

QUEER STUDY ON THE SELECT NOVELS OF DAVID LEVITHAN

*(A Dissertation to be Submitted to Nagaland University in Partial Fulfilment of Requirements
for Award of Master of Philosophy in English)*

By

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This is to certify that the dissertation entitled *Queer Study on the Select Novels of David Levithan's* is a bonafied record of research work done by Miss Atuonuo Kezieo, Regn. No-NU/M.Phil./Eng./70/2021, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema during 2020-2022 submitted to the Nagaland University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for award of the degree of Master of Philosophy in English. This dissertation has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other title and that the thesis represents independent and original work on the part of the candidate under my supervision. This is again certified that the research has been undertaken as per UGC Regulations and the candidate has fulfilled the criteria mentioned in the University Ordinances for submission of dissertation.

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I, Ms. Atuonuo Kezieo, do hereby declare that the subject of my dissertation entitled *Queer Study on the Select Novels of David Levithan*, is a bonafide of research work done by me, under the Supervision of Dr. N.D.R. Chandra, Department of English, Nagaland University, Meriema Campus, during the perieod of 2020-2022. The dissertation has not been submitted by me for any other research degree, fellowship, associateship, etc. in any other university or institute. This is being submitted to Nagaland University for the degree of Master of Philosophy in English.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I thank the Almighty God for giving me good health, and the strenght to complete this dissertation under His blessings. I would like to express my profound and deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. N.D.R. Chandra, Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, for his inevitable guidance, support, patience, and motivation,given at every stages of my work; laying the foundation to begin my work. His encouragement and suggestions have contributed immensely to the quality of my dissertation.

I am also indebted to the Department of English, Nagaland University, Kohima Campus for giving me the opportunity to register myself as a research scholar in the steemed department. I am highly honoured and grateful for the service that the department had rendered, providing me insightful guidance during the coursework, helping me to accomplish my dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the degree of Master in Philosophy.

I also express my gratitude to the library staff of Nagaland University, Kohima Campus, Meriema and State Library, Kohima for assisting me and providing me the required materials that are needed for my dissertation. Lastly, my sincere and heartfelt gratitude goes to my family and friends who have supported me, guided me financially, mentally, spiritually and physically during the course of writing this dissertation.

Date: 20th May, 2022

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ABBREVIATIONS

LGBT: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

LGBTQ: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer

OCD: Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.

YA: Young Adult



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(An Abstract for Viva Voice Examination)

*(A Dissertation to be Submitted to Nagaland University in Partial Fulfilment of Requirements
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Chapter I

Introduction

David Levithan is an American Young Adult fiction writer and editor. He was born on September 7, 1972 in Sort Hills, New Jersey. Levithan graduated from Brown University in 1994 where he double majored in English and Political Science. He is the founding editor of Push, a young adult imprint of Scholastic Press focusing on new voices and new authors. He has been writing novels that addresses the LGBT community in literature since the publication of his first book *Boy Meets Boy* (2003).

Levithans' novels are quite different from that of the other LGBT writers. His characters hardly suffer from the stereotyped gender norm that is laid down by the society. As such, he has been making positive contribution towards young adult fiction, bringing out the fact that being a gay individual does not mean been in 'doom' forever, but there is also a bright side of life which is happy, joyful and peaceful. As an ardent supporter and a practitioner of queer, Levithan believes that an individual should not be judged based on their gender preferences, but gives respect for all. Queer theory is about all section of gender, which are considered as 'other' by the society. Likewise, Levithan also writes and portrays about the other side of gender. He is against the discrimination of any kinds, thus, brings out as many voices as possible in order to break this stereotype.

The development of lesbian and gay studies arose in response to the political activism of 1960s but the incorporation of the theory in the field of formal education was much slower than the others. After World War 2, homosexual identity politics began to emerge in the society, but they were forced to remain hidden. In 1969, the slogan of Stonewall riots- "Gay Liberation" became a public issue which also gives hope to many gays and lesbians whose dreams were persecuted by the society. Their slogan- "We are queer. We are here. Accept it!" (Mohan 2002, 121) became a popular imagination once again for all the previously fired dreams. Since then, the use of the term "queer" (referred to homosexuals, lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgendered, and all sexual identities that people prefer) which defines the range of sexual minorities has been widely accepted by many circles. Just as women has struggled in order to gain their freedom and stand in the society, queer theory also struggles

to gain their rights in the heterosexual society. Queer then aims to destruct what has been called and seen as *normal* by the society.

The term queer theory originated as a part of Laubets (1991) scholarly, whose work is mainly emphasized on lesbian and gay male sexualities. He opines that queer theory posits that the classification made on the basis of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, etc., are social construct which is constructed by the society which should be deconstructed.

The fact that the aim of feminism is related to that of queer theory is something which cannot be avoided or ignored. Feminist theory and queer theory both presents the innate opportunities for critical thinking and the exploration of social identities, binaries of expression, troubling of gender, sex and sexuality. Both the term creates solution and opportunities as to when and how the problem of the classification of gender in the society can be resisted. Hence, Butler also says that gender is something that is created by the society. It is not something that an individual is born with.

Gender and gay/lesbian theorists also question the relation between gender categories that is a set norm in the society with that of sexuality and physiology. They are concerned about the classification of male and female; how they should behave and act according to their recognized gender in the eyes of the society. They are of the opinion that one's gender should not be compared to one's biological sex. Hence, one of the most subversive approach that results out of gender and gay/lesbian studies is Queer theory which covers all the area of gender and sexuality, and pushes further the rights and misconception norms of the present society. As such, some of the core theorist who are credited in the development of queer theory includes, Michael Foucault, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler. All the theorists opine that gender is set and constructed by the society; for power and benefit of few. According to Judith Butler, "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts." (Butler, 901) Butler further states that, gender is the 'performance' that is performed by individuals in order to fit in the heterosexual society, and should be deconstructed.

This research will be based on four select novels of David Levithan, which will be studied in their relation with Queer theory. The queer themes that are found will be discussed in detail

in the preceding chapters. Levithan's novels- *Every Day*, *Two Boys Kissing*, *Boy Meets Boy* and *Will Grayson*, *Will Grayson* will be dealt with in this dissertation. All the four selected novels portray different characters trying to find their way in, in heterosexual society. The study of David Levithan's work in relation with queer theory, will reveal the different aspects of queer life, their experiences in their everyday life, and how these experiences further diverge into preservation and appropriation under the sway of cultural change in relation with the coming of queer study in literature, which is a challenge to cultures and to a marginalized character and their identity.

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CHAPTER II

GENDER NON-CONFORMING IN *EVERYDAY*

David Levithan is known as a writer who does not portray stereotypical LGBT characters in his novels. He does not discriminate based on gender. But he always stands for equal freedom, rights and equal privilege of all group of people. He is not obscure like other writers, trying to hide their motive in their writings. Likewise, his novel *Every Day* is a gender non-conforming, with the protagonist 'A', who does not belong to a particular gender. *Every Day* is a novel which is not realistic, but at the same time, the situation of A gives the exact image of the society; the struggles of the LGBT community in the heterosexual society. David Levithan is an author who does not believe in the perception of the society he lives in. Therefore, through his writings he tries to bring awareness upon his people and people around the world as to what error one has made in determining one's life.

Queer supporters do not have any bias against any gender. They stand neutral when it comes to issue relating to gender, sex and relationship. An individual can lead their life according to how they want it to be and not be bothered about the opinions of others. Thus, *Every Day* is known for the portrayal of the gender non-conforming protagonist. The protagonist in this novel is not tied down by the society, but instead, follows what they think is right for them. In the novel, the use of 'both and neither' signifies the way queer people thinks about when it comes to gender. The protagonist A is genderless soul. A says, "I didn't think of myself as a boy or a girl- I never have". (Levithan, 155) Hence, like queer, *Every Day* does not conform to the ways of the society. It critiques the tight conceptualization of gender set by society through the protagonist A. The novel represents the gender queer character and shows that gender constructs can be empowering instead of stereotypical. The way of the society can change when an individual decides to change for better.

From the very first chapter of *Every Day*, A refuses to imbibed to the imposed gender construction set by the society when they wake up in the body of Justin. As such, when they were in the body of Justin, they took good care of Rhiannon unlike, the controlling Justin. In this one day, A gave the privilege to Rhiannon to decide how their day will be spent. Thus, deconstructing the said norm that male plays the dominating role in the society.

Every Day also brings out the importance of self-acceptance through his protagonist A. The ability to show their true self is worth the praise in the novel. Whenever they wake up in new body, they do not retaliate, instead, they accept themselves and try to understand the body that they are to inhabit for the day. But at the same time, Rhiannon also presents the other side by performing the 'performativity' that Butler talks about; trying to fit in the heterosexual society by losing identity of her own.

Hence, *Every Day* delves deep into the issues of gender construction, how it is imposed on individuals, but at the same time with the protagonist A, coming out from the thorns, deconstructing the gender construct set in the society by being a genderless person, moving from one body to the other body each day. The novel also presents both side of the coin-gender construction set by the society; also challenging the socially constructed norms which an individual needs to be conformed to in one's lifetime. But the novel also comes to the conclusion that, only when an individual is bold enough to accept oneself, then the society also will follow and come along with it.

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CHAPTER III

EVIDENCE ON NORM CHANGE IN *TWO BOYS KISSING*

LGBT is a sensitive issue which is seen in today's world. Many writers write about LGBTs but are unable to bring out the image vividly before their audience. But contrary to that, David Levithan brings out the vivid image of it. In his novel *Two Boys Kissing*, different characters are brought together to show the way of the society; the past as well as the present; how the present society or the world of in the novel has become more tolerant towards the LGBTs.

The plot of the novel revolves around the two main protagonists Craig and Harry, who were attempting to have the longest kiss in history- 32 hours, 12 minutes and 10 seconds, in order to be accepted by the society they live in. The 'Kiss' in the novel serves as an important asset when it comes to changing norm of society, from present to that of the past. The atmosphere in the school from the beginning has proven the fact that the present society has become way more tolerant towards the LGBTs. In the novel, it was okay for two boys to be intimately attracted to each other and never be ashamed about it. The chorus made it clear before the story proceeds that the world the readers are going to explore in the novel is different from that of their time, which clearly shows the changing nature of society.

In *Two Boys Kissing*, the chorus plays a major role. The chorus played as an important connection between the past and the present. They are people who are no more in this physical world. But they are watching and applauding the more tolerant world. The chorus also acts as a guide and comforter for the youths who are confuse about their life, been treated as a different being in their own home and society where they belonged to. Without the chorus, the feelings of the characters will be unseen and untouched.

'Homophobia' is an important term when it comes to homosexuals. It is a word which describe the prejudice that one has towards individuals who are gays. Homophobia is not absent when it comes to *Two Boys Kissing*, although it was not the main focus of the novel. The presence of homophobia in the novel also shows that one cannot be completely free from the perception that is perceived by individuals from the time they were born. But it depends on how the individual turn the situation by looking at the positive side of it.

Two Boys Kissing is a dream world which many dreams of. The setting of the novel is not completely a utopian world where there will be no discrimination against them being gays and lesbian. But society has become more tolerant and finally they can live a life as to how they want to. There is still fear, but it is balanced with their strength. They knew that they will not be spared by all, but they also know that they will be supported by many at the same time. Thus, the society that the Chorus lived in and the society that the present generation lived in has changed drastically. The regrets that the chorus have expressed in their narration have shown tremendous change between the past and the present.

This novel serves as an inspiration for those troubled youths who are confused about the things going on in their life. The challenge is to an eye-opener to gain understanding from the people, showing their genuine need for wanting of being accepted in the society. The bravery of the two boys also encourages the other youths in the society who remains hidden; gains courage and comes out from their struggled inner conflicts, expressing their desire and wants. The novel shows that the modern society has become much tolerable, understanding the differences; showing positive impact and evidence of norm change towards better society; moving towards perfection.

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CHAPTER IV

QUEER THEMES IN LEVITHAN'S NOVELS

Boy Meets Boy (2003) is a novel by David Levithan. It is one of the first young adult fiction written by David Levithan. The novel won a Lambda Literary Award in 2003. During the time that Levithan published this novel, being an openly gay person is something which everyone is scared of. Every individual is aware of the situation around them, therefore, they live a hidden life; trying to fit in the society they belonged to. As such, seeing this, Levithan decides to create a reality for all, instead of presenting the reality which every individual is aware of. It is a young adult romance novel with same sex couple at its center. The novel is set in a Utopian town where LGBTs were accepted and even celebrated. People in this little town have the freedom to be who they want to be without any hurdles from the society. Strict social norm which is followed in the other LGBT novels is not present. The kind of place that the novel presents has not been realized and achieved till date. But it is the possibility which is set for the future. In this novel, there is constant shift between feminine and masculine as there are no rules for the characters to adhere to when it comes to gender.

Queer Utopianism is the central emphasis in *Boy Meets Boy*. When it comes to Utopia, every individual understands that it is a society, by definition, so perfect that it cannot exist in reality. But interestingly, Sir Thomas More, who is initially credited with the development of the concept of utopia, says that, utopia is something which is there; currently the society that we live in. Munoz also says that when it comes to queer utopianism it is future oriented. The goals and aims of queer are not yet achieved, but there is hope that it will be achieved with changing time and society, and every being will be able to live a life of freedom and liberation without being suppressed of their rights. Queer utopianism is a small crack that is present in the heteronormative society, where there is a ray of light sown in it, where the later society will be more perfect and more refined. The word 'different' will be seen as 'sameness'.

Hence, in the novel, although Levithan has set his settings in a fictional town, he also brought to light before the readers as to what normalcy in the society means. The utopian setting and the absence of homophobia has made the novel more visible when it comes to

the talk of heteronormativity in the society. Unlike other LGBT novels which highlights the problems and struggles of LGBTs, here in this novel, the writer presents a world where there is no discrimination and feeling of homophobia is disrupted, which also serve as a tool for the writer to create a world of realism. The town in *Boy Meets Boy* is place where 'it is okay to be who you are and no one in the society can criticize and discriminate you for who you are'. There is liberty and freedom given, disregarding one's sexual orientation. The plot of the novel is placed on a fast-forward-thinking town where the individual differences of a person is loved and embrace. There are no differences between homosexuals, heterosexuals, bisexuals, etc. Everyone is considered as 'normal' in this little town set by Levithan.

Furthermore, idea of religion is put forth before the readers. The typical 'Christian' perspective on homosexual attraction is such that, homosexuals were seen as sinful men and women. Contrary to that, in *Boy Meets Boy*, it is seen that the Christian perspective when it comes to homosexuals has been altered to a certain degree. As seen in the novel, the alteration is not shown openly and largely. But to a certain extent, there is tolerant on the part of the family. One character which vividly portray the change in Christians perspective is Tony, Paul's friend who belong to a Christian family, but at the same time accepted for who he is.

When it comes to queer theory, acceptance from the part of society plays an important role. Their goal is to let the people accept the differences instead of relying upon the said gender norms which defines an individual. Every individual wants to live in a Utopian world, where there is no hurdles and hostility faced from the people around them. That utopian world is not something which cannot be achieved. It can be achieved when there is collective contribution. Therefore, Levithan in this novel *Boy Meets Boy*, takes a step forward and created this utopian world; a world where it is okay to be who we want to be, and not be burdened by the pressure laid by the society. In many cases, unacceptance leads to tragedy, especially the gays and lesbians. But in this novel, the case takes a turn towards positivity, a possible future which gives hope to the people.

Will Grayson, Will Grayson (2013) is another novel written by David Levithan and John Green in April 2010. The novel is written in a way, where there was two Will Grayson in the novel. But they were differentiated with the initial- one is referred to with capitalization and

one is referred with small letter alphabet. Both the Grayson believes that keeping oneself away from others, thus, shutting away is the best remedy to life, for which, their concept changed totally at the later part of the novel.

When one talks about queer, they want to bring equality to all genders, which is not limited only to the LGBT community. But they are talking about all the rights of the people as a whole, collectively. They are talking about a society, a future where there is no discrimination based on one's preferences and one's sexuality. But in today's world, identity crisis prevails greatly because of individual's inability to express and portray who they are. And this is something which Levithan and Green has vividly portrayed in their novel; young teens trying to find their way out, thus, going through countless hurdles in midway. The aim of queer is to remove this label set in the society; and for all to live as equal, with freedom and liberation given to all without any bias towards any gender and sexuality.

In *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, self-discovery stands out as one of the central themes. Both the Grayson are unable to bring themselves to get associated with the people around them as they are unable to accept the flaws around them. They are just confined to their own little nutshell, which in return has caused immense problem to their life as seen in the progression of the novel. As such, they were able to find their way out only when they are able to discover their true self. The whole novel revolves around the discovery of self, and one's thoughts and feelings; what the characters really wants in life.

Hence, in the novel, the characters were struggling with their life because they are unable to identify themselves, failing to discover their desire. But once they are able to sort every piece together, finally, all has come to a concluding end, where everyone was happy with the things going on around them. This is the discovery that everyone should make, in order for people to accept and understand us in the society.

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CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

David Levithan is one such writer who has got enough experience from the world he lives in. He has seen the dark side of the life that the LGBTs are living. The worst scenario is the abandonment and isolation of the individuals. Therefore, in many of his interview he says that he does not want to keep on writing about the things that can be seen and are known by the people. As such, in most cases, the trauma is presented again and again which is impacting the homosexuals to live a more hidden life. But on the other side, Levithan also opines that this is not the end. This is not the way it should be. Leaving aside the problems, there are also the bright side which very less people try to explore. As such, in his novels, especially the selected novels that have been discussed in the above chapters, he brings out his concept about the life that and society that he wishes to see in the future/coming society.

To conclude,

Homosexuality is not accepted in many parts of the world, including India. It is considered as a crime which is still punishable before the law. For decades, homosexuality is considered and seen as a disease which is curable and can be treated by undergoing various medications and therapy. Their importance and needs are not realized in many cases. They are suppressed by the majority. Even in this present scenario, many homosexuals are falling into depression, thus, taking their own life because they were not acknowledged and accepted by the people and the society, they live in. As a result, "Queer theory is a deeply introspective discourse that draws strength from the questioning deconstructive temper of contemporary postmodern literary and aesthetic practices as well as from the embattled and beleaguered conditions that have constituted, and in a large measure still constitute, the material reality of many gay and lesbian people's everyday existence." (Mohan, 122)

When Levithan started to write, and published his first book, he did it in the closet, because at the time the topic about LGBT is a serious issue. Although he wrote it, he was not sure about the result. But at the end of the day, he was glad that the book he has written has brought together many people. It has connected to the feeling of the people who are still

behind the bars, unable to come out from it. Hence, analyzing different queer novel of David Levithan in this dissertation has helped in understanding the psychology of the queer teens and also the remedy to tackle the bridge that has been made in the society.

The select novels has shown the experiences that the gays and lesbians goes through in their daily life, and at the same time how they are able to come out from it. Thus, Levithan through his writing is able to bring out the positive changes in LGBT community. He brings forth the idea of Butler's performativity, thus, deconstruct this notion of society by challenging the heteronormative society in the select novels. As earlier said, he was not trying to reflect reality, but he was trying to create reality through his writing; which he knows will be the future of the society. Thus, as seen, he was successful in challenging the heterosexual society by bringing to light the positive side of the homosexuals; his concept of how the society should be, and not how it is.

"Individually, one can bring change to oneself. But collectively, we can create a utopian world".

CHAPTER -I

INTRODUCTION

DAVID LEVITHAN

David Levithan is an American Young Adult fiction writer and editor. He was born on September 7, 1972 in Sort Hills, New Jersey to a family of Jewish background. Levithan graduated from Brown University in 1994 where he double majored in English and Political Science. He is the founding editor of Push, a young adult imprint of Scholastic Press focusing on new voices and new authors. He has been writing novels that addresses the LGBT community in literature since the publication of his first book *Boy Meets Boy* (2003). Levithan has been making a positive contribution to the genre of the gays and lesbians, where the protagonists are of strong male gay characters, living in a society, trying to find their place and identity. He continues to work as both a writer and editor saying. He won the Margaret a. Edwards Award in 2016 for Award of the *Realm of Possibility*, *Boy Meets Boy*, *Love is the Higher Law*, *How They Met and Other Stories*, *Wide Awake*, and *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*.

David Levithan is renowned as a young adult fiction writer, whose work features LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) characters. He is an award-winning *New York Times* bestselling author of young adult books. Levithan has been writing novels which feature strong male gay characters. Most of the LGBT writers' narratives typecast gender and characters who do not conform to the normative binary gender identities, and as a result, the characters do not usually come out victorious, and thus, get a happy ending. But in this regard, the writing of Levithan is quite different from that of the other contemporaries. At some point of time, his characters also go through breakdown, but that is hidden in the surface. His characters hardly suffer from the stereotyped gender norm that is laid down by the society. As such, he has been making positive contribution towards young adult fiction, bringing out the fact that being a gay person does not mean been in 'doom' forever, but there is also a bright side of life which is happy, joyful and peaceful. Therefore; in his novel, he provides solace to the individuals who are facing endless struggles due to their difference in their preferences which is considered as 'not so normal' by the society.

If there is anyone who has paved the way for contemporary literature, especially queer study, it is David Levithan. Transgender, queer bi, intersex- all these identities were underrepresented or not responded at all. Therefore; Levithan, through his works tries to present as many voices as he can, in order to bring out the importance of the life of the queer people; with relevance to the present society that we live in. Levithan has been writing novels that is related to the life of the LGBTs since the early aught of his writing. He makes sure that the characters that he presents before the readers are surrounded with people who understands and shares their emotion and grief. There is always a supporting role who stays by the side of the individual, making their life worth living.

Levithan believes that with time, the reaction of the society towards the LGBTs is also changing to a great extent. When he writes his first novel *Boy Meets Boy* in 2003, there were many protestors who were against it. The novel seems a complete fantasy which does not seem unattainable at the time. But in 2013, when he looked back, it does not seem like a fantasy anyone. People has become more tolerant and accepted towards the homosexuals. To some extent, they are enjoying their freedom and rights in the society. Levithan says, things sure have changed since I was a teenager in the 1940s. Levithan grew up in a society where homosexuals were out of topic. The life of the homosexuals was always insecure because they were surrounded with people who were intolerant towards same sex relation. Heterosexuality was accepted and encourage. There was no space for homosexuals to open up and express their feelings freely to people. Their life is always in the closet.

According to Levithan, the life of gay teens is very much underrepresented in all kinds of sources that are available, especially in media. Society has the ability only to feed them with negativity. No positive things were seen coming from the society to make their life better. The slurs that are thrown because of them belonging to the sexual minority has killed and taken the life of many young youths in the society. But sadly, the lives that are lost, that are sacrificed because of the greed and lust for power in the society has not been appreciated or even remembered. The life of the homosexuals was treated as valueless by the society. The act of the society done and shown towards the LGBTs has led the others to remain hidden their whole life, as they fear the rage and abandonment from the society they belong to. Levithan also live in such a society, where people throw the slurs freely and

discriminate the homosexuals. But on the other side, Levithan also got to experience those kinds of lives, who has experienced the good side of life, rather than the bad side of it. His life is filled with more happiness and less sadness. Therefore, he says that life certainly gets better with time, but many people fail to value and accepts the time that has been given to them.

In an interview, Levithan says that his life as a teen and a gay individual, he does not have to deal with parental pressure like many of his other friends. He had supporting friends and teachers, especially his parents who were there before him, supporting him and shaping him to the person he is now. But he has seen many of his peers who were struggling to survive because they were not accepted by people around them. He wanted to create something for them. Something which will change their life and will help them to look forward to their future. Therefore; for a change, he decides to write novels which does not present the reality because this can be done by anyone. But he decides that he will write something which creates reality and not present the reality. Since then, he started to write books which seems to be a fantasy, which is contrasted from reality. But in actual he is creating the reality which time will bring; the possibility of the future. David Levithan is an inspiration for many young teens who are struggling in accepting themselves. Many have expressed that they gain their courage by seeing the way Levithan is living, and the way he comes out and present himself as he is.

In his books, David Levithan hardly writes about the feeling of being insecure. All his protagonist is supported by their friends and families. At times, the world that he creates are completely different from the world that we see. Growing up, he has seen endless struggles and sufferings of the gay teens. Therefore; he feels that there is no need for him to be portraying the reality which is seen and experienced by all. There is no harm for an individual to dream about the world changing to better. Therefore; in his books he presents his reader a world filled with peace and comfort. At the same time, Levithan also states that the present of homophobia is always there in the society, and it will always be there. This can be seen in his works clearly. There are also characters present who are not secure with their life. The societal pressure and the disregard from their family has led them to become more unacceptable towards their gender. This is the known fact which is always there in the

society. Discrimination will exist and form in one way or the other. But the situation depends on how the individual decides to handle it.

As an ardent supporter and a practitioner of queer, Levithan believes that an individual should not be judged based on their gender preferences. No matter what the person chose to follow, he/she should be given the space and freedom. One's love and relationship does not have anything to do with one's gender. Likewise, in his novel *Every Day*, Levithan has present his protagonist in a way that they are genderless, moving from one body to another. But in the end, they were able to get a girl named Rhiannon who truly loves them, disregard of them being genderless without a body of its own. This has shown the way Levithan feels about when it comes to one's gender.

In earlier society, women were asked and expected to stay home and serve their husband, family and children. The household chores belonged to women. Whereas, men were expected to venture out and earn for their family's livelihood. This is practiced and followed by all in the olden days. The dominant role is taken by the male child and the head of the family. As such, men are responsible for their family, also, they have the right to run and control their family. The women were disregarded in the family. Very less privileges were given to women. But with changing time, and with more educated men and women coming out in the society, awareness on gender and homosexuals were also highlighted which is seen coming out positively in the present society. Things have been changing from worse to better. As such, this is the kind of life and society that Levithan wishes for the LGBTs in the society. He knows where he is going and he also know that things will change to better. Therefore; unlike other writers, he writes about the possibility, the reality that will supposedly come in the coming days.

Levithan as a gay writer, does not only focus on the life of the gays and lesbians. But he also tries to cover up the whole issue of gender in his works. Queer theory is about all section of gender, which are considered as 'other' by the society. Likewise, Levithan also writes and portrays about the other side of gender. He disregards the discrimination based on gender. But he also tries to show that gender is something which is basically constructed by the society and the people we live in. He poses questions and situations where the root cause of being a masculine and feminine is being interrogated to the people who call themselves as 'straight'. Being considered as a normal individual is something which the society has

created and form for the benefits and betterment for their own gain. In the society, everyone fights to attain certain amount of power which they can exercise. As such, they search for someone whom they can control and exercise their power, thus, as a result, homosexuals has become a target for one. Therefore; in his writings, Levithan also brings out the struggles of the people who decides to live a life against the set norm.

Levithan has witnessed the change that has taken place in the last 10 years. He is creating the reality that is yet to be attained, and that will come in the coming years. Therefore; when he writes about the future society, he brings out the image that he dreams of in the future. He doesn't want a society that discriminates, but he wants a society which lives together in harmony. Therefore; in most of his novels, he creates a Utopian society, which gives hope and pleasure to his readers. Being an ardent support of queer, Levithan is set out to create a completely different world for the gay teen. He does not hide himself as a gay individual. But he comes out and face as many interviews that he can in order to aware the people about the LGBT community. He is one among many, who decides to live a life best suited for them. He does not hide himself, but accepts himself as he is, and in turn accepted by the people around him.

Levithan states that the life of a gay teen in a culture is miserable, which is a known fact for all. Although there was acknowledgement about the existence of the gay teens in the society, they were kept in a box with very little exceptions. They were ignored and belittled by the society they live in, and the fact that they were gays leads them to their doom. Therefore; in his novels he tries to present as many voices as possible to bring out the importance of queer writing and also its relevance to the present society. As a result, Levithan has been writing novels that address LGBT representation in literature since the early aughts with the hopes of changing the conversation into a delighted and comfortable one. Often in the queer works of various authors in literature, LGBTs are defined by the way their social abuse affects them, but unlike those, Levithan aims to define his characters based on who they are without conflict. The fact that Levithan strives to represent gay community in such a genuine manner makes his works highly eligible for use in literature.

Historical Development of Queer Theory

The development of lesbian and gay studies arose in response to the political activism of 1960s but the incorporation of the theory in the field of formal education was much slower than the others. After World War 2, homosexual identity politics began to emerge in the society, but they were forced to remain hidden if they want to live a happy and peaceful life. They were suppressed from their rights, living as someone whom they are not in order to fit in the heterosexual society which is the accepted and right way of living according to society's perception. In 1969, the slogan of Stonewall riots- "Gay Liberation" became a public issue which also gives hope to many gays and lesbians whose dreams were persecuted by the society. Their slogan- "We are queer. We are here. Accept it!" (Mohan 2002, 121) became a popular imagination once again for all the previously fired dreams. Since then, the use of the term "queer" (referred to homosexuals, lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgendered, and all sexual identities that people prefer) which defines the range of sexual minorities has been widely accepted by many circles. The word "Queer" is often used as an umbrella term by, and for persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, intersex, and/or transgender, or by and for individuals who use the term as an alternative to LGBT labels. (Gieseeking, Queer Theory) Organizations like Gay Liberation Movement, Gay Activists Alliance and others started to sought medical, legal, social freedom and rights for gays and lesbians, thus, started a rift in the representation of the gay and lesbian subjects which has given the theory its present shape. It is a branch of study which takes its roots from gay and lesbian literature and their representation in popular media. The core of the theory lies in the 'reversing' (Nayar, 185), the accepted and traditional norm of sexuality. But although, queer has taken its roots, mainly from gay and lesbian literature, it also encompasses other practices, identities, communities as a whole.

The communities that the theory includes for its studies all have been marginalized or are a minority of the population, such as the bisexuals, sado-masochism, transgender etc. In general terms, queer theory cannot be compartmentalized into water tight molecules. It is because of the fact that our understanding and absorption of gender is ever changing and transforming. "Queer theory looks at the history of cultural representations of the gay/lesbian as deviant, sick or criminal, while foregrounding sexuality as an important category of critical analysis when dealing with cultural texts. Queer theory moves between

literary analysis and activism because it shows how cultural representations contribute to very real mental oppression of homosexuals.” (Nayar, 184) According to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Queer theory is “about trying to understand different kinds of sexual desire and how the culture defines them.”

As mentioned above, queer theory draws upon the experiences of gay and lesbian movements while adding to the philosophical and critical insights into the nature of one’s body. The theory looks at the general construction of sexuality in discourse of medicine, law or religion, and many popular literatures of this century. It is a continues struggle to search and bring out the hidden history of the writings in literature, pertaining to the homosexual paradigm and representation. Queer theory also looks at the other side of oppression and discrimination faced by the LGBT community in the society. This includes the form of oppression such as racism and patriarchy faced at home or in one’s workplace. The varied dimensions of one’s sexuality and preferences with a specific reference to ‘ghettoization’ (Nayar, 184) of the LGBTQ community is another subject of concern for the supporters of this theory. According to Pramod K. Nayar, in his book *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory, From Structuralism to Ecocriticism* (2019), “Queer diaspora, built on the community of sexual preferences rather than racial-ethnic identities, now constitute a global queer culture that has a political agenda and presence. Queer theory sees such a diaspora as both an effect and a counter to globalization.” (Nayar, 184) Gender theory is not a twentieth and twenty first century phenomena, but it is a term which is always in use. Simon Malpas and Paul Wake (2006) stated;

As all entries in this companion discuss, or certainly imply, critical theory argues generally that there is always a theory underlying cultural expression and interpretation, even if and perhaps especially when such expression and interpretation denies adamantly or ignores wholly its theoretical positioning. Thus, gender theory is not a twentieth- and twenty-first-century phenomenon alone, even if the term would hardly have been used or recognized in previous centuries. There always already was gender theory in use, even millennia before the rise of identity politics as we know it today. Thus, gender theory is a body of work as applicable to the study of classical

literature as it is to study of aesthetic expression and popular culture in the twenty-first century. (Malpas & Wake, 102)

The problem that results out of gender is something which is seen in all the ages. But there are very few who regains their courage and comes out to demand their rights. As such, there are numerous discrimination and stigmatization that are seen in the society. John Boswell in his book *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980), has demonstrated how the late Middle Ages in particular saw an increasing and harsh stigmatization of same-sex activity as a threat to religious order. Them, who are regarded as others in the society are seen as a threat to the society. All kinds of social non conformity posed complex multidimensional threats to vested social and religious authority. But gender theory urges the people to see that these are some power which is vested to us by the societal needs, and the root cause of it is nowhere to be found. Hence, as such in the 1980s, critical movement, which is known today as “queer theory” came into being, which seeks to disrupt the bridge which categories and identify groups for the sake of political coalition border.

Just as women has struggled in order to gain their freedom and stand in the society, queer theory also struggles to gain their rights in the heterosexual society. According to Butler (1993), the term queer is used to silence the shame and bias practices that are done in the name of society, and for the good of the society. It is a term which is used to fight against the values located outside of perceived social boundaries. To be called as queer, is referred to as someone who is a symbol of perversion, disdain, sickness, and absurdity. Queer then aims to destruct what has been called and seen as *normal* by the society. The definition of being normal has destroyed many lives; many people living in the shadow of the so-called normal society, not being able to come out and retain one’s life. There are many untold stories about life when one remembers and believes in the word ‘normal’. The goal of the queer is to establish the misconception about what is right or wrong, good or bad, black or white. Their goal is to re-establish the things that are said and done, which is a misconception about life and society. According to Pinar (2005), the recent reclamation of the term queer represents a kind of resistance movement, which is largely led by academics and activists, with the aim to transform the oppressive nature of the term into a more positive way and approach; in the field of politics, particularly in the depiction of self,

especially for the depiction and reference of the considered differently gendered individuals. The deployment of queer in this regard is to move beyond the traditional institution set boundary, and come out with the other categories which is ignored and stumbled on for decades. Their main aim is not to be discriminated based on one's gender, but be acceptable towards same sex relationship, or any other kinds of sexual relationship.

The term 'queer theory' originated as a part of Lauretis (1991), scholarly whose work is mainly emphasized on lesbian and gay male sexualities. Queer theory is a conceptual framework that "conveys a double emphasis- on the conceptual and speculative work involved in discourse production and on the necessary critical work of deconstructing our own discourses and their constructed silence". (de Lauretis, iv) According to de Lauretis (1991), queer theory problematizes fixed and stable identity-categories, including masculine or feminine, male or female, gay/lesbian/straight distinctions, and rethinks the notion of plurality, intersectionality, and fluidity in discourse production. Queer theory posits the said categories-lesbian or gays, or the use of homosexual and heterosexual as binary to display heterodominance are social construction which is constructed by the society. Therefore; Lauretis considered these classifications as artificial which should be deconstructed in the society. As such, queer theory attempts to break down the distinction that categorized and discriminated the sexual minorities, especially the gays, lesbians, bisexual, and transgender people. Queer theory presents a more fluid concept of gender and sexuality, for the better understanding of human towards gender and also the diversity that is present in the life of human; living together as a community and society. When we look into most of the indigenous society, there is no categorization of sexual in the society. The practiced is not found and adhere to. Therefore; there comes the question as to how the preceding society and present generation has adhered strictly to these norms. Pinar also said that the introduction of queer theory in the field of education is to "challenge the reproduction of sameness, of difference, of patriarchy. In different ways we work to teach the same (sexed) as the exemplification, the solidification and mobilization of difference." (Pinar, 10) According to Pinar, the aim of queer theory, introducing it to educational contexts is to end the opposed group which have been ignored by the society over the years.

Queer theory basically revolves around two schools of thought- "Essentialist and Anti-Essentialists." Anupama Mohan writes that, "essentialists" are those that believe that when

it comes to homosexuals, it is inborn and biologically determined. In this type of school of thought the individual realizes the differences that he/she has, thus, coming out or opening up about the truth of oneself to the others. In this case, usually, individuals are faced with fear as the belief that homosexuals is a sin is deeply ingrained in the minds of the person as a child and the way he is brought up in. This form is called as “homosexual panic” as the individual discovers that his preferences is different from that of the set norm perceive and regarded as accepted by the society. On the other hand, the other school of thought, “anti-essentialist” believes that one’s sexual identity is not inborn or biological, but it the result of socio-cultural factors, which evolve due to specific times and cultures. The book, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, written by Michel Foucault is one of the best ways to understand this concept. According to Jay Steward,

Queer theory and politics necessarily celebrate transgression in the form of visible difference from norms. These ‘norms’ are then exposed to be norms, not natures or inevitabilities. Gender and sexual identities are seen, in much of this work, to be demonstrably defiant definitions and configurations. (Wikipedia, Queer theory)

Heterosexuality is considered as the dominant and recognized sexuality in the context of society. It hinders the position of the minorities in the society. Heterosexuality is a powerful force which is used to determine the relationship of individuals in the society they live in. Michael Warner (2002) stated,

A whole field of social relations becomes intelligible as heterosexuality, and this privatized sexual culture bestows on its sexual practices a sense of rightness and normalcy. This sense of rightness- embedded in things and not just in sex- is what we call heteronormativity. (Warner, 194)

Some of the major key factors of queer theory is that, sexual behaviors and all concepts that links sexual behaviors to sexual identities as well as all categories of normative and deviant sexualities are social constructs, meaning that they are the product of social and historical constructs. That being said, like any other theories, the use of the term queer has been changing and redefining itself over again with the passing of time, thus, expanding their boundaries in drawing themselves closer in gaining their rights.

Queer theorist follows the idea laid down by the feminist theory and gay/lesbian studies followed by the earlier writers. They reject the idea that sexuality is an essential category, something determined by biology or judged by eternal standards of morality and truth. As such, according to the supporters of queer theory, sexuality is a complex array of social codes and forces which needs to be deconstructed.

Feminist theory

The term feminist is first coined in France in 1880s. This term is spread throughout Europe in the 1890s and North and South America by 1910. Feminist is a term which is a combination of the French word for woman (femme) and -isme, which is referred to a social movement or a political ideology. In United States the history of feminism is divided into first wave and second wave. Both the wave is concerned with the position and treatment of women in the society. They both interrogated the role of gender at individual level, sexual level, organization level and also at societal level.

Feminist theory questions the set of role and position based on gender which is followed in the society- male as the higher level and superior being, whereas, female placed at the lower level and playing the submissive role in the society. The privilege access by the two gender is in contrast with one another. Opportunities are given and enjoyed based on the position of the person when it comes to gender. Thus, feminist theory is set to disrupt this notion of “man” as belonging to the natural and superior category in the society, and “woman” as playing the supporting role of man and husband in the society. The position of women is placed in such a way that their purpose of their existence is to support and stay under the rule and authority of the male individual in the family as well as society. Relating to this, Butler (2006) notes,

The symbolic order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive positions of “having” the Phallus (the position of men) and “being” the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women) Every effort to establish identity within the terms of this binary distinction of “being” and “having” returns to the inevitable “lack” and “loss” that ground their phantasmatic construction. (Butler, 60)

The scaffolding of the feminist theory lies in the differentiation of the positioning of man above woman in the society; privileges enjoyed based on one's gender. Butler (1999) argues that gender is something which is reconstituted in the outside, that is to say which is laid down and followed by the society. The differentiation of opportunities based on gender is something which is borne out of the wants and desires of the society. Gender is not something which an individual is born with; but it is something which is formed and created by the society. The society has placed the position of man and woman in such a way that man should be masculine and woman should be feminine. And when an individual does not adhere with these concepts, they are put in position where they will be alienated and considered a bad influence to the society and the generations to come. The constructed gender role has led to lack of opportunities, rights, right to express one's opinion, and rights to vote by women in the society. The denial of woman in the society has gone to the extreme, where women were seen as an object which is responsible for child rearing and managing the household. They were not given the opportunity to earn. Instead, their wages were deducted to a great extent when compared to men. The hard work done by women were not valued and appreciated by the society. The imbalances and struggles faced by women have led to the emerge of feminist theory, where women decide to come out and demand their rights for justice and equality.

Feminist theory is primarily concerned with equality and justice of all women in the society. It "seeks to eliminate systems of inequality and injustice in all women's lives." (Shaw and Lee, 9) According to Shaw and Lee (2004), feminism celebrates the achievements and struggles faced by all women. Estelle B. Freedman noted that "structural discrimination operates through the everyday practices of individuals.... discriminatory practices originate in our attitudes about gender." (Freedman, 167-168) Gender construction and gender discrimination are not inborn, it something which is born out of human in order to achieve their wants and desires; to be called the superior and the one to holds the power and authority above all.

The fact that the aim of feminism is related to that of queer theory is something which cannot be avoided or ignored. Feminism questions the stand of identity, political, social, stereotypes, prejudices based on gender. Feminist theory and queer theory both presents the innate opportunities for critical thinking and the exploration of social identities, binaries

of expression, troubling of gender, sex and sexuality. Both queer and feminism are considered as a response to 'essentializing' of gender and sexual identities, for which those individuals who fails to conform to the socially construct gendered norms are considered as outcast and their position in the society is degraded. Both the term creates solution and opportunities as to when and how the problem of the classification of gender in the society can be resisted. Feminism is a fight against gender discrimination. It does not matter as to where the individual stand is in the society, everyone should be free from the judgement and criticism of the society. No one should be shamed and stumbled upon because of their preferences and the way they decide to live their life.

Although the relationship between queer theory and feminism cannot be denied, there are also differences which can be seen when the two are compared with each other. One key difference between the two is that, both has different scope, although their approach is on the same level. Feminist theory is mainly concerned with the issues that are affecting the life of women empowerment in the society. Whereas, on the other hand, the main subject of queer theory is that their scope and aim is to include all women, homosexuals, transsexuals, and those that are considered as deviant by the society. Queer theory consists of all the oppressed in the society based on one's gender and one's preferences which is regard as not normal in the eyes of the people. Nonetheless; feminist theorists also contributed richly when it comes to the development of Queer theory in literature.

Queer Theorists

Some of the core theorist who is credited in the development of queer theory includes, Michael Foucault, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Judith Butler. Michael Foucault's work on sexuality said that, sexuality is a kind of discursive production rather than an essential part of a human. It came from the human's wants and desire to achieve the power, to rule over someone whom they consider as the subordinates; not being repressive and negative as productive and generative. In other words, according to Foucault, power makes sexuality seems like a kind of hidden truth which should be dug out and exposed it before the public. Sexuality of a person should be studied and portrayed specifically and those that are different from the common are alienated and isolated from the society. As such, Foucault as a supporter of queer theory refuses to accept the fact that sexuality can be

defined clearly, but instead, he focuses on the expansive production of sexuality within governments of power and knowledge. Michael Foucault in his *History of Sexuality vol. 1 (1984)*, famously writes that “the nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood...the sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.” (Foucault, 43)

Rubin lays down the groundwork to start a discussion on the difference between gender and sexuality, which society perceives and considers it as one of the same kinds. But according to Rubin, these two should be studied and understood separately. Because when one looks deep into it, the two subjects clearly contrast with each other. The fact that society emphasizes the rules and practices set on individuals is because of the ignorance towards the difference between the two. Rubin says,

I want to challenge the assumption that feminism is or should be the privileged site of a theory of sexuality. Feminism is the theory of gender oppression.... Gender affects the operation of the sexual system, and the sexual system has had gender-specific manifestations. But although sex and gender are related, they are not the same thing. (Rivkin & Ryan, 916)

Hence, the distinction that is brought up by Rubin has led the way for Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's pioneering the book *Epistemology of the Closet*. In this book, Sedgwick argues that homo-hetero differences in the modern definition of sexuality is vitally disjointed because of two apparent reasons- that homosexuality is thought to be a part of the minority group in the society, and how homosexuality is gendered and classified into either masculine or feminine. She points out that the definition of sexuality depends a lot on the gender or the romantic partner of the said individual. It depends on the person that is involved in the feelings and emotions that draws each towards each other. Given the fact, the assumption that the gender one has, and the other gender that the other party is attracted to makes up the most important element when it comes to sexuality. Furthermore, Sedgwick's examples of sexual variations that cannot be put into discrete locations, that is created by a binary set between homosexuality and heterosexuality, has given further room to analyze the way sex-gender identities are shaped and thought about. The solution depends a lot on the individual, but the misconception has been influenced and deeply ingrained in the minds that it is impossible to depart from it.

The theorist which is most commonly identified it when it comes to the study of gender and sexuality is Judith Butler. Butler has drawn much from the ideas laid down by Foucault, but she has laid her emphasis particularly on gender. In *Gender Trouble*, she argues that gender, like sexuality, is not an essential truth which is obtained from the way an individual's body is shaped, but it is something which is acted out and is considered and portrayed as reality. She is of the idea that the notion of 'masculine' and 'feminine' is a mistaken conception that has been taught and accepted. This mistaken notion has led to the belief that heterosexuality is the dominant and accepted kind of relationship when it comes to gender, thus, creating the logical outcome of either being in the category of male or female gender. Later in her book, *Undoing Gender*, Butler makes it clear that performativity is not the same when it is compared with performance. According to Judith Butler,

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler, 901)

Here, Butler ultimately explains that gender performativity is a repeated process which ultimately creates a subject as a subject.

Butler's 'Performativity'

Butler's (1999) notion of *performativity* is another hallmark of queer theory. By prioritizing gender as her focal point, Butler puts forth- a. the notion of "performativity" as it relates to the expression of identity. b. a radical critique of category-generating terms that manage identity. In the first place, Butler sets forth the practices and rules that are followed when it comes to the referencing and recognition of the individual as belonging to a particular gender or sexuality. Through these social rules and norms, individuals struggle in order to be called and classified as belonging to a particular gender identity; trying to fit into something which they are not meant to be. They are compelled to go through the process set by the society in order to be called as someone, and to be included in the society and community they live in. In her book, Butler argues that this gender identity becomes the

“performativity”, which needs to be attained by the individual, which in turn, whereby, individuals “perform” their gender according to the social rules, practices and expectations set for them in the society. Therein, when they perform this obligation, they lost their own identity, their life, and thus, in turn live in misery; a life lived without purpose.

In this regard, these individuals who encounter with this performativity comes to the realization that gender identity is fluid and it is not fixed. It cannot be tied and ruled to all individuals. In the society, filled with diversity, one cannot be expected to normalize a rule meant for every being when it comes to one’s gender. A person may want to be someone the society does not want. There will be differences that arises and that differences should not be ignored and stumbled upon, but it should be appreciated and valued. Butler and the others in this sense, questions the nature of these social rules and practices by exposing them and interrogating the fact and root cause of it; the ways in which these gender constructs are constructed and thus, bind it to the people. For instance, Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) has suggested that the notion of “hegemonic masculinity”, which asserts the believed concept that male is the dominant one in the society, be it in social, political, social and economic and that women are the subordinate one who exist in their relationship the male folks in the society. This is something which should be questioned and interrogated by all. In this regard, Butler (1999) stated that, the idea about gender performativity and sexual identity becomes clear when one comes across it. None can deny the fact that gender construct is constructed by the society and it is not inborn. Every individual, when thought upon it will open up the political possibilities, and the possibilities which will break the society from constraining to these social rules and practices.

In sum, the notions of heteronormativity and performativity as a hallmark of queer theory is useful when it comes to interrogating the power structures set and followed by the society. The questions as to why certain things are done, in the workplace, and considered as normal pops up. Recently, queer theory has been criticized, as in that; it seems too western in its scope. As a result, the aspects of transnationalism also evolve when one talks about queer theory, in the light of globalized science. As such, queer theory is not just about lesbian, gays, bisexual, transgender and other sexual minorities, but it also includes all the factors which are seen as discriminatory; which are construct by man such as- discrimination and

inequality based on citizenship, gender, class, and sexuality which are constructed based on different setting and those of which is existing in the name of 'race'.

Lesbian and Gay Studies

In the late 1960s, gay and lesbian scholars who were remaining silent on the matter of their sexuality has finally decide to come out and made known to the people about the homosexuals who were kept in the closet until then began to open up about the themes of homosexuals in their work and in literature. In the 1990s, along with feminism, they were able to bring in a new school of gender theory. Michael Foucault has made an enormous contribution when it comes to the study of gender and sexuality. Gender and gay/lesbian theorists are concerned with unearthing a hidden tradition of homosexual writing and with examining the gender dynamics of canonical literature. There are many gay and lesbian writers at this time who were not bold enough to come up and write about their life openly before the public. Therefore; many were writing about it through hidden text and meanings. Michael Ryan writes,

The building of a counter-tradition is made difficult by the fact that, while there have been many gay writers- from Sappho to Tennessee Williams- few of them wrote openly about their lives and experiences. Heterosexual cultures were intolerant of gay perspectives either on the streets or in books, and while women might have been put in the attic for being "mad." Gays were put in jail for being "perverse." Wilde is the most famous example, but writers like Elizabeth Bishop and Henry James, who remained "in the closet" for much of their lives, were more common. (Ryan, 115)

While much gay/lesbian work is concerned with the set traditional building which is followed over the recent years, gay critics are also very much concerned about the notion of sexual identity, thus, interrogates and questions the logic of gender categorization in the society. They also question the relation between gender categories that is a set norm in the society with that of sexuality and physiology. They are concerned about the classification of male and female, how they should behave and act according to their recognized gender in the eyes of the society. They are of the opinion that one's gender should not be compared to one's biological sex. An individual should not be judge and classified according to their

biology. Their gender should not be questioned whether they decide to be feminine or masculine. The decision lies solely on the interests of the individual; how he wants his life to be, how he wishes to present his outlook. According to Michael Ryan (1999),

Not only do traits like masculine and feminine circulate quite freely in combination with biological appearances and sexual choices, but also the meaning of each of the terms is highly variable and changes both culturally and historically. Layer in the axes of class and race, and the meanings proliferate further. There is no guarantee consequently that what will line up in a predictable necessary way with a particular set of sexual behavior or psychological dispositions or social practices. The normative alignment of male and female with heterosexual masculinity or femininity in the dominant gender culture must therefore be seen as political rather than biological fact. (Ryan, 116)

Gay/lesbian theory questions the opposition made between heterosexual and homosexual, interrogating the hierarchical relation between the two set in the mainstream society. They question as to why there is marginalization of the two set in the society, one is given the position of the superior and the other is treated as a kind of disease, ignored over the centuries when people knew about their existence since time immemorial. According to Ryan,

Rather than opposed and exclusive quantities, they are differentially connected moments of a continuum that includes numerous other possible variations. Heterosexuality contains a moment of homosexuality, when the child identifies with the parent of the same sex, or when heterosexual men relate to each other while competing over women, and the homosexuality comprises both masculinity and femininity, supposedly heterosexual qualities, in highly mixed and variable amounts. (Ryan, 116)

Normatively, heterosexual men are considered to be masculine and heterosexual women are considered to be feminine. This is because of the fact that they are instructed to be acted in the way they are taught and not the way they want it to be. And the moment an individual decides to overlaps this concept, they are stigmatized from the society and the

people around them. This is the struggle faced by the homosexuals in the society. The fear of being discriminated and stigmatized has not allowed them to come out and express their inner thought of who they really are. As such gay and lesbian critics are opposed to the norms set based on one's gender. They argue that such identities as man and woman are not pre-decisive foundations, but rather it is the normalizing injunctions which is produced by discursive performances in the process.

In this way, the variety of sexual practices which is practiced by various people in the society, the possible gender formulations- masculine lesbian, masculine heterosexual women, feminine heterosexual man, feminine gay men, etc., are ignored and erased totally. Instead, they are forced to subsume the norms of oppositional identity- either be a heterosexual or homosexual, masculine heterosexual or feminine heterosexual. Lesbian and gays are consisted of plurality gender. They can be either feminine, masculine, or other varieties, or mixture of both. They might connect or disconnect to the set norms of being a man and woman. In this way, according to them, the society should not expect individuals to be classified with either one, that is, feminine or masculine. They should be given the freedom to act either way or both ways without any hurdles.

Gender Studies have come up and examines the structure of male heterosexual oppression, both socially and culturally, that have contributed to the marginalization and exclusion of the homosexuals in the society. Critics try to bring out the cause and root of the problem in the society. They also come up with an answer by saying that there is violence against the homosexuals because of the fact and fear of violence that is exercised on their heterosexual identity. They were not secure of being themselves. They feel a kind of threat that is headed towards them; therefore; they started to stigmatize and discriminates the homosexuals in the society. Their act towards the homosexuals is a kind of defensive shell upon themselves. Therefore, "gender studies has thus given rise to analyses of the repressed "homosocial" strains that motivate the heterosexual tradition's construction of compulsory heterosexuality and normative masculinity." (Ryan, 177)

Hence, one of the most subversive approach that results out of gender and gay/lesbian studies is Queer theory which covers all the area of gender and sexuality, and pushes further the rights and misconception norms of the present society. "One argument it makes is that homosexuality is not an identity apart from another identity called heterosexuality.

Rather, everyone is potentially gay, and it is only the laborious imprinting of heterosexual norms that cuts away those potentials and manufactures heterosexuality as the dominant sexual format.” (Ryan, 177) It is the society who has constructed the classifications based on gender. Therefore, this misconception should be destructed according to the gender studies, gays and lesbians.

Gender theory as said earlier is heavily indebted to feminist theory. The early twentieth century writers such as, Virginia Woolf, and later Simone de Beauvoir, has questioned the indifferent attitude of the society on the nature of gender roles, which has delimited the number of rights that a woman can exercise in their way of living, and in their daily lives. According to Beauvoir (1988), “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.” (Beauvoir, 301) This shows that one’s biology, and the body that an individual is born with is not related to the inscribed norms that has set by society, in the same of the social value system. For most of the feminist theorists, this means that there is a complete repudiation of any reference to ‘natural’ or essential qualities of womanhood or femininity, with an emphasis instead on an iconoclastic questioning of the extent to which everything having to do with gender difference is a human construct, created to reflect and reinforce a set of power dynamics privileging men. “Just as feminist theorists renegotiated the valuations of the binary male/female, and theorists of race renegotiated the social values ascribed to white/black/brown, so too have gender theorists attempted to undermine the judgements and seeming timelessness of the concepts heterosexual/homosexual”. (Malpas & Wake, 106)

Homosexual is always present in the society we live in. If there is a society where there are no traces of the homosexuals, it is because of the norms set by the society that they are unable to come out of their safe zone. The treatment of the homosexuals is different, based on the society and culture they live in. Some of the major key factors of queer theory is that, sexual behaviors and all concepts that links sexual behaviors to sexual identities as well as all categories of normative and deviant sexualities are social constructs, meaning that they are the product of social and historical constructs. That being said, like any other theories, the use of the term queer has been changing and redefining itself over again with the passing of time, thus, expanding their boundaries in drawing themselves closer in gaining their rights.

Thus, Queer theory originated mainly from the studies of the gays and lesbians, and feminism, whose focus is mainly based on gender and sexuality. But it soon distanced itself from the said theories because of the disagreement which is found in their concept. Queer theory stands for all those genders, sexualities, minorities who are discriminated in the society based on the societal belief of being a 'normal' individual. It covers all the rights of an individual existing in the society. Queer questions the existing norms and practices which are imbibed into the minds of the individual since from their younger days- the misconception of life, with their special focus on heterosexual and homosexual gender, difference based on male and female, rich and poor, white or black; all types of classification found in the society. It goes beyond the binaries laid by the society in molding and shaping the life of an individual. Just as feminism argues that gender is something which is perceived and which is clearly a social construct by the public, queer theory also stand on the point that classification based on gender, race and sexuality is purely social construct which can be deconstruct overtime. Gender expression of an individual should not be questioned and judged by the society. An individual should be free to express their thoughts and behavior according to their own desires. Queer theory does not assume a uniform access to reality, but rather acknowledges that subjective knowledge about sexuality, gender and other social aspects are constructed rather than pre-requisite, fluid rather that stable, and it is not always in accordance with the societal norms. In this sense, queer theory is much more when beyond, instead of simply focusing on the experience of gender and sexuality. Queer theory research constitutes any form of research positioned within conceptual frameworks that highlights the instability of taken-for-granted meanings and resulting power relations. (Nash and Brown, 4) Anupama Mohan writes;

No discussion of gay and lesbian studies or queer theory is complete without a fundamental questioning and reconsideration of what it means to be a gay/lesbian in our varied cultures. For all gay and lesbian men and women their homosexuality is a crucial factor in their mental, physical, emotional and intellectual make up. As a result, Queer theory is a deeply introspective discourse that draws strength from the questioning deconstructive temper of contemporary postmodern literary and aesthetic practices as well as from the embattled and beleaguered conditions that have constitute, and in a large

measure still constituted, the material reality of many gay and lesbian people's everyday existence. (Panja, 121)

Hence, as part of the larger postmodern concern with the debunking of "metanarratives", queer theory's greatest contribution is the destabilization of *heteronormativism*- the idea or belief that heterosexuality is the norm from which all kinds of sexual behavior deviant is condemned as unnatural and immoral.

Select Novels of David Levithan

This research will be based on four select novels of David Levithan which will be studied in their relation with Queer theory. In the mentioned novels, Levithan has vividly portrayed the insights of the LGBT community and their dealings with the heterosexual society. But at the same time, Levithan also shows the brighter side of life of the LGBTs by portraying the life that queer theory is trying to create in the society and the society to come. The queer themes that are found will be discussed in detail in the preceding chapters. Levithan's novels- *Every Day*, *Two Boys Kissing*, *Boy Meets Boy* and *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* will be dealt with in this dissertation.

Every Day

Every Day is a novel by Levithan in which the main protagonist named A, is a genderless individual. They do not have a gender of their own. Every day they travel from one body to another body. The body and gender that they inhabit for a day changes each day and each time. They do not stay longer than a day. Their inability to be settled in one body has led them to live a hard life. They are unable to make connection with the people they love unlike the others. The things that run through in their minds cannot be understood by all. But one day, when they inhabit a boy named Justin, they come to meet his girlfriend Rhiannon, whom they also come to know that she was not treated by her boyfriend. She is under the control of Justin. She is always insecure when it comes to Justin. When she first met A, she is always conscious about whether Justin is mad, or whether she has done something which has made him mad. The feeling of being insecure even when she was with him shows the position of women in the society, whose existence people think that, is through their connection with men.

In the novel, throughout their life, A stopped themselves from getting connected with anyone because they know that they are going to be forgotten the next day. But things changed when they came across Rhiannon. A fall in love with Rhiannon the moment they met her. After their meeting with Rhiannon, A says, "I am tired of not feeling. I am tired of not connecting. I want to be here with her. I want to be the one who lives up to her hopes, if only for the time I'm given." (Levithan, 15) Before meeting Rhiannon, A describes their life by saying, 'I have gotten so used to what I am, and how my life works. I never want to stay. I'm always ready to leave.'" (Levithan, 27) The love and relationship between A and Rhiannon is something which is near to impossible. A will change his body and gender every time, and it will be hard for Rhiannon to recognize them every single day. Being said that, A wants Rhiannon to recognize them instantly no matter what body and gender they are in. But with time, Rhiannon falls in love with A, not wanting to leave them ever again. There are many complications in their relationship, but they decided to give it a try and be with each other no matter what.

Levithan, through his protagonist A, has brought to life how a person who does not abide by the social norm lives. A does not belong to any gender, but unlike others, they also have the freedom to choose and be who they want to be. There is no boundary when it comes to the rights and freedom they can access. But at the same time, they also make sure that they protect the body they are inhabiting for the day. They faced many challenges and complication in their life, living as a genderless person. At times, they also go through mental breakdown, because they feel that they will not be remembered by anyone, whether they are dead or alive. Therefore, they said, "I will never have a family to grieve for me. I will never have people feel about me the way they feel about Marc's grandfather... If I die, there will be nobody but Rhiannon who will ever know I've been here." (Levithan, 268)

Hence, *Every Day* is a novel which brings out the insights of the people who does not conform to any gender; the gender constructs of being a masculine and feminine in the society. At the same time, the novel also portrays that gender construct is constructed by the society, for societal gains. Therefore, it should be and can be deconstructed. Through the protagonist A and Rhiannon, the portrayal that love does not have any gender, it solely depends on the invention of man; a concept that love should happen only between two

individuals belonging to two different sex and gender has been clearly brought before the audience.

Two Boys Kissing

Two Boys Kissing is a realistic novel in which Levithan brings out the reality of the society that we live. It is about the two characters, Craig and Harry who decides to hold the longest kiss, thirty-two hour, twelve minutes and ten seconds, in order to abolish the stigmatization and discrimination faced by the gays and lesbians in the society. Craig and Harry decide to take this challenge, when they saw how their friend Tariq was beaten up by some drunk men in the street. There are many who sympathize with the situation, but there are also many who does not care about what is going on in the street. Some police were showing concern, whereas, some were ignoring the scene that took place right Infront of their eyes. The indifferent attitude of the people, and the condition that their friend is in has led them to challenge the set gender norm, which is 'two boys kissing' and not 'one boy and one girl kissing.'

The life of the other gay men was also presented in the novel in different ways. Some were supported by their friends and parents, whereas, some were left all alone. It also describes the life of individuals who takes decision when they were at their lowest, which is one of the most common scenes seen in the society. They go to the extent of killing themselves because they feel that there is no one for them, who will sympathize with them and understands their position in the society. But the fact is that, there are people who understands, but they are not willing to support them and help them because of the fear of being isolated by the society they live in.

Two Boys Kissing is evident that it is a novel which disrupts the norm set by society on gender to a certain extent. In here, norm change is referred to societies who have becomes more tolerant and accepting towards the homosexual's behaviors, practices, gender expression and identity. The novel was narrated by Greek chorus who had passed away, who were gays when they were alive. The chorus has made it clear that the society is changing to better. During their time, being a gay individual is something which everyone does not dream of. They live a hidden life in order to be counted by the society. Therefore; they are pleased and happy to see the younger generation coming out from their shield, of

living as someone who they are not. They are also pleased to see the amount of freedom that they are enjoying comparing to them. The present younger generation are living the kind of life which they dreamt of when they were alive. The Chorus expresses their concern over the young youths who give up on life because of the situation they are facing. They hope to see the younger generation striving continuously, and not giving up their hope, thus, make the better decisions in their life. The constant comparison between the life that the Chorus lived, and the life that is enjoyed by the younger generation is enough evidence that the society is changing; the norms set by society has loosen up- more tolerant and acceptable to the homosexuals in the society unlike the earlier days.

Boy Meets Boy

Boy Meets Boy is the first young adult fiction written by David Levithan. At the time when Levithan wrote this novel, people were not at all tolerant towards the LGBTs. The original title of book is *Paul is Gay*, but later on Levithan changed it to *Boy Meets Boy*. This novel is completely different from that of other LGBT novels. In this little town, Paul, the protagonist enjoys his life living an open gay individual in the society. His life is filled with happiness. In the novel, he was not seen going through a hurdle because of his gender. Instead, he was filled with people who supports him and stands by him, leading by his parents and teachers. On the other hand, there is Tony, who is the best friend of Paul, who is also a gay but is not supported by his parents. He represents homophobic individual in the society. In the novel, Paul confesses, "In this space, in this moment, we are who we want to be. I am lucky, because for me that doesn't take that much courage. But for others, it takes a world of bravery to make it to the clearing." (Levithan, 184)

Paul knows in what kind of society he is living. He is also glad that he has supporting people besides him, but he also feels for the others who are not as much privileged as him. The town that Paul live is a little utopian town, which is a heaven for LGBT community. They are treated as normal as the other people in town. There is no discrimination and stigmatization. It is a world which is dreamt off by every gays and lesbians, living among heterosexual society. The life that Paul portrays in the novel shows that one should not be degraded by the opinion that comes in from the society. But one should know how to be

brave and strong in order to fight the injustice that is done by people. In his conversation with Tone, Paul states;

I find my greatest strength in wanting to be strong. I find my greatest bravery in deciding to be brave. I don't know if I've ever realized this before, and I don't know if Tony's ever realized it before, but I think we both realize it now. If there's no feeling of fear, then there's no need for courage. I think Tony has been living with his fear for all his life. I think now he's converting it to courage. (Levithan, 156)

The above statement made by Paul should be the attitude of each individuals when it comes to them, living a life which is best suited for them. His life is a kind of life where it will be hardly found and seen in the society. But at the same time, with time, one can expect things to take a complete turn. As such, the novel is not about the reality, the present society that we live in, but it is the reality that Levithan creates for the world that is ahead of us, that is slowly turning into reality. The kind of setting that Levithan creates in this novel, is the kind of society that queer stives and long for.

Will Grayson, Will Grayson

Will Grayson, Will Grayson is a novel written by David Levithan and John Green. In this novel, both the protagonist has the same name, but they were differentiated with the initials- one is referred to with capitalization and the other is referred to as with small alphabet letter. The novel is written and narrated according to the perspective of the two protagonist and their views towards life. One Will Grayson likes to live a peaceful and lowkey life. Whereas, the other Will Grayson is going through depression for which he was also under constant medication throughout the novel. The novel is narrated in the eyes of two teenagers, where one is a heterosexual teenager, and the other is a depressed gay teenager. Although there are two sides of the story with the two characters speaking, the story remains the same from the starting till the end of the story. As the story progresses, with the different perspectives that flows in, both the former and latter also blends into one plot, for which the plot also becomes clear as the story progresses.

The novel also portrays the different kind of life that is led by the teens in the society. There were also rebellions and at the same time self-discovery of the individuals in the novel. Both

the Will Grayson narrated the story according to their own situation and the people that surrounds them. They belong to different places, but at one point of time, they also met each other, for which they also get to experience a turning point in their life, which both have never imagined will happen to them. Their meeting has become a turning point for both the two Will Grayson. There is a kind of connection between the two. Their encounter has brought a kind of self-discovery and self-acceptance for both the two.

Unlike his other novels which are dealt with in this dissertation, this novel also brings out the other side of life led by the gays and lesbians. Their life is not filled with complete happiness. As such, the other Will Grayson also suffers from depression. He gets only little happiness, without anything good to hold on in his life. As such, he started to get connected with a person named Isaac online, where he starts to give all his time, for which Isaac became a source of happiness for him. Hence, the novel also portrays a kind of life that is led by the young adults, where they try to find happiness in unrealistic things, as they are unable to open up themselves to people around them, given the judgmental society that they live in.

Hence, the novels which are mentioned and highlighted above reveal the insights of Levithan. Levithan grew up in a society where he was supported by his family. When talking about his life, he was grateful that he did not have to suffer and go through stigmatization from the society he belongs to. But at the same time, he also wishes to present a kind of society where everyone, despite the differences can all be treated as normal and live in peaceful life. He does not want to see the gays and lesbians suffering, trying to live a life of their own. The force that come from the society is very powerful that individuals are unable to face it. And the only thing that can change the world, is through writing which will be shared and read all over the world. Since the time that he started to write, till the present date, things have taken an enormous change. Levithan has lived and experienced the good and bad. Also, people keep on writing things about the LGBTs, where their life always ended in misery and destruction. This is a common sight that is seen all over the world. Therefore; Levithan, as belonging to the community decides to write something different, a possible world, and a brighter future which is reflected in all of his works.

Levithan also makes his point clear by stating that discrimination and stigmatization on gender will never be depart and taken away from the society. Therefore; although

he presents a utopian world to his characters, he also creates characters which are suffering because of the pressure of society. And that the only solution that can change this fact, is for the LGBTs to come out strong and brave. In this world, no one is below anyone. Everyone is born equal, but it is human who have created separations between people. Therefore, when one decides to stay hidden, things will not change. Reality has to be faced and challenged; by then liberation will overtake it. In his works, Levithan has, and always portray his thoughts and feelings clearly. He is a person who is not shamed because he is a gay. He had supported parents and like him, everyone can also take a step towards it. Queer has always been a source and root of all his novels.

Hence, the study of David Levithan's work in relation with queer theory, will reveal the different aspects of queer life, their experiences in their everyday life, and how these experiences further diverge into preservation and appropriation under the sway of cultural change in relation with the coming of queer study in literature, which is a challenge to cultures and to a marginalized character and their identity.

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CHAPTER - II

GENDER NON-CONFORMING IN *EVERYDAY*

David Levithan is known as a writer who does not portray stereotypical LGBT characters in his novels. He does not discriminate based on gender. But he always stands for equal freedom, rights and equal privilege of all group of people. As such, he always portrays his thoughts and feelings vividly in his works. He is not obscure like other writers who try to hide their motive in their writing. Likewise, his novel *Every Day* is a gender non-conforming, with the protagonist 'A', who does not belong to a particular gender. As described by Frank Bruni of *The New York Times*, "A doesn't have a real name, presumably because they don't have a real existence: they're not a person, at least not in any conventional sense, but they have a spirit, switching without choice from one host to the next and, for just 24 hours, replacing its consciousness with their own." (Wikipedia, *Every Day*).

Every Day is a novel which is not realistic, but at the same time, the situation of A gives the exact image of the society; the struggles of the LGBT community in the heterosexual society. The characters in the novel are influenced by the way the society is. Although, they do not speak out openly about it, declaring it loudly, their actions bring out the insights of them. The plot of the novel revolves around the genderless protagonist, named 'A', who travels from one body to another body each day. A does not have a body of their own. The novel portrays the gender construct set by society, which results in the loss of identity of individual. They are unable to accept themselves because of the pressure of society, at the same time they also know the fact that they cannot live the way society expects them to. Thus, the confusion and battle that they have within themselves led them to lose themselves; who they are and what they are.

In the novel, A does not comply with any gender. Throughout the novel, A occupies the body of both male and female, and non-binary people without the knowledge of the person that they will be waking up as the next day. As A does not belong to any particular gender, A is addressed as gender neutral pronoun "they" throughout the novel. A as a genderless soul, appreciates the beauty of all people, not according to how they appeared to be, but according to the fact that they are all humans who should be recognized and appreciated the way they are.

David Levithan in this novel, through his characters, brings out the struggles of the LGBTs and how they long to be accepted in this traditional society, allowing them to live the life that is set for them. In the novel, A's gender changes each day. Since childhood, from when he remembers, A travels from one body to the other. At first A thought that this is just something that everyone goes through, but as years went by, he come to know that he is living a life different from other normal beings. He does not have a place where he can call it a home. He does not have parents whom he can call as family. In the opening of the novel, A says;

I wake up. Immediately I have to figure out who I am. It's not just the body- opening my eyes and discovering whether the skin on my arm is light or dark, whether my hair is long or short, whether I'm fat or thin, boy or girl, scarred or smooth. The body is the easiest thing to adjust to, if you're used to waking up in a new one each morning. It's in life...Every day I am someone else, I am myself- I know I am myself- but I am also someone else. (Levithan, 1)

A is used to his changing body, gender and the way he lives each day. As soon as he opens his eyes, he knew that he is a different person, inhabiting the body for a day. But the thought that he will not be remembered by others, whether he lives or dies scares him and disappoints him at the same time. Every day he wakes up, "the information is there. I wake up, open my eyes, understand that it is anew morning, a new place. The biography kicks, a welcome gift from the not-me part of the mind." (Levithan,1) Every day A is a new person. There is not a day or time where A inhabits the same body twice. Each day he tries to respect and take care of the body that he inhabits. He does not think of the future or past. A is least bothered about the things that has happened and things that are bound to take place in the future. A says that it is "hard in the body of someone you don't like, because you still have to respect it. I've harmed people's lives in the past, and I've found that every time I slip up, it haunts me. So I try to be careful." (Levithan, 2)

A as a genderless soul, fell in love with Rhiannon, who was in relationship with Justin when the story opens. While in Justin's body, A comes to know about Rhiannon, Justin's girlfriend. A is used to moving from one body to another, and as the gender of A changes each day, A also fail to remember all the names and memories of the person they inhabit so far.

Throughout the novel, A occupies the bodies of men, women, trans etc. without the knowledge of the people's body in which they will wake up the next day. With time, A decides to keep a distance and avoid their feelings being engaged with others/the body they inhabit. But A's feelings changed completely after meeting Rhiannon. Being with Rhiannon for a day, A felt a connection with her, which is completely different from the other days. A fall in love with Rhiannon knowing about the struggles and difficulties that will come their way. Although, A changes each day, the day spent with Rhiannon stay fresh in their mind. As the story progresses, A was able to gain the favor of Rhiannon, letting her to know about the phenomenon that they experience each day.

As days pass by, no matter whose body A is in, each day A tries to search for Rhiannon and kept in touch with her. But on the other hand, their relationship also brings out the idea that the love between two persons does not depends on one's gender, but on the preferences and feelings of the two-person involved, because despite the hardship that they went through, their love keeps on growing. As the story progresses, Rhiannon also falls in love with A, although she does not have any idea as to whether the person, she is in love with is a male or female. Every day A comes to meet her in different body. But once their eyes meet, Rhiannon always recognizes A in any given circumstances. The love between Rhiannon has proved that the norm set by the society when it comes to love is a mistaken belief. When the feelings of two person gets connected, the feelings in them grow accordingly. As such, A as the protagonist of the novel is not tied down by the rule set by society, but lived a life which is not controlled by the way society expects a person to be. There is enough freedom and liberation when it comes to the protagonist. A was not scared when it comes to his love. He decides to be tied by the society; lived life with no regrets.

In *Every Day*, A has lived and experiences various lifestyles of people living in the society. Sometimes, they feel privileged and happy, but at the same time they also question life when they inhabit particular body. Throughout, they also come to know that each person living in the society has different problems and struggles that goes unseen and untold. Each people are trying to live their life; trying to breathe and be a part of the society that they are born into. But the despite the struggles, the society is not willing to appreciate the life that has been set before them, instead they try to ruin and destroy it. In the novel, Nathan, a

body that A inhabits, try to bring out the person A is, not knowing the harm that he is bringing upon himself and the people around them.

Gender construction is set by the society when a person is born into this world. The society runs in such a way that a person who decides to be brave and live a life best suited for him will be considered a failure in the eyes of the people. Particularly the homosexuals are treated as a kind of disgust and disgrace to the society, especially the family. They are discriminated and isolated in the society. They are not given a chance to unleash their thoughts and feelings. Their life remains a mystery, with no light shining upon it. The only thing will help in their survival is to comply to the ways of the society. Thus, A represents the gender construct set by the society and how the people who fall as victim suffers along the way. Also, on the other hand, A also poses as a challenge to the societal norms, thus, going against the rule set by the society in order to live a life filled with no regrets. The novel brings light to the life of the LGBTs, how they are treated in the society; judgement of society against the LGBTs.

In the novel, A as a genderless soul, although they enjoy enough freedom, at the same time, constantly moving from one body to another, without having to have a body of its own also shows the hidden life of the LGBTs. A does not have a body of its own. They are hidden behind the body they inhabit each day. All throughout the life of A, A is hidden behind a mask. A try to create a lasting connection or tries to stay in a body permanently. But nothing could be done. Every day there is another body waiting for them to take over. The relationship and bond will always end and the body will be switched the next day. There is no security given when it comes to the lives of the LGBTs. This is vividly portrayed by the changing body of A in the novel.

At first it was hard to go through each day without making any lasting connections, leaving any life-changing effects.... I would make bonds without acknowledging how quickly and permanently they would break.... But after a while, I had to stop. It was too heartbreaking to live with so many separations. (Levithan, 7)

We live in a society where people believe that intimate relationship can happen only between two people, belonging to different or opposite sex, that is, a male and a female. It

is normal to see a boy and a girl holding hands in public showing the affection to each other comfortably. But if the same thing is to be applied to two individuals belonging to same sex, it will attract the crowds; they will be shamed and curse. The society is running in such a way that there is no place for people belonging to minority sexual group to express their thoughts freely. They are being forced to comply with the norm set by the society, living as someone who they are not. But in this novel, Levithan is set to break this norm set by society. He was trying to show the readers that when it comes to love, it can happen with anyone. It is not bound or tied up to a particular sex. It can happen with just anyone that you meet in life. And his ideas about love is portrayed by genderless A, who fell in love with the character Rhiannon in the novel. The novel portrays that when it comes to love, there is no discrimination.

Society's Perception on Gender Construction

Society has become an important force when it comes to the set gender construction of human beings. Since childhood, individuals are taught and brought up in such a way that man should be masculine and female should be feminine. As such, when anyone tries to dress up according to their taste and likes, they are discriminated and looked down upon instantly by all the people around them. But all these perceptions are brought upon and created by the society that we live in. Things will take a turn if people become more broadminded and more accepting towards the preferences of individuals. No individuals can live in isolation. But also, no society can drive the life of the people living in it. Every individual, despite their differences or similarities have their own freedom to choose and be who they want to be.

For many years, the conflict about the gays and lesbians, and any other type of sexuality has been debated over without any solution. There are many opinions and restrictions when it comes to LGBT community, also particularly because of one's faith and belief. Since the time when the phenomena of gender appear in the surface, the question of what it actually means to be a man or a woman has been a constant problem. The society is not willing to accept any differences. Differences are seen as hurdles which brings destruction to the people living in it. The majority takes control over the lives of the minority. The life of the minority is driven by the rules laid down by the society. Biologically, to call someone as a

male or female is understandable. But to define someone based on their biology, considering sex and gender as the same thing is something which should be considered. Judith Butler in her book, *Gender Trouble* (1996), mentions that when we talk about gender, it is not the result of nature but it is something which is socially constructed. This statement shows that, male and female behavior are not the result of one's biology, but rather it is something which is socially constructed and reinforced through various factors. This way, one can assume that gender has a close connection with human behavior, the way they live, brought up and are taught upon. For instance, many things are considered as male or female possession. The interests of male and female are directed by the society they live in. But the question is whether these things, or these facts are already embodied within the minds of humans since their childhood, or this concept is followed in order to achieve certain goals and purposes of society. This is a question which should be considered by all human beings. And whatever the solution that one draws upon, one should also go back to one's roots, thus, find the error that is made and brought upon oneself.

David Levithan is an author who does not believe in the perception of the society he lives in. Therefore; through his writings he tries to bring awareness upon his people and people around the world as to what error one has made in determining one's life. Likewise, in *Every Day*, he also brings out the image of the society through his characters. Some characters suffers because they cannot abide to the way that the society live. They cannot let their live be controlled by the society. But although, they try to turn away from it, the things that are imbibed within them are very strong that they react accordingly to it subconsciously. This is the result of some characters in the novel.

In the novel, Rhiannon was one character who was not able to accept the way A looks. Everyday the looks and body of A changes. Sometimes A is a boy, sometimes female, sometime a transgender. The size of the body also changes each day. A also notices that the reaction of Rhiannon changes according to the body they inhabit. When A inhabits the body of a female person, the reaction of Rhiannon towards A changes. This is seen when A states,

I remember Rhiannon's hesitation to kiss me longer when I was Kelsea. I am hoping this reason was nowhere near the heart of it. There were so many reasons in that moment... She still keeps a physical space between us- there

will be no leaning shoulders or holding hands right now. But if our body keeps apart, our words do not. I don't mind that. (Levithan, 142, 147)

Rhiannon was conscious of the people around them when A inhabits a female body. She was not comfortable when A tries to get closer to her. She wants to walk with A, keeping a distance between them. She says that she cannot stand the stares that they get from the passer by. On days when A inhabits a girls' body, Rhiannon's reaction changes instantly which makes A feel that they are not wanted in the society. The reaction that one gets from Rhiannon is the same problem that the society is today. Rhiannon loves A even after coming to know about the reason behind the changing body and gender that they go through each day. She loves A, but on the other hand, because of the way she is brought up, she could not run away from the label of society. She loves A but she is not able to accept the differences. Rhiannon states;

I mean, you're a different person every day. And I just can't love every person you are equally. I know it's you underneath. I know it's just the package. But I can't, A. I've tried. And I can't. I want to- I want to be the person who can do that- but I can't...there are just so many things you and I can't do. We'll never hang out with my friends. I can't even talk about you to my friends, and that's driving me crazy. You'll never meet my parents. I will never be able to go to sleep with you at night and then wake up with you the next morning. Never. And I've been trying to argue myself into thinking these things don't matter, A. Really. I have. But I've lost the argument. And I can't keep having it, when I know what the real answer is. (Levithan, 278)

Deep down Rhiannon knows about her feelings that she has towards A, but the trend set by society, which is imbibed in her does not allow her to trust her feelings and go along with the flow. The expectation that the society has towards what is called a normal relationship seems unfulfilled when it comes to them. She is still conscious about how the society and people around her look at her. She also cannot hide her disappointment when it comes to the body and gender of A. The confusion that Rhiannon goes through is the reality of today's society. Here, the performativity that Rhiannon is doing in order to be accepted in the

society is what Butler talks about in her performativity, “gender proves to be performance—that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be.” (Butler, 2006)

Society is created in such a way that the female is under the control of the male in the society. Patriarchy plays a major role. Many says that patriarchy disappeared with the changing time. But the root is planted in the minds of all individuals from the time they are born. This can be seen in the relation shared between Rhiannon and Justin. In their relationship, Rhiannon is the submissive one. Her life is driven under the control of Justin. She always admits and follow the way Justin directs her. She does not have an opinion of her own. When it comes to any type of conversation between Rhiannon and Justin, Justin always takes the upper hand. A says “Justin is the one who makes the first move. Justin is the one who figures things out. Justin is the one who says what they’re going to do.”(Levithan, 9) Rhiannon tags along under the wishes of Justin because she is afraid that she will do something which will make Justin mad. She sets Justin before her views. When A was in Justin’s body, Rhiannon constantly asks, “Are you mad at me?... I’m glad you’re not mad at me...I just want everything to be okay.” (Levithan, 5-6) Hence, the relationship between Rhiannon and Justin clearly shows the kind of heterosexual relationship, where there is confirmation and submission on the part of the woman. Being around Justin makes Rhiannon to lower her self-esteem. She is always timid around him, being scared about making some mistakes around him which will make him lose his temper. She is always conscious of her action and Justin’s feelings when they are together.

When A was inside the body of Justin, they come to know about the truth in their relationship. A wanted to change this. They decide to take Rhiannon to the beach. Rhiannon was given the chance and freedom to be whom she wants to be for a day. Therefore, when A ask the opinion of Rhiannon, she always replies and starts with the word *I don’t know*. This happened because she is used to follow the instruction of Justin. In the process, she forgets all her rights and the ability to share her opinion. Whenever A ask her something, “every single answer starts with the answer *I don’t know*. But most of the time she knows, if I give her the time and the space in which to answer.” (Levithan, 12) The reaction from Rhiannon shows the submissive nature of woman in the society; being unable to stand up on oneself and one’s opinion.

A is against the society where people were treated with bias. Therefore; when A goes out on a date with Rhiannon, they give the opportunity to Rhiannon to be able to express herself. A did not should at Rhiannon like Justin would. Instead, they wait for the reply of Rhiannon patiently. This made Rhiannon to be confused of the role she is playing because she does not get the same treatment from Justin. But despite that, A did not take advantage of Rhiannon but helped her to express her thoughts more freely even though it was just for a day. A says, "If I were really Justin, I would find something wrong with her. Right now. Tell her. Yell. Bring her down. Put her in her place...But I can't. I'm not Justin. Even if she doesn't know it." (Levithan, 13) A was against the set of responsibility, the difference between male and female and the obligation set for woman and man in the society, with woman being the submissive one. Therefore, when given the chance, although it was just for a day, they take a turn from the tradition and move towards modernity; positive change that Levithan longs for in the society.

Rhiannon is the perfect epitome of the way society expects an individual to be. She is afraid of being alone, being discriminated by the society she lives in. Therefore, even if she needs to be under the control of Justin, she forces herself to accept it. As a girl, she is afraid to face the world. She needs someone who will give her security and from whom she can shield herself from. She lets the decision and voice of the society before her wants and desires. Therefore; when she started her relationship with A, she was in constant dilemma because A is not someone from whom she can take shelter from. She is afraid of being alone. Finally, she declares,

I want to see you, but I'm not sure if we should do that. I want to hear about what's going on, but I'm afraid that will only start everything again. I love you- I do- but I am afraid of making that love too important. Because you're always going to leave me, A. We can't deny it. You're always going to leave.
(Levithan,305)

The ideal relationship in the society consists of a male and female and not beyond it. In the novel, once A inhabits the body of Vic, a transgendered individual. A introduced themselves as, "my name is Vic. I'm biological female, but my gender is male." At this Rhiannon sighs and said, "I don't even know what that means. I start to explain, but she cuts me off!" (Levithan, 257) There was resignation and denial in her voice. She does not want to listen to

the explanation that A was trying to offer. She is not ready to go out and be seen together with a transgendered person. Instead of being understanding towards A, Rhiannon further suggested, "Why don't you walk behind me for a while. I think it'll just make things easier...I have no choice but to follow." (Levithan 258) The reaction of Rhiannon towards Vic shows the ignorance that the society have towards the LGBT community, be it gender or sexuality. The proof is right before them but they are not trying to look at it and understand the situation. Instead, they turn away from it, thus, isolate the things set before them. The society is inattentive when it comes to the sexual minorities. In the novel, although Rhiannon understands the situation, she chooses to ignore it and be ignorant towards the feeling of A. But on the other hand, she also says, "I'm not saying you're any less important. You know I'm not. Right now, you are the person I love the most in the entire world." (Levithan, 259) Here, the justification given from the side of Rhiannon shows that the society can see the problem right before them, but they cannot bring themselves to accept it, solve it, thus, comes up with the solution. Ignorance has become a powerful weapon of the society. Rhiannon further asks, "So you're a girl who's a boy?" (Levithan, 258) This question made A realize that Rhiannon is not willing to know more about Viv, nor does she want to get herself into it. All she is trying is to get away from the topic, from the reality. Rhiannon's ignorance towards Vic's gender reflects the mainstream society's lack of understanding sex and gender.

In the novel, Rhiannon states and considers A as a male although A never claim themselves, belonging to any gender. But in the imagination of Rhiannon, A remains as a man. Rhiannon even states that there will be other girls out there, when she talks about the relationship that A got into in the past. Her comments indicate that she is accepting A as a male and not being genderless. She creates an imagination for herself where she can hide under it, assuring herself to be accepted in the society. A also states, "I notice she's less affectionate with me when I'm in a girl's body, but I don't call her on it." (Levithan, 225) But when A is in the body of Adam, Rhiannon does not hesitate to show her love. This makes A to wonder, "I take her hand and she doesn't pull away. Is this because something between us changed, or is it only because my body has changed? Is it easier for her to hold Adam Cassidy's hand?" (Levithan, 175) The attitude that Rhiannon shows towards the body that A inhabits reveals that the gender binary system is still very much prevalent in the society. The belief of

heterosexual society is passed down from generation to generation that people who do not conform to it are found to be judged and found wanting in most of the cultures found in the society.

The construction that male holds the upper hand in the society is not only applied solely to relationship but also in other contexts. When A was occupying the body of Mark, a basketball player, the coach also calls out and scolds a player when he was unable to score a shot during their practice. "When one of my teammates botches a shot, the coach tells him to stop being a girl. I wish I could tell him that I was a girl two days ago, and two days before that. Nothing is different. A shot is a shot." (Levithan, Day 5931) In this case, when a guy fails to give a shot they are belittled and compared to a girl. But this comparison does not have anything to do with one's gender. It is the coach who is trying to bring out the differences by offending the player. It reveals how one also goes through mockery of the society when one fails to live up to the expectation of gender set by the society. The act of the coach towards the girl also proves that women are still looked down and considered as weaker when compared to male.

In many cases, people confuse the term sex and gender, believing that biological sex and gender are two identical terms which can be used interchangeably. In the novel, although Vic is biologically born in a female body, his gender changed to a male as he grew up. But as he was biologically female in his younger day, people around him could not let go of the thought that he is a male, although his gender changed with time. He was seen to and referred as someone he does not want to be seen as. Even in his family, his mother could not stop herself from seeing Vic as someone he is not. People around him could not accept the way he is. This shows that the society accepts and sees the person as they want to be and not according to who they are. The result of this leads to general ignorant of the people living in it; trying to unsee the things that can be seen. Thus, the general ignorance from the part of the people around shows that gender binary system is prevalent and a dominant force in the society. Vic has supportive parents. He can be whom he wants to be. But the fact that one cannot let go of the things that are taught in younger days is apparent. No matter how much they try to change, they always go back to their roots. And the people who cannot conform to it are forced to fit into a superimposed binary classification.

At present, the society exist in such a way that male should be masculine, and female should be feminine. Females are expected to do household chores which fits the look of a woman. Whereas, men are expected to do things which shows their masculinity. In the society, man who stays at home and does the chores which is considered as women's job are considered and seen as feminine. But this idea is set only by the society. Individuals are born not to be controlled by the society. But the society should be open and willing to accept the differences that comes along, and not reject them and discriminate them because they are not them by their choice. It is there in them and they cannot accept it, despite all the pressure from the society that comes along. Society has a very strong influence upon sex and gender. Also, the circumstances that one has to go through while going against the set norm is something which everyone tries and wants to avoid; living a hidden and life filled with failure and disappointments.

Gender Non-Conforming

According to Merriam Webster, "Gender identity refers to an individual's internalized psychological experience of being male or female, whereas gender non-conforming refers to the degree to which an individual's appearance, behavior, interests, and subjective self-concept deviate from conventional norms for masculinity/femininity." (Merriam Webster, gender nonconforming) 'Gender non-conforming' is a term which is referred to people who does not conform or go along with the norms set, that are expected of them. This term can be used to describe those people who does not care about how they look, how they present themselves and how they should be dressed and act according to their gender. They do not care about how society and people around them judged them according to their presentation. Their roles and behavior do not conform to the set gender roles between male and female. In other words, gender non-conforming can be used to describe various people or it can also be used in describing the actions, ideas and dress of a person. Being a gender non-conforming does not mean that you are a transgender or belong to non-binary gender. You can be both or neither.

The expected gender norms may differ from society to society. But the fact that there are certain norms that should be followed by an individual based on their gender is something which none can deny. At present, we see many males dressed in dresses which are

considered as women dress. Also, on the other side, there are many females who are dressed in dresses considered as male clothes. And the reaction that they get from people around them depends on the society they live in. Having said that, one cannot deny the fact that, people who decides to go against the norms cannot be passed unnoticed by the people around. This is because the difference given and taught in the society does not tally with the changing time, and the people cannot bring themselves to accept the fact.

A person being a gender non-conform does not have anything to do with their gender. It solely depends on their personal preferences and the way they look and view at themselves. In a society, if a male shows their emotions publicly, there are seen as feminine by others. But there is no such things that a male should not show their emotion or cry out loud when they are struggling and suffering. It is the society who has set those rules, thus, making it difficult to live. On the other hand, working women are criticized by people because they feel that a married woman should stay at home and look after their children. These are some mistaken facts which the society has brought upon oneself, for which one is unable to accept the reality. Hence, the independent individuals are stumbled upon when they come out of their controlled zone.

Queer supporters do not have any bias against any gender. They stand neutral when it comes to issue relating to gender, sex and relationship. They believe in the equal treatment of all gender despite their differences and preferences. One can act and dress the way they want and not be criticized by the people around them. An individual can lead their life according to how they want it to be and not be bothered about the opinions of others. *Every Day* is known for the portrayal of the gender non-conforming protagonist. The protagonist in this novel is not tied down by the society, but instead, follows what they think is right for them. In the novel, the use of 'both and neither' signifies the way queer people thinks about when it comes to gender. A, as a character, in any does not perceive themselves as belonging to a gender, but they always perceive themselves as genderless and people should accept them just as they are. A says, "I didn't think of myself as a boy or a girl- I never have." (Levithan, 155) Here, A defies the gender construction set by the society, which is one of the main aims of queer.

Palazzi argues that when it comes to gender and sexuality, queer people normally have a different understanding comparing to those who belong to binary male or female

dichotomy. She also claims that those people who identifies themselves as queer refuses to abide by the existing binary social code set by the society. Likewise, A as a character against gender construction, rejects the binary system and even transcends the binary by saying,

There were days I felt like a girl and days I felt like a boy, and those days wouldn't always correspond with the body I was in. I still believed everyone when they said I had to be one or the other. Nobody was telling me a different story, and I was too young to think for myself. I had yet to learn that when it came to gender, I was both and neither. (Levithan, 254)

The above lines bring out the concept that the novel has to offer. It shows that one can be wither male or female, or belongs to both the sexes. It becomes clear when they are driven in the right direction when they are young. But in this society, no one is willing to stand up and speak the truth, which is taking the society to worse. Queer cannot classify themselves with one sex. They can be both and neither as stated by A. Queer rejects the idea of a stable identity. According to them, the identity of a person can change with time. One does not necessarily become the person they are born in biologically. As such, the idea of a stable identity is just an illusion which is a misconception belief. Likewise, in the novel, A decides to defies the concept of the society by going beyond it. They do not identify themselves as a particular gender at any point of time. They identify themselves with all genders.

In the novel, A does not justify themselves or label their sexuality as homosexual, heterosexual, or to assign labels of any kinds to their romantic interests. They prefer not to label their sexuality because they do not see the need to adhere to any kinds of specific label when it comes to one's interests, particularly in one's intimate relationship. Love can happen at any time, with any person. Further, in the narration, it is also highlighted that A was in relationship with both male and female. There is no bias towards anyone. *Every Day* revolves around the love story between Rhiannon and A. But before that A also goes in relation with a guy named Brennan briefly although this is not the focal of the story. Here, A's flexibility towards relationship can be equated with the conception of queer in terms of fluidity. Queer people chose to be flexible when it comes to relationship. They treat everyone equally when it comes to one's sexual preferences despite the differences that comes along with it. Therefore, the queer people do not see the need to conform to the set heterosexual relationship, despite the fact that they will be given less importance and will

not be accepted easily by the society and people around. They go beyond what the society expects them to be. Hence, the novel makes it apparent that A defies the sexual constructs of society by deciding not to conform to heteronormativity. The main character A, portrays and live different kinds of life without any set boundaries. A led a life which is dreamt by many by not conforming to the likes of society; but a life worth living.

In the beginning of the story, A did not care about the life that they posit for a day. They had a memory of their own. They remember the things they want to and leave the things that are not important to them. They have the ability to access in the memory of the person that they are inhabiting for a day. As such, at first the story is portrayed in such a way, as to how it feels to live a life without boundary. However, as the plot progresses, A falls in love with Rhiannon, whom they met through Justin. Since then, the story goes beyond one's imagination. A fall in love deeply with Rhiannon. But at the same time, at point of time they also started to look at the society the way Rhiannon perceives it. They started to feel conscious about their looks and the shape of the body they inhabit. A says;

I feel guilty about how relieved I am to be a normal size the next morning. I feel guilty because I realize that while before I didn't care what other people thought, or how other people saw me, now I am conscious of it, now I am judging alongside Rhiannon's eyes, I guess this is making me more like everyone else, but I feel something is being lost, too. (Levithan, 276)

The above extracts from the text shows the immense influence that the society has on an individual. A is a person who does not abide by the norms of society. But after meeting Rhiannon, they started to look at the society in a different way. This is something which is prevalent in society. Our thoughts and feelings are driven towards the way our peer reacts. But the realization on the part of A is something which differentiates from the others. Hence, A is the representation of same sex desire- love without boundary, which is seen as a continuous conflict relating to the phenomena of gender problem which exist till date.

In the society, everyone wants to be belonged to. None wishes to be isolated from the society they live in. But in the process, when one becomes to obsess to prove one's worth, there the struggle comes. In wanting to be someone superior, one tires to overpowers the minority; trying to get the better out of them. This is something which A has come across in

life. When A was in the body of Roger Wilson, A voices out their opinion regarding one's religion by saying;

I have been to many religious services over the years. Each one I go to only reinforces my general impression that religions have much, much more in common than they like to admit. The beliefs are almost always the same; it's just that the histories are different. Everybody wants to believe in a higher power. Everybody wants to belong to something bigger than themselves, and everybody wants company in doing that. They want there to be a force of good on earth, and they want an incentive to be a part of that force. They want to be able to prove their belief and their belonging, through rituals and devotion. They want to touch the enormity. (Levithan, 77)

Every day delves deep into the issues of gender construction set by the society. A is a genderless and disembodied soul who represents the minority section of the society. They go through and experiences different lifestyles led by people. Some were happy and contended with their life. But at the same time some were trying not to live and witness another day. A is forced to occupy a different body each day, where they need to access and lead a completely different life each day. The only similarities are that they inhabit the body belonging to the same teenage age. By experiencing various lives, A discusses as to how the concept of binary gender set by society effects the life of an individual. A stay in the body just for a day, but the body of the individual will need to go through their life each day, given their situation. They do not have the freedom and ability to change their life. The set gender construction has shaped and mold the body directing towards the control of the society, which the individual is unable to accept but are bound to live along with it. In one or the other, individuals are forced to follow the social norms set by the society, and those that does not adhere to it, deals with the consequences of non-conformity. The representation of gender can be understood through the established power relations between men and women, the cultural construction of beauty, and also the mainstream perception of the LGBT community.

Levithan, through his character A, goes beyond the gender construct prevailing in the society by portraying non-conforming characters who transcends the stereotypical gender constructs. The perception of gender identity is still often equated with the biological sex of

a person, and transgender individuals are expected to modify all their previous gender identification indicators to the new biology that is to be adopted. However, such binary assumptions also fail to appreciate that all transgender individuals do not desire demarcation within the traditional male-female gender system. Similarly, when it comes to gender people, it is not possible to choose the gender that they want to live with. Therefore, they are neutral when it comes to gender. They give equal respect and freedom to all. Hence, like queer, *Every Day* does not conform to the ways of the society. It critiques the tight conceptualization of gender set by society through the protagonist A. The novel represents the gender queer character and shows that gender constructs can be empowering instead of stereotypical. The way of the society can change when an individual decides to change for better.

Deconstruction of Gender Construction in *Every Day*

From the very first chapter of *Every Day*, A refuses to imbibed to the imposed gender construction set by the society when they wake up in the body of Justin. From the very first moment, A comes to know that Justin is of the type who takes the superior role when it comes to his relationship with others. He portrayed those people in society who believes in the rule of patriarchy. But A as a gender non-conforming is against this rule where women have to act and live according to the control and rule set by the male in the society. As such, when A was in the body of Justin, they took good care of Rhiannon unlike, the controlling Justin. In this one day, A gave the privilege to Rhiannon to decide how their day will be spent. Instead of abusing her and letting her to be whom Justin wants her to be, A shows the more caring and better side of the society which Rhiannon has never experienced in her relationship with Justin. The better side of life and society is shown to Rhiannon in this day. When A meets Rhiannon, they noticed that she was down and was not happy. If it was Justin, he will not notice the look on Rhiannon's face. Instead, he will just go on about with what he has planned. But A notices this, and asked Rhiannon "are you okay?" Rhiannon could not hide the surprise on her face when she hears this because this is not something Justin would have asked in any given situation. The possibility is not near to anything. "I see the surprise on her face, even as she tries to cover it." (Levithan, 4)

The day that Rhiannon spent with A, it was completely different from her usual days. She is filled with mixed emotions, unable to express herself. When asked where she wanted to go, Rhiannon was unable to answer. "Every single answer starts with the phrase I don't know. But most of the time she does know." (Levithan, 12) Here, the reaction of Rhiannon, being unable to express her wants and thoughts shows the other side of society, where women were caught up in the male dominated society; unable to decide for themselves and ends up going for the decision made by man because they were not given the chance to express what they really want. Their opinions were belittled and ignored. In a male dominated society, women were compelled to live in the shadow of men, and going against it will lend up the woman in a position where her disobedience is compared to a serious crime which is committed by individuals. In the novel, Rhiannon knew that her life has been controlled by Justin, but she is not willing to accept the reality because she wanted to hide behind the shadow of Justin. Without Justin she felt that she will not be able to decide and survive in this male dominated society. This is the reason why she feels that she should not live Justin, but be with him and let him to decide her life.

In the society, for a woman to be recognized and respected is to follow the patriarchal norm where their husband's and the male child in the family decides everything. If they follow it accordingly, they are considered as someone who is worthy enough to be called a woman in the society. Therefore, to retain their position in the society; live in the society peacefully without any hindrances, they decide to go along with the flow, disregarding their own wishes, wants and desires. But here, in this novel, A decides to go against this patriarchal norm. They want to show the world, the ladies, that it is okay to be who you want to be. There is no one who is responsible for driving the wheel of life, except 'you yourself'. A unlike Justin, does not act aggressively towards Rhiannon. A says, "if I were really Justin, I would find something wrong with her. Right now. Tell her. Yell. Bring her down. Put her in her place. But I can't. I'm not Justin. Even if she doesn't know." (Levithan, 13) This line reveals the true intention of Levithan in writing the novel, *Every Day*.

A feels that there is no need for a man to feel superior over women in the society. Every individual is born with different talents and abilities. Every being should be respected and considered upon. Therefore, in the day spent with Rhiannon, none of them were superior or the submissive one. Thus, accordingly, they also can see how happy and joyful Rhiannon

was. She became a completely different person, expressing her feelings and thoughts freely. "She is so joyful, I can't help but stop for a second and watch. Witness. Tell myself to remember." (Levithan, 19) In the novel, A does not, and cannot come to submit and conform to the established social expectation that society has set for men. The reason why men cannot help themselves, but to take the superior role is because they do not want to let go of the power that they think is set for them;

Everybody wants to believe in a higher power. Everybody wants to belong to something bigger than themselves, and everybody wants company in doing that. They want there to be a force of good on earth, and they want an incentive to be a part of that force. They want to be able to prove their belief and their belonging, through rituals and devotion. They want to touch the enormity.... For whatever reason, we like to focus on 2 percent that's different, and most of the conflict in the world comes from that. (Levithan, 77)

A noticed the different attitude of Rhiannon when they possess different bodies. She is more comfortable and more outgoing when A inhabits the body of a male. But A's thoughts are different from that of Rhiannon. Therefore, A says that they "want her to be able to see behind this body, to see me inside here, to know that it's the same person she spent an afternoon with on the beach." (Levithan, 55) They do not want Rhiannon to differentiate her feelings according to how they look, behave, dressed, and how they are presented as. Although they look different each day, their feelings belonged to one person, the person who loves her unconditionally without any boundary. A says, "in my experience, desire is desire, love is love. I have never fallen in love with a gender." (Levithan, 142) They want her to accept them as they are and not someone whom they are not. When a person is truly in love, none of the things that the society says will matter. The only thing that will matter is the feeling of happiness and satisfaction that a person can have, while together with the person in love. "It's as if when you love someone, they become your reason." (Levithan, 68) A also says that many people take love very casually. They do not know the value that is there with them.

People take love's continuity for granted, just as they take their body's continuity for granted. They don't realize that the best thing about love is its

regular presence. Once you can establish that, it's an added foundation to your life. But if you cannot have that regular presence, you only have the one foundation to support you, always. (Levithan, 58)

A wants to show that love go beyond one's own thought and imagination by being a genderless person. But on the other hand, the life of A; continuous struggle to be accepted as they are, also showing the plight of the people who are unable to be accepted in the society because they decide to live a different life; life best suited for them. A's life has many ups and downs, although they know where they are going and what kind of life they are pursuing for. Everyone tends to become a different person when they come to know the real you. In the end, you are left all alone with no one by your side. The feelings that go through one's mind when one is betrayed is something which cannot be expressed and spoke. A says,

I wanted friends, a mom, a dad, a dog- but I couldn't hold on to any one of them more than a single day. It was brutal. There are nights I remember screaming and crying, begging my parents not to make me go to bed. They could never figure out what I was afraid of. They thought it was a monster under the bed, or a ploy to get a few more bedtime stories. I could never really explain, not in a way that made sense to them. I'd tell them I didn't want to say goodbye, and they'd assure me it wasn't a goodbye. It was just a good night. I'd tell them it was the same thing, but they thought I was being silly...Eventually I came to peace with it. I had to. I realized that this was my life, and there was nothing I could do about it. I couldn't fight the tide, so I decided to float along. (Levithan, 106)

In the novel, A also poses a challenge to the set standard beauty of a woman. The society expects a woman to take care of her face and body. Beauty is defined in the fitness and fairness of the body. And many women in the society suffers to reach up to the expected standard beauty set by the society. Little do they know about the harm that they are causing and are bringing upon themselves. Therefore, while in the body of Ashley Ashton, A was not willing to follow the standard beauty of Ashley. Ashley's life is defined by her attractiveness outwardly. A is sure that Ashley has suffered a lot in order to be in shaped like she is now. To be called a stunning beauty, it does not just come naturally. But lots of hard work and

perseverance are put into the process. She needed to go beyond the routine that are followed by others. Her beauty and attractiveness are her pride when she goes out in the society. But the fact is that, beauty is not the only thing that attracts the eye. The personality that come along with it is the thing that mattered the most. A want to tell the world and the ladies that one does not need to have a perfect body. But the thing that matters is whether the individual is living a contended life, besides the expectation of the society. A person cannot be successful unless that are happy and satisfied with the way they are living. But with someone like Ashley, she is allowing the society to define who she is. She is not living for herself, but is living for the society. Her life is controlled by the society and she is just moving towards it. Therefore, A decides to rebel against it, to show the readers that beauty and attractiveness is not the only thing that matters. A want to change this concept. As such A comes to the conclusion by declaring,

I don't want to have any part of it, though. With girls like Ashley, I just want to shake them, and tell them that no matter how hard they fight it, these teenage looks aren't going to last forever, and that there are much better foundations to build a life upon than how attractive you are. But there's no way for me to get that message across. My only course of rebellion is to leave her eyebrows unplucked for a day. (Levithan, 149)

But on another occasion, when A gets ready to go out, he says, "I don't really care, but I have to respect the fact that Ashley would care- probably very much. So, I go back and change, and even put on some makeup." (Levithan 150) This shows that no matter how hard an individual tries to change the way of the society, at one point or the other, they always go back to the way they were taught and brought up, as the fact is deeply ingrained within them. A is trying to change society's perception, but at the same time he is seen following the way society functions.

For a person to be fully equipped with life's happiness, one needs to learn how to disregard the society's opinion. A is against the rule set by society, therefore, they did not think anything when they decide to change the way Ashley looks for a day. When in restaurant together with Justin and Rhiannon, A says, "I dip my crab cakes in tartar sauce, and imagine Ashley yelling at me for doing so." (Levithan, 161) No matter how an individual strives for, no one can really reach perfection; gaining the respect and leaving the criticisms that flows.

The society is always there to judge and pull them down. Therefore; whether one is “very short or very tall, it must change your whole perspective on the world. If people see you differently, you’ll end up seeing them differently, too.” (Levithan, 150) Likewise, one should not let the society to take over one’s life, but should be given the space for the society to think differently and be accepted for who you are. All through their life, A did not let the society to stop them and control their life. Being a boy or a girl does not bother them. They know that they are different, and they decide to go along with it. A says, “I didn’t think of myself as a boy or a girl- I never have.” (Levithan, 155)

When A was in the body of Finn Taylor, the way that people around them reacts scares them. It makes them uncomfortable. This reaction also shows how much an individual is affected by the society they live. Although, they believe in themselves and the person they are, they could not help themselves but be insecure about it. Everywhere that Finn goes, people were looking at him with unbelievable reaction. “And there are looks I get- such undisguised disgust. Not just from other students. From teachers. From strangers. The judgement flows freely.... there’s also something more primal, something more defensive in their disgust. I am what they fear becoming”. (Levithan, 271) The people around him are fearing that they will become like him if they do not take care of themselves. They take him as an example. He is like a disease that people do not want to get across. This is the reality of today’s world. When one is different, he is not accepted. The only thing he gets is the judgement that flows freely.

The image of an ideal woman is always associated with thinness. In almost all the societies, those women who are fat are considered as ugly and not acceptable. There is a feeling of insecurities in the minds of the ladies who are not up to the standard size of the society. Similarly, for a man to be called a muscular, one must wake up early and exercise regularly and consistently. One morning A wakes up in the body of a girl named, Venessa. A knew the punishing routine that Venessa follow in order to keep herself fit. But A, being against it, decides not to follow the set routine of A. Venessa “runs at least two miles every morning, and I am already late for the routine. She has to make do with a single mile, and I can almost hear her chiding me for it.” (Levithan, 211) Given her concept of beauty, Venessa is quick to judge when she comes across someone who does not level up to her expectation. While in

the body of Venessa, A comes to know the nature of the body. Therefore; they also imagine what Venessa would say when she comes across dressings of certain people. A says,

Is that a backpack that Lauren has on? I guess she's acting like she's in third grade until her chest fills in. And oh my God, why is Felicity wearing those socks? Are those kittens? I thought only convicted child molesters were allowed to wear those. And Kendall's top? I don't think there's anything sadder than an unsexy trying to dress sexy. (Levithan, 211)

Judgement flows along freely. As such, when in the body of Venessa, A tries to control the minds by not allowing her to pass judgements freely like the other days. Here, A wants to change the importance of one's appearance when it comes to beauty of women. They want to change this concept, which is why they controlled the minds and appearance of Venessa, while they were inhabiting it. No one should be judged according to how they appear to be. But one should be focused in the inner beauty of an individual, which is the actual beauty of all beings. One of the most common stereotypes of gender on girls is their outward appearance. Therefore; A is all set to break this stereotype and mindset.

When one notices that an individual is different, everyone tries to discriminate and pull down the person. Likewise, in the novel, Nathan also tries to track down A and bring them before the public. He tried every possible way to let them to come out and confess what they have done. When Nathan keeps trying, A also knows what he has been going through. Therefore, they also tried to convince him by letting him to accept it and give up his search. But Nathan was not willing to give up. A tried every possible way to let him understand the fact that it was not a devil who possessed him. But it was a person, a genderless person. But in the end, to satisfy Nathan, A goes and meet him in his house, where Nathan brought a father, an exorcist to help A. But little did he know the harm he was doing to him. Therefore, when he sees A struggling, instead of running away from it, he came over and helped them to run away from the father. The act of Nathan also shows the kind of society we live. He did not know the harm he was doing, but he tried to harm A. But also, instead of being a coward, hiding away from reality, he helped A to run away from it and came out of his house. This is what Levithan wants from the society. Although, we have judged without realizing, now is the time to come out and be bold about the truth. One must not be a coward, but come forward and help each other be a better human being.

When in the body of Hamilton, A did not follow the set routine made by Hamilton. Even though A knew that they needed to work out according to the way Hamilton wants, they decide to ignore it and go against the routine of Hamilton. Part of the body of Hamilton wants to sleep and take enough rest. But part of it knows that he needed to head out for work out in order to have a masculine body fitted for a man. Hamilton also forces himself to eat more food in order to get the body and muscle that he wants. As such, although A does not want to consume any more food, the body forces them to consume more and more food. The body is forcing himself to eat more. Hamilton wants to acquire that desired muscular body, therefore, although it is against his wish, he is forcing himself to accept it. This is something which A is completely against. One does not need to suffer in order to fit in the society. But the only thing left to do is to be oneself and be happy with it. A state that being a male does not have anything to do with muscular. A also encourages Hamilton not to work too hard and harm himself but to be careful of what he wants. A is against this idea which is believed by Hamilton and his brother. This shows that A does not agree to the fact that masculine is associated with a perfect masculine body.

A also challenges the gender construction in the novel when they were in the body of Marc. When they were inhabiting Marcs' body, they come to know that Marc's grandfather has passed away. While in funeral, A cried openly which is considered as being feminine by the society. But they did not care to hide their feelings and openly expressed their emotions. Traditionally, men are expected to be tough and strong, show their braveness when it comes to one's emotion, because crying is considered as a womanly behavior. Despite the fact, A is successful in coming out as a genderless person, openly challenging the domain of gender construct of the society, that science belongs to men and literature are meant to be studied by women. In the novel, A is trying to bring out the fact that all these gender norms are brought to society by the people living in it; it can be created but at the same time with collective effort it can also be deconstructed.

Self-Acceptance

Self-acceptance is the key to every problem. When one is unable to accept oneself, one will never be able to come out victoriously in life. Life has many ups and down. There will be joy, and there will be sorrows. But every situation and experiences come with a lesson. For a

person to be happy and contented, it depends on the self as to how they decide to control the situation. According to Shepard (1979), "self-acceptance is an individual's satisfaction or happiness with oneself and it thought to be necessary for good mental health." Self-acceptance includes self-comprehension, a realistic understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of one. It results in the sensation of an individual about himself, that he is of "unique worth." Many individuals in the society are suffering because they are unable to accept themselves for who they are. They want to live a life which is not suited for them. Appreciation is out of their sight. Each day they spent away their life, trying to be someone else. Therefore, in *Every Day*, Levithan also tries to bring out the importance of self-acceptance through his protagonist A. In the novel, A is willing to accept themselves, be who they are; show their real self to others without being guilty about it. The ability to show their true self is worth the praise in the novel. According to Ramadhani and Munfangati, "having a good ability in self-acceptance in daily will automatically increase the quality of individual's life... Here A can be a good example for the rest of the people."

In the novel, as soon as A wakes up, they knew that they were in different body. Although this is something which cannot be understand by human mind, A does not try to resist and create a situation. They accept the body they are to inhabit each day. They always go along with the flow and does whatever the routine the body has set to do for a day. They do not try to create a person out of the body. But they take time to analyze and understand the body of the individual. The routine of A is set when they wake up in the morning. "Immediately I have to figure out who I am. It's not just the body- opening my eyes and discovering whether the skin on my arm is light or dark, whether my hair is long or short, whether I'm fat or thin, boy or girl, scarred or smooth...Every day I am someone else. I am myself-I know I am myself- but I am also someone else." (Levithan, 1)

Every morning means different life for A. Each day is a new experience. Every day A will live the same life but follow different routine each day for which they need to adapt themselves with. Although, A also longs for a home, a family, and friends that can be with them every time, they knew that it is impossible and they go along with it, not wanting anything that they cannot have in their lifetime. They live their life as though there is not tomorrow. Therefore, they don't understand why people always talk about tomorrow and look forward to new day which they are not really sure whether they will wake the next day. "It's hard

being in the body of someone you don't like, because you still have to respect it. I've harmed people's lives in the past, and I've found that every time I slip up, it haunts me. So, I try to be careful." (Levithan, 2)

Waking up every morning in different body means a day and life filled with unpredictable. Every individual is different. Therefore; it is impossible for a person to experience and appreciate each behavior and personality. Every day A has to force themselves to adapt to the behavior even though they knew that it is not fitted for them. They accept the things that are set before them instead of trying to run away from it. A has gone through a lot in life. At times they lend up in body and faces chores and routine which they have done it over the course of time, but at times they are also compelled to learn and experience new things which they have not come across. The quotation below will describe their life filled with new experiences;

I know how to play most sports, but I've also learned my limits. I found this out the hard way when I was eleven. I woke up in the body of some kid who was in the middle of a ski trip. I thought that, hey, skiing had always looked fun. So, figured I'd try. Learn it as I went. How hard could it be? (Levithan, 49)

The above lines shows that A is not familiar with skiing, but situation has compelled them to go along with the routine that is set. Being Skylark for a day has compelled A to learn the art of skiing. A also knew that skiing will put Skylark's and their life at risk as they do not have any experience upon it. A also blames themselves when they have brought harm upon the body that they had inhabited for a day. As for them, they will be in different body the next day. But the person that they have left will be in pain, and in state of confusion because of the things that has happened the other day. A blame themselves by saying, "instead of the pain, I felt something just as bad-fierce, living weight of terrifying guilt. Just as I'd rammed him with a car, I was consumed by the knowledge that a stranger was lying in the hospital because of me." (Levithan, 49) A knew the harm that they are doing to the person's body when they come across things that they are not familiarize with. Therefore, they also try to be careful when it comes to certain situation which they feel will hurt and harm the body. They do not want to make any more mistakes which will make them to feel terrify and guilty about it. "So I'm careful. Soccer, baseball, field hockey, football, softball, basketball,

swimming, track-all of those are fine. But an equestrian, and once, recently a gymnast. I've sat all those out." (Levithan, 49)

Self-evaluation helps a person to understand their weakness as well as their own potentialities. It helps individuals to look and see within themselves, and go for things, for which they are meant to be and existed for it. It depends on how an individual decides to deal with it in any given circumstances. Knowing and understanding one's limit will help a person to avoid various circumstances which will cause harm to oneself and also the other people around us. This is shown clearly by A, when they were in the body of Skylark. They have made mistake, but they also realize that they should not go beyond their limit, thus, ending up hurting a person and felt guilty about it the whole time. Self-realization and knowing one's worth will help an individual to lead a meaningful life.

A enjoy and cherish every moment that life has to offer. They have a memory of their own, where they feel and accept themselves. They also let go of the things which hinders their tomorrow. If they hold on to the past, they knew that they will live a life filled with regrets. Therefore, they let go of things which will not help them in their memory. They accept their life as it is. They stopped searching beyond their boundary and accept their fate. "Eventually, I came peace with it. I had to. I realized this was my life, there was nothing I could do about it. I couldn't fight the tide. So I decided to float along." (Levithan, 107) A enjoys the moment that has been set before them. They did not try to venture into things that are not meant to be. This leads them to be more acceptable towards their life.

A focus on things that are there with him at the moment. They wanted to make a connection with Rhiannon. Therefore, after logging into the account of Justin, they came to know that there was going to be a party, where they are sure that Rhiannon will be there with Justin. Hence, they also decide to be there and enjoy their moment with Rhiannon. The connection that A made with Rhiannon, in the body of Nathan has helped them to feel more alive and loved. A is trying to connect with the reality without having to worry about tomorrow or the future to come. When an individual realizes their own value and decides to make the best use of the time provided, they feel that they are the one who drives their life, be it going to the right direction or driving towards the worse. The wheel is for them to turn on. "I have imagined my mind as something physical, something that can control the body. I

have to picture my mind holding the body down. I read another sentence. Then another.” (Levithan, 63)

When A tries to explain their situation to Rhiannon at the first place, it was hard for Rhiannon to understand it. This is a known fact for all. But A did not give up just then. Instead, they tried every possible way to make her understand the situation that they are in. A wants Rhiannon to love them as they are and not the person that they inhabit each day. A wants Rhiannon to love them just as they are, without being worried about the person they are, or the gender that they belonged to. A says, “Because I think you are remarkable. Because I don’t want to keep meeting you as different people. I want to meet you as myself.” (Levithan, 94)

A does not think about moments which cannot turn their situation. Instead, they are grateful with the present that is set before them. Their efforts in making Rhiannon understands their situation is applaudable. Their realization has brought immense joy to their life. In the end, they knew that they cannot be with Rhiannon given their situation. They clearly know who they are. Therefore; when they come across Alexander Lin, they decide to let go of Rhiannon. They see themselves in the life of Alexander. They realize that they wanted a life exactly like Alexander. They also realize that Alexander is the perfect guy for Rhiannon. Therefore, A says, “I don’t want to do this. But I have to do this.” (Levithan, 318) A enjoyed the moment with Rhiannon, but also, they are being realistic to their situation. Their realization has given a better and happier life to Rhiannon. Although, they were down, they were also happy with their decision, because they knew that this was the best for them as well as Rhiannon.

Levithan also brings out the effect of mental illness that the society and people around take it for granted. “Some people think mental illness is a matter of mood, a matter of personality. They think depression is simply a form of being sad, OCD is a form of being uptight. They think the soul is sick, not the body. It is, they believe, something that you have some choice over. I know how wrong this is.” (Levithan, 119) When one does not realize the effect that is costing to one’s life, it destroys the person. Many people take depression for granted. A knew exactly what needed to be done and the purpose of their life in the body they inhabit. Therefore, when they found a girl trying to end her life, longing for death, they also tried their best and helped out the girl. This happens when one does not know the

worth of one's life. There are many who are wishing to have a day added to their life. But there are people on the other hand who does not know the value of that one hour and day added in life. When one realizes and accepts one's life, it is worth living.

At one point of time, everyone will be there at their lowest point of time. Every individual is meant to go through good and bad times. But the situation will turn according to how the individual will decides. Likewise, A was at that point of time where there is no turning. They are living a peculiar life which cannot be understood by any normal beings. But they did not give up on life. Their realization that things will not get any better with their life has led them to accept themselves for who they are. Upon accepting their fate, finally inner peace and healing comes along. The level of happiness that one enjoys upon accepting self is immense. Therefore, in every situation one should be ready to accept and go along with the set routine set before us, turning the worse to better, and bad to good. In doing so, the society will also turn to better, accepting the differences and peculiarities of individuals.

Hence, to conclude, the definition of gender when it comes to one's sexual desires and the way they want to act and behaved should be reconsidered. There is freedom to choose whom we want to be and no one should try to bury that. Individuals should be allowed to live a life without boundary. When the mentality of all changed, then the life of the minority will be improved. There will be no discriminations faced by people, especially those who are against the gender norm set in the society. Discriminations should not be practiced and among the people based on one's gender preference. The novel also brings out the clear concept, the difference between sex and gender by bringing in its characters, Rhiannon and A. Their love is beyond boundary. A does not belong to any gender. Knowing the fact, Rhiannon decides to love A as they are without any limits. Although at first, she was confused and in dilemma with her encounter, with time she understands and decides to go with what her feelings is. Furthermore, the novel also shows how people are judged in the society based on their gender. The judgement and discrimination that one faced in heterosexual world is beyond limit.

The difference between gender and sex is vividly portrayed by A, declaring that desire is desire, love is love, and it does not have anything to do with one's gender. It solely depends on the person's feelings. *Every Day*, when seen on the surface is a novel which is alienated from the present society, we live in. It is impossible for a person to live without a body of its

own. This happened only in fantasy and one's imagination. But on the other hand, when we go to its depth, it is a way of critique against the society, who are too into their own fantasy, not allowing themselves to face the reality. Gender construct has been imposed on the people, disregarding the feeling of the minority. The novel shows that one should not bring gender in the front when it comes to love. The ambiguity still remains and one should not be judged over it. David Levithan in this novel, through his protagonists A, brings out the struggles of individuals in the society as a whole, particularly, life of the LGBTs. The entire plot of the novel revolves around the struggles of the youth. Each individual is different from each other. In this present scenario, many youths are losing their interest in life because of all the ups and downs that they go through each day. At times, the pressure of the society and parents set on them, to become someone productive in the society, to be a respectable person, especially to follow the religion which is believed by the parents also led the individual to become astray in life. The constant inner conflict, their wishes and their parents wish and expectations of them destroy their life. They start to live a pretentious life, which kills them slowly.

As seen in the novel, the social constructs are so powerful that it can influence the person who is least concerned about the way they look or dressed as. A does not agree with the mainstream when it comes to one's gender. But the next moment, A also finds themselves being relieved that they are not in the body of an oversized individual. This shows how much an individual can be impacted by the society they live in. No matter how much a person is strong and bold in their determination, they also need to be surrounded with someone whom they can identify themselves with, one who shares the same thought. But if they are put up with people who contrast to their personality, it will hinder their determination. This happened with A when they were in the body of Finn. Their judgement upon a person also compels them to question their own standpoint in the situation that they are put up with. Hence, as seen, even a gender non-conforming individual like A are influenced with the society around. Therefore; it is not based on an individual solely when it comes to changing society, but collective efforts are called upon.

Every Day delves deep into the issues of gender construction, how it is imposed on individuals, but at the same time with the protagonist A, coming out from the thorns, deconstructing the gender construct set in the society by being a genderless person, moving

from one body to the other body each day. A is bound to be genderless since the time they were born. Therefore; they also raise the question as to why there should be a gender boundary when it comes to relationship and falling in love. One should not be hidden by the society. But be willing to come out and show the people who they are and expressed their feelings out loud before the society. Only then, they will be considered and accepted by the society. Hence, the novel also presents both side of the coin- gender construction set by the society, and also challenging the socially constructed norms which an individual needs to be conformed to in one's lifetime. The novel also comes to the conclusion that, only when an individual is bold enough to accept oneself, then the society also will follow and come along with it. Nonetheless, its main concept, as to why there should be mainstream conceptualizations of gender and bodies is critiqued and question upon.

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CHAPTER - III

EVIDENCE ON NORM CHANGE IN *TWO BOYS KISSING*

Two Boys Kissing

LGBT is a sensitive issue which is seen in today's world. Many writers write about LGBTs but are unable to bring out the image vividly before their audience. There are many books about LGBTs which cannot be understood by simple reading. One can only understand the depth of the story through deep understanding and research. When we look into the olden texts, we find many themes related to the gays and lesbians. But the intention of the reader is hidden. Their feelings and thoughts are put behind bars, thus, they surface around the belief of the society- that for one to be considered a normal individual when it comes to one's sexual identity, they should be a part of the heterosexual society. According to Butler in her book *Undoing Gender (2004)*, she maintains that norms are necessary yet must be exceeded in the name of the future of the human.

Contrary to the other writers, David Levithan is a genuine writer who portrays the life and image of the LGBTs vividly without hitting around the bushes. His novel *Two Boys Kissing* is one such novel which brings to light the feeling and trauma of the gays and lesbians living among people who still have mixed feelings about individuals who comes out as homosexuals. Unlike other settings, the setting of the novel is more different than that of the others. The intimate feeling that one has toward the other is vividly shown and portrayed. Different characters are brought together to show the way of the society, the past as well as the present; how the present society or the world of in the novel has become more tolerant towards the LGBTs.

In the novel, David Levithan was not the main narrator. Instead, he has employed the chorus who belonged to the generation where there was no dream about gays and lesbians who comes out openly about their sexual identity. The novel opens with, "You can't know what it is like for us now- you will always be one step behind. Be thankful for that. You can't know what it was like for us then- you will always be one step behind. Be thankful for that too.... We were once like you, only our world wasn't like yours". (Levithan, 1) The given quote from the text has clearly portrayed the two worlds that the readers will be exploring while

reading the text. Through the opening of the text, Levithan has made his purpose clear- that the present world has become a better place for the LGBTs unlike the older generation. The unknown speakers are expressing the cruel world that they lived in. Hence, they are glad and relief about the condition that the present generation are living in.

The plot of the novel revolves around the two main protagonists Craig and Harry, who were attempting to have the longest kiss in history- 32 hours, 12 minutes and 10 seconds. But their attempt is seen differently and caught the attention of many because the kiss was not between a male and female. But it was between two male individuals. The kiss was witnessed by many but people with different opinion and views towards the act. There are people who sympathize with them, but on the other hand, there are also other group of people who curse their act and disregard their act as evil and a bad influence to the youths and their children. Besides, the protagonist, there are also other characters who portrays the other side of life, living as homosexuals. The narration constantly shifts from one scene to the other, from past to present. It shifts back and forth which brings out the clear concept about the society, especially the change that took place in present, when comparing to that of the past.

Many of the protagonist in the novel are privileged enough to have supporting friends and parents. There are teachers who accepts them and appreciate their sexual preference as they are. In many cases they are not discriminated because of their sexual preference, although, there are circumstances in the novel which shows the trauma of being a homosexual. Cooper, is a character who feels the loneliest in the novel. His parents are unable to accept and understand the fact that he is a gay. He was out of their house, with no one to turn to. His character also shows that one should not be caught up in one's own world but should be open to conversation, thus, socialize with the people around us. Cooper was unable to put up with his situation because he closed doors to all care and communication that he is likely to get from his parents and people around, which led him to the point of committing suicide as the story progresses. But, as mentioned earlier, the trauma and suffering, although is present is not the main focus of the novel. The basis is put on the changing society, from the present to that of the past.

The novel also tells us that it is impossible to live in a world where there will be no discrimination or humiliation. At one point of time there will always be someone who is

ready to degrade you and look down on you no matter who you are. There will always be people who will judge you and be against you. Likewise, there will also be someone who is always there to support you in every circumstance. As such, it depends on the decision taken by the individual when faced with contradictions. This situation is presented by Ryan in the novel. Although he has supportive friends and aunt, there is Skylark, who finds every opportunity to degrade him and suppress him for who he is.

Walt Whitman is also constantly mentioned in the novel. His poem is read and used in the novel by the characters as an encourager and strength. When Craig and Harry are set to hold their challenge, the longest kiss, Tariq also reads out the poem of Walt Whitman in support of their act. Later on, during the kiss, "Tariq consciousness is warping under sleeplessness. He starts murmuring Walt Whitman to keep himself going, to keep his thoughts in sequence." (Levithan, 207) The poem goes:

*We two boys together clinging,
One the other never leaving,
Up and down the roads going, North and South excursions making,
Power enjoying, elbows stretching, fingers clutching,
Arm'd and fearless, eating, drinking, sleeping, loving,
No law less than ourselves owning, sailing, soldiering, thieving, threatening,
Misers, menials, priests alarming, air breathing, water drinking,
on the turf or the sea-beach dancing,
Cities wrenching, ease scorning, statutes mocking,
feebleness chasing,
Fulfilling our foray.* (Levithan, 51)

The poem of Walt Whitman mentioned above serve as a major role in the novel. It brings to light the voice of the past. The dream and imagination of the homosexuals in the past. The poem read out before the kiss by Tariq shows that the act of the longest kiss, carried out by Craig and Harry is a lifelong dream of many, especially in the past.

Two Boys Kissing is an eye opener for many because although many knows the existence of LGBT society, many are unaware of their presence, thus, suppresses them in many ways. As such, the views and comments that the people pass in the novel is very much related with the present society. Many individuals are quick to judgement when it comes to homosexuals. They treat it as a disease or something that they have picked up on the way, trying to act like a different person. But the solution to this statement is made very clear in the novel- "the idea that all people are, in fact, born equal, no matter who they kiss or screw, no matter what dreams they have or love they give." (Levithan, 235)

Furthermore, the plot of the novel also reveals that a lot of things has come to past. The present society has become more tolerant and open towards the fast-changing world. As such, one can also expect the best in the future. Although, one does not declare their support towards the homosexuals, there are room in their heart which accepts them and supports them in the society.

The Kiss

The plot of the novel *Two Boys Kissing* revolves around the two main characters, namely, Craig and Harry. Both Craig and Harry are gays. Harry has supportive parents. His parents knew the fact that he is gay. But Craig parents on the other hand, does not know the fact that their son was gay. They come to know about it only when the they attempt the longest kiss in their school campus. Harry and Craig were in a relationship before the story begins. But in the process, they broke up and remains as friends throughout.

The 'Kiss' in the novel serves as an important asset when it comes to changing norm of society, from present to that of the past. Everyone at school were aware of the fact that there are gays in and around the school. There are teachers who supports the students without being discriminated. The atmosphere in the school from the beginning has proven the fact that the present society has become way more tolerant towards the LGBTs. In the novel, it was okay for two boys to be intimately attracted to each other and never need to be ashamed about their sexual identity. They were surrounded with friends, teachers and family who sympathize with them and not isolate them.

When the novel opens, the Greek Chorus reveals, "when we see you, we cannot help but think of ourselves. We were once the ones who were dreaming and loving and screwing. We

were once the ones who were living, and we were the ones who were dying. We sewed ourselves, a thread's width, into your history. We were once like you, only our world wasn't like yours". (Levithan, 1) The chorus made it clear before the story proceeds that the world the readers are going to explore in the novel is different from that of their time. All of them had the same feelings and dreams, but the time that they lived contradicts with the present. "You can't know what it was like for us then- you will always be one step ahead." (Levithan, 1)

In the novel, the homosexuals want to be accepted and be liberated from the norm set by the society. As the chorus watches the younger generation, paving their way out to the society, they appreciate them and encourage them to be brave with their action before it is too late for them. They said, "just when we were feeling strength, it was taken from us. This should not happen to you." (Levithan, 5) Likewise, Craig and Harry decide to be brave enough to come out to the society and show the people as to who they are. They knew that they were going to face ample criticisms, but they also know that there are people who genuinely respects and supports them regardless of who they are and how the society judge them.

Craig parents were not aware about him being a gay, and he knew that there will be a fit when they find out about it. But despite that, he decides to go ahead with the kiss. It was his idea because he couldn't hold himself back when he saw his friend being bullied by the drunkards in street. When Craig approach Harry with his plan, Harry agreed. When one is bullied, all the characters become a victim because they knew that this will happen to them one or the other day. Therefore; they feel the same pain and share the same burden. They are one who is longing for the world to recognize their kind and pain that they go through each day. "Our happiness had defiance, and our happiness had fear. Sometimes there was anonymity, and sometimes you were surrounded by friends and friends of friends. Either way, you were connected. By your desires. By your defiance. By the simple, complicated fact of who you were." (Levithan, 7)

Craig and Harry have been preparing and planning for their big kiss for months. Their purpose of the kiss is to let the world know that it is okay for two boys to be kissing with each other. It is more than normal and people should stop judging and discriminating them. In order for the people to witness the event, Craig and Harry decides to have the longest

kiss in their school campus where every passerby can see. When they approached their school authority, the authority allowed them to hold the event. Hence, preparation starts. Before the kiss, Harry and Craig went over with all their needs because once it starts, they cannot let go of each other no matter what the situation may be. They should be intact with each other. Their friends are also there with them preparing to broadcast the event live for every person to witness around the world. There are also their teachers who are willing to be with them and supports them during their kiss. And there, the attempt for longest kiss, thirty-two hour, twelve minutes, and ten-seconds starts. "Months of preparation, Weeks of practice, and years of living have led up to this moment." (Levithan, 55)

The chorus narrates that for two boys to be kissing in public is an unseen dream. Some of them never make it in their life. All their life has been filled with thoughts of how they can flee the world, their society and live a life they want to be. But there was no place for them to be who they are. Even the thought of a private kiss, a secret kiss is something that they should not put forward in their life. They knew the power of kiss, the connection that it brings, but they never got to witness it until Craig and Harry. But now the possibility has been put forth before them. According to them, kiss is more powerful than sex between two individuals. Seeing the preparation and the kiss between Craig and Harry taking place in public, they knew that the world is opening up for them. "Every time two boys kiss, it opens up the world a little bit more. Your world. The world we left. The world we left you. This is the power of a kiss: It does not have the power to kill you. But it has the power to bring you to life." (Levithan, 75)

With time, there are crowds forming to look at the two boys kissing publicly. Some wonders as to what is happening at school. They find it strange and unacceptable. Some were disgusted by their act. Some adults said, "Do their parents know? ... How could they let something like this happen?" Different questions and opinions were thrown from all angles. But the difference is that Harry's parents were right there with them. They were supporting them and defending them from the criticisms. Mrs. Ramirez also comes forward boldly and answers to the people saying, "His parents are right here." (Levithan, 85)

There are also parents who brings up their son to witness the event in order for them to know the fact that for some to be a parent, it does not necessarily need to be a man and

woman. Both parents can either be a male or a female. There is no difference in between the two. But the decision rest upon the individual. This is a fact that they wanted to ingrain in the minds of their children. This way they will not be confused about the judgement passed by the society based on one's sexuality.

Among the crowd, there is Max with his dad. From early childhood, Max comes to know that he was gay with the help of his parents. He did not have the need to hide behind the closet because of his supportive parents. He was appreciated and taught to be bold for who he is since childhood. The behavior of Max has marveled everyone in the novel because he did not look at Craig and Harry as strange. He looks at the kiss as something which is normal and which can be done and seen by just anybody. He did not throw any judgement unlike the others. His upbringing was that, "it didn't have to be a mom and a dad. It could be a mom, a dad and a dad, just a mom, or just a dad." (Levithan, 85) His definition was very clear. Max did not find anything peculiar about the kiss, the fact that two boys is kissing, and not one boy and one girl kissing. "But it's not the two boys part that gives him pause. It's the kissing. He can't imagine ever wanting to kiss anyone for that long." (Levithan, 86) This is the kind of upbringing that every homosexual wants to be seen in the society. Max's parents have clearly shown the world that the world is changing and needs to be changed. And this can be done only when the child is made aware about it from early days.

The kiss between Craig and Harry is broadcast live. Many are starting to tune in and witness the event. There are also many gays who were supporting them. Supporting them not to give up and become a laughing stock of society. But to succeed for the betterment of all. They do not have the courage to come out and support them openly. But deep inside their heart, they know that time is nearing for them to finally be who they want to be without the sneering and jeering from the people. Their act has given them hope and strength to live on.

As time passes, Craig and Harry become more and more tired. Their feet are becoming as numb as ever. Although they are trying their best to stay focused, they feel that they are burning away, losing themselves. In the midst of all this, there comes a small woman in the scene. Just some minutes ago, she thought that her son was out on a camping trip. But now, she sees her son in the arms of other men, kissing in front of the people in public. When she called out Craig's name, he couldn't answer and respond to her because he has started it, and it cannot be stopped. She was left in dilemma. She doesn't understand why her son is

not answering her and going ahead with the kiss when she is just right there in front of him, waiting for his response. She did not know that her son was gay until this moment. And more than her son been a gay, she couldn't bring herself to accept the fact that she should be finding out about her son in this way. Craig's saw the disappointment and confusion in the face of his mother. He wants to tell his mother that this is how he is. But he couldn't. Seeing this, Tariq brought up a paper for him. He quickly writes, *"I'M GAY MOM, I'M GAY...I CAN'T STOP NOW. I'M SORRY."* (Levithan, 100) Despite all this, his mother was there for her. But she turns to walk back home and declares it to her family. At this, Tariq was in tears and blaming himself because it was him that has brought this situation to Craig. At this, the Chorus says;

Some of our parents were always on our side. Some of our parents chose to banish us rather than see us for who we were. And some of our parents, when they found out we were sick, stopped being dragons and dragonslayers instead. Sometimes that's what it takes- the final battle. But it should take much, much less than that. (Levithan, 102)

As the kiss continue, Craig and Harry became exhausted and every person who were around them can see that. Some were wondering why they are torturing themselves in public when they are not going to get anything out of it. Their act seems stupid and baseless for some people. But they didn't give up. Instead, they encourage each other to be strong and not give up. As time passes, the crowd become more and more. And people who are watching live become more and more. People all over are talking about the two boys kissing. When Tariq scrolls through the comments he finds that there are a lot of "encouragement and more than a few haters." (Levithan, 151)

The people around them wants to talk to them and interview them as to why they are torturing themselves by going through this kiss. But there are friends and police around who are protecting them by not allowing others to peek in near them. Many starts to support and stood up by them. But at the same time there are also few who thinks that their kiss should be stopped. They think that this is an act of criminal which should be shown publicly. They did not like the fact that the authority was allowing such event to be taking place in the campus. As Harry and Craig couldn't speak for themselves, there is Harry's father, Smita, Mr. Bellamy, Tom, who were speaking to the people on behalf of them. "Harry's father who

steps up and explain their aims. It is Smita who prepares the sound bites of support. It is Mr. Bellamy-Tom-who may be risking his job to say that he is a teacher at this school and that he supports the boys one hundred person. He doesn't identify himself as gay, but he doesn't try to hide it, either." (Levithan, 154) Their support and encouragement led Harry and Craig to be braver and keep on with their goal. Among the people who were watching, there are some people who were commenting;

"This is what the gays do- they stop at nothing to be in our faces with their disgusting habits and then act like they're the ones being treated badly. I don't want to look at that, and I don't want my kids to have to look at that."

"I don't understand why they're not being arrested. Why aren't the police arresting them? It's a public place."

"Well, they should be ashamed of themselves and start doing their job."

"They should just get a room! Next Caller!" (Levithan, 155)

The day starts to get warmer and warmer. It was becoming harder for the two boys who were kissing. Harry starts to signal for his friend to remove his hoody as the heat was becoming unbearable. He starts sweating profusely. Craig also can feel and see the sweat of Harry. Although they kick their legs back and front, it was becoming unbearable for them. "The ache is becoming unbearable, like someone is twisting each and every vein around each and every muscle. He tries to think of other things, but pain is the loudest broadcast." (Levithan, 169) Despite the pain, under the heat, Harry can see the smile on Craig's face when the people began their count down. There were enormous cheers and wave from people around because of their determination.

Harry starts to cry because it was too much for him to handle. He wanted to challenge himself and stay strong because he does not want to disappoint Craig who believed in him. Therefore, he was holding on with the hope that their act will let the homosexuals to live a better liberated life, away from the rules of society. He was trying not to cry but instead finds himself crying nonetheless. He lost control of himself and everything. The feeling that they still need to hold on for another five hours has taken his soul away from him. But he

was trying to be awake, holding on. His body is shouting for him to *surrender* and his mind is telling him that he cannot last for another minute but he was still holding on.

With time nearing to the set goal, the reaction from the crowd becomes different. The people who were criticizing them starts to cheer and root for them. They can see how much the two were suffering. They start to appreciate and hope that they will not give up after all the struggles but will be able to reach the set time successfully. Tariq, who was there all alone, doing his part was in pain because he can see how much his friends were suffering in order to bring justice upon him and all of them. But he also hopes for them to hold on till the end because he does not want the people to talk about how amazing they were, but at the same time disregard them and call them a failure.

Despite the suffering and shame that they went through, Craig and Harry were able to finish the goal set, the longest kiss, thirty-two hour, twelve minutes and 10 seconds. They have set a world record which amuses many, at the same time changing the mindset of the society at large. They wish that the story will spread around and it will make the people to become more open and tolerant when they see two boys kissing. The act of Harry and Craig will help the people to think more positively, and “that all people are, in fact, born equal, no matter who they kiss or screw, no matter what dreams they have or love they give”.

The Greek Chorus

In *Two Boys Kissing*, the chorus plays a major role. According to Britannica, “the Chorus in Classical Greek drama was a group of actors who described and commented upon the main action of a play with song, dance, and recitation.” The chorus played as an important connection between the past and the present. They are people who are no more in this physical world. But there are watching and applauding the more tolerant world. They are looking at the world which they don’t even dare to dream of when they were alive. Their narration shifts from one scene to the other, from present to the past where their life is filled with misery. The chorus also acts as a guide and comforter for the youths who are confused about their life, been treated as a different being in their own home and society where they belonged to. In the novel, the chorus introduced themselves as;

If you are a teenager now, it is unlikely that you knew us well. We are your shadow uncles, your angel godfathers, your mother’s or your grandmother’s

best friend from college, the author of that book you found in the gay section of the library. We are characters in a Tony Kushner play, or names on a quilt that rarely gets taken out anymore. We are the ghosts of the remaining older generation. You know some of our songs... (Levithan,3)

Through the narration, the condition of the past is brought to life. During their time, they were able to survive in the society because they did not come out public with their feelings. Their feelings were hidden within themselves. They were suppressed by the society. The society treats them as a kind of evil disease which should not be encountered or even talk of. The thought of holding hands and kissing in public is something which they cannot even imagine or dream off. That is an impossible and unseen dream. But in today's world things have turned. "When we were in high school, hair existed on the bland spectrum of black/brown/orange/blonde/gray/white. But tonight, in kindling we have Ryan walking into the community center with his hair dyed a robin's-egg blue. Ten minutes later, Avery walks in with his hair the color of a Mary Kay Cadillac." (Levithan, 9)

The Greek Chorus expresses their concern about the individuals who are unable to make the right choices for themselves while in dilemma, thus, living in fear. They should live the way they want although it is sure that hurdles will come along the way. They have lived and they have died. Some of them have decided to live their life among the bushes, been who they are. Whereas, almost all of them decides to live a hidden life filled with regrets over the time that they have lost and died. Like many of the confused gays, they also went through a phase of confusion when they come to know about their sexual identity. They feel lost as there was no one to guide them and protect them. But that is not the case with the present generation. Therefore, they say, "we know that some of you are still scared. We know that some of you are still silent. Just because its better now doesn't mean that it's always good. We wish we could offer you a creation myth, an exact reason why you are the way you are, ..." (Levithan, 6) They have lived and they have passed. They do not want the present generation to live the way they have lived. Therefore; they wish to share their experience and make things right for them. But they are unable to talk to them because they have passed. The only thing they can do is to watch over them with pity and fear.

The society that the chorus has lived has regarded homosexual as something that they don't even want to dream of. Their thinking is different from that of the present. The only choice

that they are given is to live a life behind their real identity. At the present they are watching over the kiss that is taking place between two males. But the thought of doing this in their days is not something that one should even dream of. Their life is totally controlled and taken by the society. They are unable to express their grief because they need to be a part of society in order to be regarded as a person; following the set norms set by the society. The people during this time are not tolerant towards homosexuals. They live with the belief that the relation between people of opposite sex can only be accepted and acknowledged. Their life is filled with distressed because they are living as someone's shadow; they are not them, and their life is not theirs. They are controlled. But contrary to that, they are relieved to watch the world changed, the present world that they are witnessing in the novel. They said that the present generation are living in the world where they have dreamt off when they were still alive and breathing. This world is a world where they have created in their dreams- finally achieved.

The world that the chorus lived in has passed and the world that they are watching is their dream. The present generation are living a life which they have been dreaming during their lifetime, which is not achieved. Therefore; they declared, "We no longer sleep, and because we no longer sleep, we no longer dream. Instead, we watch. We don't want to miss a thing. You have become our dream." (Levithan, 24) These lines show how the world have changed. They are happy to see their dream being slowly achieved and the privilege enjoyed by the present homosexuals. It is a known fact that discrimination based on one's sexual identity will not be dissolved easily. But on the other side, it is always brighter and the dreams kept in hold will be achieved with time.

The feelings and thoughts of the people in the novel was brought in to the scene by the chorus. Without the chorus, the feelings of the characters will be unseen and untouched. Through them, the struggles, anxieties and confusion that the gays go through are brought before the readers. With this, Levithan has employed the chorus in order for them to show that even the homosexuals longs for the society to treat them as any normal human beings. They are breathing and living the same life as any straight and normal bring. They do not want to be ostracized, but want to feel belonged to. They do not want to be overseen by the society. They longed for that day where they can openly share their feelings and express their love for each other. It's not by their choice that they are the way they are put at. But

they are born that way and the society should not curse them and regard them as evil but they should be embraced and love. All these thoughts and feelings of the homosexuals are brought before the scene through the chorus.

The chorus also expressed their gratitude and love for their parents, especially their mother. They said, "We miss our mothers. We understand them so much more now." (Levithan, 25) Through them, the readers are enlightened with the value of being a mother. No matter what situation we go through, our mothers always have our back. They do not show their worries to us, but they keep it to themselves, showing the best side of them in the face of their children. "...she will only show her worry when they are asleep." (Levithan, 24) In the novel, when Cooper's father finds out about the fact that his son is gay, he was filled with rage. And so, does his mother. But despite being disappointed, Cooper's mother could not let go of her son after he rushed out from home. She always waits for his return. Her love and care for her did not fade. This scene shows the undying love of a mother even in the phase of disappointment. "There is nothing more painful than watching someone give up on you. Especially if it's your mother." (Levithan, 24)

The chorus lived and died fighting for their dreams. With their continuous struggles, they were slowly starting to see some changes in their society. The people were becoming a little calmer and accepting while they hear about gays and lesbians around them. They see their world turning, but it was too late. The realization was too late and they were all slowly dying away. "It was an exquisite irony: Just when we stopped wanting to kill ourselves, we started to die. Just when we were feeling strength, it was taken from us. This should not happen to you." (Levithan, 5)

Avery, a character in the novel was born as a boy, whom the whole world has seen as a girl. He had supportive parents. All along his mother knew that there are some things which cannot be seen and understood by others. Therefore; she named him Avery, a name to be given to her child whether it is a male or a female. When Avery grew older, his mother came to know what was happening to her child. With the support of his parents, Avery got a new life which he always longs for. His parents tried every possible way to make things right for him. For their son to set his body in the right direction. They went through miles and struggles in order to help their son. If it was in the days of the Chorus, they would choose to live a hidden life. The thought of being accepted by parents like Avery, and the acceptance

from the society is something which one cannot dream off. "In our day he would have been trapped by an insurmountable body in an intractable world." (Levithan, 15) The world is seen changing from worse to better through the life of Avery and his supportive parents.

In the novel, there are complexities when it comes to the flow of the plot. The narration shifts back and forth, thus, creates confusion in the minds of the readers. But with the help of the Chorus, the confusion is cleared and the concept becomes clearer and clearer as the story progresses. The value of life is shown by the Chorus when they saw Cooper trying to take his life. Cooper feels that he is left all alone and that there is no one to support and stand up by him. He has forgotten all the good people who are willing to be on his side. Thus, he decides to take his own life. At this juncture, the Chorus expressed their longing for life. They said that their life was short, and they do not want it to be any shorter. The Chorus has vividly portrayed the kind of life that one should live up to. Their presence in the novel has made everything meaningful.

Homophobia

'Homophobia' is an important term when it comes to homosexuals. Merriam Webster defines homophobia as, "irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or gay people." It is a word which describes the prejudice that one has towards individuals who are gays. The discrimination and bias against gay people are very evident when we look at our present context and also of the earlier generation. Many regard homosexuals as a disgust for the society, especially their family. Many families also go to the extent of abandoning their family members because of the fact of them being a gay person. Homosexuals are discriminated and suppressed in one way or the other. Discrimination towards the LGBT community has taken a lot of life, thus, keeping a lot of life in darkness. Individuals are unable to express and accept themselves for who they are. They deny their own kind in order to fit in the norm set by the society. But little do we realize the affect caused because of our ignorance and consideration towards the lesbian and gays.

When it comes to the context of LGBTs in the society, one's faith and belief also played an important role. Many a times parents are unable to accept the fact that their own children belong to a community which contradicts with their faith. They are unable to accept the reality set before them. Although they do not harm the person verbally or physical, they

harm the person through their actions. The act of frustration towards the person led the person to go through mental breakdown. In this case physical abuse is not the only thing that can be considered as a discrimination against the homosexuals. But also, the gestures which tells the individuals that they are not wanted is another major problem when it comes to LGBT community. Hence, the silence which filled the home and society about their sexual identity deeply affects them.

Homophobia is not absent when it comes to *Two Boys Kissing*, although it was not the main focus of the novel. The main victim of homophobia was faced by Tariq, because of whom Crag and Harry decides to take up the challenge of having the world longest kiss. When he was waiting for his father to pick him up, he was attacked by five drunk men. Tariq knew their intention; therefore; he tries to avoid them and go his own way. But these men start to make fun of him because of the color of his pants. They make their way in and started to boxed him. It was too late for him to shove his way out. "They boxed him in, he felt the panic button being pressed. As they made fun of the color of his pants, as they taunted him some more, he tried to shove himself out." (Levithan, 41) The guys were laughing and enjoying their cruel act, whereas, Tariq laid there helpless. Tariq "couldn't even yell for help, because the only sounds he could make were the ones he'd never heard before, a wailing, guttural acknowledgement of the sudden, intense pain as they punched and kicked, laughing their *faggots* at him as they broke his ribs." (Levithan, 42)

Tariq's ribs were broken but the guys just laughed at him. He was left there helpless. Tariq was bleeding profusely. The condition of Tariq also takes the chorus back to when they were humiliated and dehumanized because of their sexual preference. Their memory about the days has returned. There is no safety that is given when it comes to this kind of situation. A situation like this is feared by all the homosexuals. They do not have a sense of security because of these kinds of act that are done, with no one to lend a helping hand to them. When Tariq was beaten by the guys on street, there comes the surprising concern that is not unfamiliar to all. There are some who are concerned over the incident, especially Tariq's parents. But on the other hand, there are also some who are not at all concern about, even some police who were around. The incident did not allow Tariq to lock himself out from society. He was glad that it has passed. He enjoys himself like any other days. But there is fear in him which remains and haunts him over and over again. Hence the thought, "People

like to say being gay isn't like skin color, isn't anything physical. They tell us we always have the option in hiding. But if that's true, why do they always find us," (Levithan, 43-44) always pops up. At times like this, the law also does not seem to take any justice. Their rights are overlooked because of the fact of been a gay.

Craig was depressed over the thing that has happened to his friend Tariq. They were looked down by people wherever they go. The people seem to turn a blind eye even if they see them struggling because they feel that they should not be a part of the curse. The condition of Tariq has triggered the sense of security in the life of all the homosexuals. There is very little that can be done when it comes to these kinds of situation. Therefore; Craig made up his mind that he will conduct the longest kiss publicly so that it will not be an unusual thing for two males to be kissing openly. Therefore; with this intention, he confronts his idea to Harry, his ex, whom he is still in love with. Craig cannot track down or punish the people who has hurt Tariq. But he needed that he is equally same to all humans. He should not be treated differently just because he is gay. He wanted to show something which will let the world to realize that he is "an equal human being." (Levithan, 71) During the kiss between Harry and Craig, many have shown their disappointments towards them, taking their act as a curse which should not be acknowledged. Some commented;

"This is what the gays do- they stop at nothing to be in our faces with their disgusting habits and then act like they're the ones being treated badly. I don't want to look at that, and I don't want my kids to have a look at that."

"I don't understand why they're not being arrested. Why aren't the police arresting them? It's a public place."

"You can't have a world record if there you're two guys. That's not a world record." (Levithan, 155-156)

The comments passed regards Craig and Harry as a disgrace to the whole community. Some of the spectators also tries to humiliates them by throwing eggs to their faces. Some passer by cover the face of their children in order for them not to be influenced by the evil act. Many people are not able to accept the action taking place in public, with some supporting and defending the act. But on contrary, things would have taken another turn, if the persons

in action were of opposite sex. But the kiss became the talk of the town because it was ‘two boys kissing’ and not ‘one boy and one girl kissing.’

Cooper, on the other hand was a victim of heterosexual society. He could not bring himself to declare to his parents of the fact that he is a gay. Therefore; he hides himself by spending time in chatting and connecting with others through online. “The world, in his eyes, is flat and dull.” (Levithan, 5) When it comes to online, there is no one that he should be feared off. But in the process, he was caught off-guard by his father. Still then, Cooper was not in the position to explain himself because of the feeling of humiliation that he will need to go through. When his father came to know about his sexuality, he started to call him “*Faggot. Disgrace. Whore. Sick.*” He could not control his rage and disappointment. Cooper ran away from his home in order to defend himself. But he finds himself all alone with no one to turn to. The fear of him being recognized by others as gay scares him. Therefore; he distanced himself from everyone who tries to get closer to him. Right now, it is only his mother and father who knew the truth about him. But that will not be the only problem after words spread. With all the thoughts running through his mind, he is unable to find a way to defend himself. He was lost with nowhere to go, and no one to turn to. Therefore; he starts to look up to his online friends with whom he chats with. But none could help him and keep his mind at ease. At this point, Cooper decides to take his own life. He did not care for anyone because he feels that no one will be by his side. Thus, he decides to let go of everything and take his own life, only to be caught by police.

When it comes to Cooper, fear has controlled him. He was not confident to face the world. He was scared of humiliation and discrimination that he will go through. Therefore; he locked himself to his little room where he is all alone, with no one to question him. He was confused about his life. His confusion has led him to a point where he was not able to think right, thus, take the right decision. The chorus expressed that they also went through the same phase because of the hostile attitude of the society towards their needs. But things will get better. Although they had all these things in mind, they were not in the position to convey it to him. But the only thing that they can do right now is to just watch him losing his life away. This frustrates them. Cooper could not realize how precious his life is and how many people longed to have a life of his. But all these things happened because he was filled with the thought that he will never be accepted because of who he was.

Avery, boyfriend of Ryan was another victim of homophobia in the novel. Avery doesn't want to use public restroom because of the stare that he gets from the people around. People stare and look at him when he enters the men bathroom. He was treated differently. No matter how he tries to get over the feeling of being discriminated and treated differently, he could not let go of it. The fear is always right there in front of him.

He feels eyes on him as he goes over to the men's room. People behind the counter glaring because he hasn't bought anything. People at table staring because they know where he's going, know what he's doing. Nobody has to be watching for Avery to feel watched. He is almost used to it, but will never truly get used to it. The feeling that he's trespassing. The feeling that he will be confronted. The feeling that the world is full of people who think *different* is synonymous with *wrong*...No matter how strong Avery gets, there will always be this subterranean fear, this nagging shame. (Levithan, 171)

When he feels lost in the society, the Chorus also whispers to him by saying, "*I am not wrong. Society is wrong.*" (Levithan, 171) According to them, there is no need for setting up separate bathrooms for boys and girls. There can be a common bathroom which can be used by both men and women. It is the society who is pushing them and forcing them to hide themselves for who they are, so that they can have control over them. They are the ones who are trying to let them follow their rules, thus, differentiate them in society. This is an act of "bastardization of the concept of morality, this rule of shame." (Levithan, 172)

Society has played a major role when it comes to the trauma deeply ingrained in the minds of the homosexuals. The society is formed in a way where one that does not go along with the norm will not be able to fit in the society. And this fact has taken the life of many. Society should serve as a shield to its dwellers. But it instead has hit the dwellers living inside it. The problems of the society are caused by the people living in it. One should not be judged because of their different preference. But everyone should be treated equally. It is not the duty of the society to judge. But there is a judgement day where everyone will be judged by Above. As such, one should not suppress the other, but should live as one.

Evidence on Norm Change

Two Boys Kissing is a dream world which many dreams of. The setting of the novel is not completely a utopian world where there will be no discrimination against them being gays and lesbian. But society has become more tolerant and finally they can live a life as to how they want to. There is still fear, but it is balanced with their strength. They knew that they will not be spared by all, but they also know that they will be supported by many at the same time. Evidence of norm change can be seen heavily in this novel. "A normative shift occurs when the dominant group view of something changes." (Simplicity Analysis, *Normative Shifts and Change*)

Through the Chorus we have come to know about the difficulties they have faced. All their life, they lived with fear. They were told to hide behind the closet. Their parents abandoned them when they come to know about their sexuality. They treat them as criminals and their disease as something which is a curse, and which should not be allowed to passed it to the other people in the society. The society they live in and the society the present generation are living is completely contrast to each other. When they look back at their past, their world is filled with sadness and darkness. Those people who comes out and declare themselves as homosexuals were treated inhumanely, which serve as a lesson to other people. They fought and dies with their dreams not being achieved and fulfilled. It was also their first time witnessing two boys kissing in their lifetime. By seeing that, they come to realize that the world is becoming a better place to live in. The chorus wishes to live a life which can be seen as a role model for the coming generation. But the lack of understanding from the side of society and people living in has made them to become numb. But by seeing Craig and Harry taking a huge step, they stated;

We wish we could have been there for you. We didn't have many role models of our own- we latched on to the foolish love of Oscar Wilde and the well-versed longing of Walt Whitman because nobody else was there to show us an untortured path. We were going to be your role models. We were going to give you art and music and confidence and shelter and a much better world. Those who survived lived to do this. But we haven't been there for you. We've been here. Watching as you become the role models. (Levithan, 237)

The regrets that the chorus have expressed in their narration have shown tremendous change between the past and the present. They have done their part, but they were not successful enough to be called as role models. But their efforts were not in vain because the fruits are been enjoyed by the present generation. They wanted the present generation to be grateful for their life and not find excuses to ruin their life. Life is precious and it should be tent with love and care, because life once lost will never be regained or retained. We only live once.

The chorus has vividly narrated the difference between the two society, past and present. In this novel, the characters are privilege enough to have supportive parents, friends and teachers. They were treated equally at school by their teachers. While Harry and Craig were holding their kiss in the campus, their teacher Tom took the responsibility and explained it to the other people around, saying that he is a teacher teaching in their school and the people need not worry about it. This is a dream of many, because for many, school is a place of hell where discrimination is the root of all evil. Unlike the earlier society, the people become more expressive in expressing their feelings and thoughts. Avery, while he was on date with Ryan says, "My hair can be pink because I'm a boy. Yours can be blue because you are a girl. If you free yourself from all the stupid arbitrary shit that society controls us with, you feel free, and if you feel freer, you can be happier." (Levithan, 80) There are people who choose to appreciate the diversity that is there in the society but instead, finds every possible way to stumble them and controls them with the power that they have in the society. It was not by their choice that the hold a different sexual identity, but they were chosen to be who they are and to die by it. But people refuse to back down even after knowing the fact because they want to be the one to hold the power, discriminating the minority group of people because of their false belief and power.

One is chosen to live as a family for a purpose. Families are meant to support and uphold each other in every situation. But when it comes to the truth and humiliation that one needs to face; many backs down and never turn back. But in this novel, although families were not accepting enough, they stood by their son, their brother, when they come to know about their sexuality. Craig's mother was devastated when she comes to know about him. But she did not give up on him, instead she went ahead and ask her son whether he needs anything and that she will confront it to his father.

During the kiss, many were disgust at the sight of the two boys kissing openly in public. But there are more people who were in support of them. They people can understand as to what they were going through and sympathize with them upon their act. Although they were criticizing the act, they couldn't keep themselves from keeping an update about the two. The outcome was welcomed by all the people. Many cheered on them when they saw the struggle that they were putting up because they do not want the unsympathize people to look down on them. Among the people who were watching, the chorus, the invisible audience were the most excited and most feel privileged audience. They were glad to witness their dreams slowly realizing by the present generation. They constantly went back to their past and talked about their past because they want the readers to know as to how much the world has changed. The present generation were living a life that they have dreamt and planted before them. They were also glad when some people remember them and the things that they have done in the past for the present generation.

The connection between the past and the present society is also seen. In the past there were no much people to whom the people can look up to as their motivation when it comes to their sexuality. Everyone was living a superficial life in fear of being recognized by the people in the society. There were very few writers who were writing about the gays and lesbians because they do not want to be shamed by the public. Therefore; their only source of motivation was from the writers like, Oscar Wilde and Walt Whitman. They find confidence from these writers. Likewise, the present generation also went back to the past and took them as a source of inspiration for them. Before the kiss starts, Tariq reads out a poem of Walt Whitman in order to commemorate the event. When he was tired and on the verge of giving up, he also murmurs the poem of Walt Whitman in order to stay focused and to be motivated. This shows that, although the past generation could not achieve their dream, their struggles has brought comfort to the present generation, as shown in the novel by the characters.

In the novel, the young parents and adults were seen more tolerant towards the homosexuals, comparing to that of the older parents. The older parents stopped their children to come across and witness the act. They commented that their action is an act which can be compared to that of a criminal. Only few among them understands the act of the adults. But on the other hand, the parents, belonging to the younger generation were

more understanding and tolerant towards the two boys kissing. They sympathize with them and also allows their children to witness the event. They wanted to imbibe the thought in the minds of their children that, it is completely normal for two boys to be kissing with each other, whether in public or private. For them, the challenge taken up by Craig and Harry is a source of motivation and inspiration for their children.

This novel is an inspiration for those troubled youth who are confused about the things going on in their life. They should not stay hidden all their life. When one is unable to express oneself, shutting oneself away from the society, it will lead to one's death. In the novel, Cooper was one such person who was not ready to face the society. He was not able to bring himself to express his feelings to his parents. He finds comfort in living a life under the shadow of someone who is not. He turns to online friends because out there no one is there to judge him for who he is. It is filled with people who are hungry for love but are unable to come out and express themselves. All of them are hidden behind their phones and computers. But this did not bring joy in the life of Cooper. When he ventures out away from his room and home, he finds that there was no one he could turn to. He did not realize that "freedom is also about what you will allow yourself to do." (Levithan, 4) Cooper did not realize the love and care that the people around him are willing to give him. He ran away from everyone and finds himself, ready to jump off and take his own life. This is the life of many youths in today's world. When one does not find someone they can turn to, they give up their life, not realizing how precious and rewarding it is to be alive, living and breathing. Therefore, through the life of the characters, today's world is vividly portrayed in the novel.

Levithan, in this novel *Two Boys Kissing*, openly expresses the intimate scenes of the characters without any care. Here in this novel, the image of the present society is portrayed vividly without any hurdles. The setting of the novel is of the society, where many people have become tolerant towards the gays and lesbians, but at the same time, filled with people who are opposed the relationship between same sex relations. They take the act of two boys kissing openly in the public as a misleading act to the young youths in the society. Some people discriminate the act, whereas, some people support the braveness act of the two boys who took up the challenge to break world record for longest kiss. Their challenge is to gain understanding of the people, showing their genuine need for wanting of being accepted in the society. The bravery of the two boys also encourages the other

youths in the society who remains hidden, covering their real them, in order to be accepted and respected in the society; gains courage and comes out from their struggled inner conflicts, expressing their desire and wants.

The goal set by Craig and Harry is achieved. They have shown that the society has become a better place to live in. And the change that is happening in the present world is because of the change of mindset that the younger generation are willing to understand and rely upon. The Chorus explains that the modern people will never understand what it was like for gay men to live a few decades ago. Their lives were filled with challenges and discriminations. The past is gone. All is said and done. But to bring betterment in the society, the responsibility rest upon the shoulder of today's generation. With that, with time, like in the novel, the longing for normalization will be achieved.

Hence, the aim of queer is to bring change in the minds of the people will continuously strive for the rights of the minority when it comes to any kinds of sexuality. They are of the view that one should not be discriminated based on one's sexual preference. But they should be treated equally without any differentiation in the society. They only thing they asked for is to be accepted in the society, living a peaceful life. And this dream is vividly portrayed in the novel by David Levithan, *Two Boys Kissing*. The novel shows that the modern society has become much tolerable, understanding the differences; showing positive impact and evidence of norm change towards better society; moving towards perfection.

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CHAPTER - IV

QUEER THEMES IN LEVITHAN'S NOVELS

BOY MEETS BOY

Boy Meets Boy (2003) is a novel by David Levithan. It is one of the first young adult fiction written by David Levithan. The novel won a Lambda Literary Award in 2003. Levithan says that, when he decides to publish his novel, it has received lots of criticism from the public. The people perceive the novel as something which should not be shown to the world. It is a threat to the people and the generations to come. During the time that Levithan published this novel, being an openly gay person is not something that one can think of. Every individual is aware of the situation around them, therefore; they live a hidden life; trying to fit in the society they belonged to. As such, all throughout his life, Levithan has been seeing and reading novels which portrays the plight and sufferings of the LGBTs. Therefore; in this novel he decided to come out with something new, which is different from other young adult fiction. As in, in this novel, the focal importance is the theme of acceptance. It is a young adult romance novel with same sex couple at its center.

The novel is set in a Utopian town where LGBTs were accepted and even celebrated. People in this little town have the freedom to be who they want to be without any hurdles from the society. Strict social norm which is followed in the other LGBT novels is not present. Unlike his other novels, this novel brings out the joy of being a gay individual in the society. Every person thinks that being a gay or lesbian in heterosexual society is a burden and something which makes the life of individual miserable. But Levithan says that he wanted to create something which will show that, being a gay or lesbian is not only a doom or gloom, but it also has the bright side, which makes individuals feel lucky enough to be a part and parcel of it.

Boy Meets Boy is a delightful young adult novel, which revolves around the time spent at high school. It is a high school story, set in a Utopian town in which being a gay teenager is no more a horror to the individuals. Instead, they were seen and loved as any other straight heterosexuals. *Boy Meets Boy* is an uplifting and affirmative young adult novel which celebrates the joy of love and friendship. In this little town, the dwellers were given

complete sexual liberation, for which the protagonist said that he does not want to leave his town and go elsewhere. Paul, the main protagonist describes the town that he lives in as:

There isn't really a gay scene or a straight scene in town. They got all mixed up a while back, which I think is for the best. Back when I was in second grade, the older gay kids who didn't flee to the city for entertainment would have to make their own fun. Now it's all good. Most of the straight guys try to sneak into the Queer Beer bar. Boys who love boys flirt with girls who love girls. And whether your heart is strictly ballroom or bluegrass punk, the dance floors are open to whatever you have to offer. (Levithan, 1-2)

The town in the story is of fictional setting where it is okay to be who you are, and what you are, and this philosophy is inclusive of all sexual orientation. The setting of the novel is set in a place which the Queer writers' dream of; the possibility of queer life in near future. The kind of place that the novel presents has not been realized and achieved till date. But it is the possibility which is set for the future. The characters in this novel were embraced and loved despite their differences. Whether one is homosexual, heterosexual, transgender and bisexual, and others, all were considered as equal and normal before the eyes of the people and society. The strict boundaries of traditional gender expressions have been dissolved.

In this novel, there is constant shift between feminine and masculine, as there are no rules for the characters to adhere to when it comes to gender. Paul, the main protagonist has supportive parents who try to help their son to understand that there is nothing wrong in liking someone who belongs to the same sex. Paul portrays the kind of character who is completely satisfied with the life he is living. There is nothing which he considers a hurdle when it comes to his family and the town that he lives in. He knows that he cannot ask for anything more. But he also has a friend name, Tony, who is living a life completely opposite to him. His parents are devoted Christian and they cannot allow or accept any of their members who are homosexual. They consider homosexual as something which is evil and sin in the eyes of the lord. Therefore; Tony tries his best in order for his parents not to find out about him being a homosexual. Throughout, Levithan tries to show that gender expression should not be judged and seen on the basis of one's sex or biology, but it is completely a social construct, which is created and formed by the society and the people living in it. There is no root in the beginning.

The novel also explores the other kinds of relationship that is found in the society. Levithan also brings to light about the heterosexual society. The problem faced by the teenagers in life. Various relationship problems are explored in the novel. Through it, Levithan also try to tell his readers that, be it heterosexual or homosexual, every individual goes through different problems in life. The solution lies in how the individual decides to handle it. It is not only the homosexuals who goes through everyday problems and struggles, but the burden is same for all. In the novel, Levithan does not only portray the life of the homosexuals, but all kinds of sexuality which is considered as 'others' in the society. This covers the aim of queer theory.

In many societies, the belief and faith of individuals is questioned when it comes to being homosexual. Many religions take homosexuals as deadly sin which should not be committed by anyone. And if there is someone who is noticed and recognized, they either ignore the individual or tries to bring the individual to realization that the thing they are going for is not right. And one should confess and turn to God. The scene of homosexual, brought up from a Christian family is also discussed in the novel. Tony, Paul's best friend belong to a Christian family. Therefore; every day is a challenge for him, because he tried to run away from reality. He could not bring himself to confess his position to his parents. As such, he had led a controversial life all throughout, and come to peace with himself only when he decides to face the reality by declaring his homosexuality to his parents. His parents could not bring themselves to accept the sexuality of their son, therefore, they ignore him and deal with the problem in Christian way by praying out loudly, provoking the sentiments of Tony. At this juncture, they consider Paul as a bad influenced which should be separated from their son's life. Therefore, Paul says, "His parents are keeping him under constant watch, afraid he might steal some kisses if they're not on guard. The chances of me getting to see him in the near future are about as likely as me becoming Heavyweight Champion of the world." (Levithan, 115)

But in the end, they surrender before their faith, and lets their son to be who he is and who he is meant to be. As such, the novel is seen as something which is not realistic, as the characters in the novel are all living their life, although at one point they also face challenges and discrimination, it is very few, and the main emphasis is on the brighter side. But

Levithan wrote this with the aim to create a possible future which he wishes to witness in the coming years, as he has seen the changes over the past years.

Queer Utopianism

When it comes to Utopia, every individual understands that it is a society, by definition, so perfect that it cannot exist in reality. But interestingly, Sir Thomas More, who is initially credited with the development of the concept, he did not think of queer as a perfect place, which is most assumed by people when it comes to the concept of utopia. But instead, he opines that, utopia is something which is there; currently the society that we live in. As such, utopians can thus, be defined as something which work towards the betterment and more refined society, where common good and benefits is the utmost concern of all. Its emphasis is not on the betterment and refinement of particular individual in the society. As such, it is a kind of society which can be achieved in the future when all the people work collectively for the benefits of all, instead of focusing on achieving for oneself in the society. As such for instance, utopians are seen working for common good. It does not focus on the accumulation of gold, silver and jewelry for oneself, and achieving prosperity for oneself, but it is focused on ways where one can lead a more refined and correct moral ways: living a good and honest life. When it comes to utopian society, all men and women were given the freedom and voice to choose their own representatives to lead them, without trying to suppress one another. Equal voice and importance are given to all the people, disregarding one's gender, race, caste or creed. However; at large, there are still many critics and theorists who assume the concept of utopia as a perfect society.

As such, Munoz says that when it comes to queer utopianism it is future oriented. The goals and aims of queer are not yet achieved, but there is hope that it will be achieved with changing time and society, and every being will be able to live a life of freedom and liberation without being suppressed of their rights. That is to say, at present, we are living in a heteronormative society, where there are constraints given when it comes to queerness. For Sean Seeger (2021), "For Munoz, the aim of queer politics ought to be nothing less than the achievement of a world no longer structured by heteronormativity or white supremacy, however remote such a goal may appear from our present dystopian vantage." Queer people are still living in a closet with no space to be themselves. But queer utopianism is a

small crack that is present in the heteronormative society, where there is a ray of light sown in it, where the later society will more perfect and more refined. Likewise, queer utopianism is the society that we live in everyday of our life, working towards a better future. Hence, putting all these pieces together, one can come to the understanding that queer utopia is the future space of absolute queerness in the heteronormative society; a society without classification.

Queer utopianism seeks to disrupts the prevailing system of social norms, whereby, heteronormativity, homophobia and homonormativity will be disrupted and thus, abolished. It cuts open room for people who are deprived and who are alienated given their personal preferences to be different. The word 'different' will be seen as 'sameness'. To cut it short, queer utopianism is a space where one can be oneself instead of living in fear, fear of being isolated and discriminated. These spaces will obviously be filled with certain prohibitions, as given in the society, for the betterment and unity prevailing in the community; these restrictions will not lead to the suppression and oppression of the individuals living together as one in the society.

It is said that with the diminishing of utopianism, the scope for queer theory has become more broader and wider. Queer theory started to flourish in the 1980s and 90s, whereas, the status of utopianism started to diminish around this time. During this time, the reason for the diminishing of utopianism is the fact that there is only a bare possibility for the success of the change that the theory talks about. Thus, Utopianism became an emptied and highly abstract, rather than seen as something which will give a better society and liberation to its inhabitants. As such, the status of utopianism became something impossible, which also in turn leads to the first wave of queer. As a result, *The History of sexuality* by Foucault has become one of the main sources of inspiration for the formation and existence of queer theory.

Some critics sees queer theory as a retreat and revise version of utopianism which diminished with the coming of queer theory. Queer theory also focuses of the side where there will be no discrimination based on gender, sexuality, caste, creed or race of an individual. As all the people have its own individual differences, every being should be treated as one and considered as 'normal' instead of classification. Likewise, even utopianism talks about a society filled with liberation, where everyone is happy, with

enough freedom and liberation to be oneself, and live-in peace and harmony with one another. As both the former and latter talks about the future possibility and better future, with the fact that queer came later when compared with utopianism, it is possible for critics to claim that queer theory is a re-edition of utopianism.

According to the research conducted by Dr. Sean Seeger, a lecturer in Literature in the Department of Literature, Film, and Theatre Studies at University of Essex, he says that both queer theory and utopianism has a mutual interest in challenging the existent norms of the society, the dominant norms, values and institutions that the former and latter shares, it is evident that both share the same affinities. Also, according to Tobias Jones, *Queer Utopianism*, it is the creation of spaces in the present that does not necessarily allows for complete emancipation or even happiness, but are suggestive of the potentiality for the future, thus, giving hope. Here, the construction of queer utopias is not about the happiness that one gets, but it is about the little space that individuals get, where they can live a life, a life where they can breathe freely. Thus, queer utopia is not the fixed perfect place/society that one dreams off, but it is about the emancipatory of the future of the queer where they can breathe freely; a possibility for the future that every queer hopes for.

As stated above, about the aims and goals of queer utopianism, the same concept and aims is seen in David Levithan's novel, *Boy Meets Boy*, which will be discussed further in this chapter. D'Emilio's account when it comes to the origin of gay identity, he says that it is not deterministic. He also did not claim that the problems or alteration in the economic status in the society has brought to the recognition of gay identity in the society. But he stated that, until certain specific historical conditions arose in the society, there was no social space given to the identity to occupy its place in the society. Even before, there is existence of the homosexuals in the society. But they were not regarded and given consent when it comes to their personal identity.

Challenge to Heteronormative Society

In the novel, although Levithan has set his settings in a fictional town, he also brought to light before the readers as to what normalcy in the society means. The utopian setting and the absence of homophobia has made the novel more visible when it comes to the talk of heteronormativity in the society. D. Bell, in *International Encyclopedia of Human*

Geography, 2009 defines heteronormativity as, heteronormativity “describes the ways in which heterosexuality is normalized through myriad practices, so that it becomes naturalized as the only legitimate form of sexuality.” Unlike other LGBT novels which highlights the problems and struggles of LGBTs, here in this novel, the writer presents a world where there is no discrimination and feeling of homophobia is disrupted, which also serve as a tool for the writer to create a world of realism. The town in *Boy Meets Boy* is place where ‘it is okay to be who you are and no one in the society can criticize and discriminate you for who you are.’ There is liberty and freedom given, disregarding one’s sexual orientation. The plot of the novel is placed on a fast-forward-thinking town where the individual differences of a person is loved and embrace. There are no differences between homosexuals, heterosexuals, bisexuals, etc. Everyone is considered as ‘normal’ in this little town set by Levithan. All the above points noted has become a tool and a challenge to heteronormative society.

Paul, the main protagonist of the novel was not oppressed in any way. Instead, he was supported by his parents as well as the teachers. It was because of the guidance of the adults that he come to be clear about himself; him, been a gay individual. He says, “I’ve always known I was gay, but it wasn’t confirmed until I was in kindergarten. It was my teacher who said so. It was right there on my kindergarten report card; PAUL IS DEFINITELY GAY AND HAS VERY GOOD SENSE OF SELF.” (Levithan, 8) Paul, as a young boy was surprised when he sees this in his teachers’ desk. Given his confusion, he got more confused when he found out that this was written only in his report card and not in his other friends’ report card. But he was comforted and his doubts were cleared when his teacher was there beside him, telling him that there was nothing wrong with him in being gay. His teacher Mrs. Benchley also says, “What you felt is absolutely right for you. Always remember that.” (Levithan, 9) When Paul conveyed the news to his parents, the reaction from his parents was never the way that one would expect from them. Instead, his mother just yelled to Paul’s father by saying, “Honey..... Paul’s learned a new word.” (Levithan, 10) Although it took couple of years for Paul’s parents to accept the fact that their son was gay, they were never disappointed by it, instead, with time, they eventually got used to it, thus, supported him in every possible way that they can, as parents. This is rarely seen when it comes to the

present context, but Levithan has made it possible, bringing a ray of hope to the LGBT community.

The characters in the novel performs gender in various ways, which brought out the concept that gender construction is set by the society, and one need not be bind by it. There are feminine boys and masculine girls, as well as masculine boys and feminine girls in the novel. All the characters in the novel can be whom they want to be, without any worry of been judged by the people around them. They can both be feminine and masculine at the same time. And this fact is most vividly portrayed by Infinite Darlene, who is both the star quarterback and the homecoming queen. She walks the hallways in high heels and “more-than-passable make up,” (Levithan, 250) but at the same time, she will sweat, grunt and break her nails on the field. As such, throughout the novel, Levithan constantly mixes between things which is perceived as feminine and masculine. Things such as riding motorcycles or playing football, to that of things which are perceived as feminine, such as homecoming queens and cheerleaders. In the novel, Paul also adds to this by remembering a video, where he sees a big hulking guys who were crying their eyes out over the dead of their friend, as crying is regarded as something which should be shown by girls and not by boys. The saying ‘boys should not cry’ is something which is taught in order for boys to be tough, thus, not showing the soft side of them. But this was contrasted in the novel.

Infinite Darlene, at the Homecoming Pride Parade, “strides out in a pink ball gown, covered in part by her quarterback jersey” also shows that the characters in the novel can portray the side of them, in any way that wants to be.” (Levithan, 34) Here, by portraying the different sides, of both being feminine and masculine, Levithan has brought up the fact that gender construction is purely laid by the society and is a social construct. It all depends on how we want to perceive and accept things as. By portraying Infinite Darlene as a quarterback and homecoming queen at the same time, Levithan also question the existing stereotype in the society. It highlights that gender is something that we do as individual, rather than something that we are or born into. Although Infinite Darlene is seen as someone who is breaking the stereotype, she also goes through dilemma, given her role in the novel, being both star quarterback and homecoming queen. This brings out the realism that is there in the novel. Paul says;

And sometimes it's hard for her to fit in. The other drag queens in our school rarely sit with her at lunch; they say she doesn't take good care of her nails and that she looks a little too duff in a tank top. The football players are a little more accepting, although there was a spot a spot of trouble year ago when Chuck, the second-string quarterback, fell in love with her and got depressed when she said he wasn't her type.... It's a real dilemma. (Levithan, 18)

The dilemma that Infinite Darlene goes through is something which every individual, despite of one's gender goes through in life. In the novel, Paul the protagonist is also attributed with certain feminine role, which the heteronormative society regards as something which should not be inherited by male, regarded as masculine being. In the novel, many time Paul has been the sacrificial one as he was not able to speak up his mind. He works not only for his own gain and benefits, but instead, he also thinks about his friends and contributes to the people around him in the best possible way, instead of focusing on himself. When Paul was on his run to meet and get associated with his newly found lover, he was not successful in his mission because of his consideration and sympathy that he has towards others. He was stopped several times on his way to meet Noah. On his way, he said,

Reluctantly I turn around and see Lyssa Ling about to pull my sleeve. I already know what she wants. Lyssa Ling doesn't ever talk to me unless she wants to be on a committee... At first I am distracted by theme ideas. Then I remember the reason for my after-school existence and continue heading to locker 264...until I am stopped by my English teacher...I can't exactly blow her off, nor can I blow off Infinite Darlene when she asks me how her double role at the Homecoming Pride Rally went. The minutes are ticking away. (Levithan, 29-30)

Here, in the above extract, Paul, instead of excusing himself and go on his way, he insists on staying back, thus, held back by the other characters, as he could not bring himself to disappoint them. As a result, he brought trouble upon himself. The reaction on the part of Paul also contributes to feminine like character which is perceived by the society. Paul, in the novel also becomes a traitor when he decides to go with Joni, his best friend, for a lunch with her new boyfriend Chuck. Although he was disappointed with her decision, for

the sake of their friendship, he could not refuse the invitation. And his action is seen as a betrayal on the part of Ted, Joni's ex-boyfriend. The consideration on the part of Paul is seen as something which is expected of in a friendship, but on the other hand, it can also be seen as a feminine-coded.

Paul is also portrayed as a humble and modest character. This was shown vividly when he went to visit Noah's house. Given his feminine attribute, he was in awe when he enters Noah's room. Usually, boys do not care about how the room is arranged. They hardly notice the art. But here, Noah says,

I don't know where to begin, both in looking at it and describing it. The ceiling is a swirl of just about any color you'd care to imagine.... One wall is covered with Matchbox cars glued in different directions, with a town and roads drawn in the background.... His books are kept on freestanding shelves hung at different angles on a sea-green wall.... His window shades are made from old bubblegum wrappers, arranged into a design.
(Levithan, 46)

The observation that is done on the part of Paul, and his description about the room is something which all girls emphasis on when visiting a friends' home. This is portrayed by Paul, for which Levithan's intention about his views has been portrayed and brought before the readers. Later on, in the novel, after visiting Noah's home, Paul was worried about how Noah will react when he visits his room. He was worried as to how Paul will think of him. Thus, Paul starts to decorate and clean his room by saying,

I clean my room thoroughly, then mess it up a little so it won't look so clean. I worry that it's not whimsical enough. Instead, it's the museum of my whole life, from my Snoopys with their wardrobes to the mirror ball my parents got me when I graduated from fifth grade to the Wilde books still open—winged on my floor from last week's English report. (Levithan, 61)

Hence, Levithan also tries to show the feminine side of Paul by describing the little details that run-through his mind. But in any way, the novel does not assert the fact that, being a character like Paul is necessary for all heterosexual or homosexual men. But instead, it portrays that one can be like Paul, at the same time can be just a masculine guy. This is a

challenge to heteronormative society where, the concept is that, there should be a definite role between a 'man' and 'woman' in any form of relationship.

Heteronormative society is filled with homophobia. But in this novel, like the aim of queer utopianism, where there is no fear of being discriminated by the people and society around, there is very less homophobic experiences by the characters. At one instance, Paul was subjected to homophobia. But the incident is condemned and challenged by the context. At one point of time, in the novel, Paul was "tackled by two high school wrestlers after a late-night showing of *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert...*" (Levithan, 13) They insulted him with homophobic slurs- queer, faggot, the usual. But Paul was not alone. He went for the movies with a bunch of friends. As such, he was saved by his friends. "They pulled out their foils and disarmed the lugheads. (One of the, I've heard, is now a drag queen in Columbus, Ohio. I like to think I had something to do with that)." (Levithan, 13) Although Paul was subjected to homophobia, experienced by the LGBTs, he was saved by his friends, and as such, direct homophobia is absent from the novel, which is a kind of contradiction to heterosexual society. The novel criticizes the presence of homophobic elements, but at the same time, the occurrence of the incident also shows that, no matter how much the society changes, there will always be someone who will enjoy making fun and discriminating people, disregard of their gender or their personal preferences.

The characters in the novel goes through phase of confusion and mental trauma for not being accepted the way they are. But the fact of their struggle is less apparent as compared with reality. Their struggles became a less apparent, instead, the novel focuses and portrays more about their joy of being homosexuals in the society. The freedom and liberation that they enjoy along the way. The joy and privileges that the characters enjoy is bountiful, as such, there was no room for regrets and sorrows. Hence, in the novel, David Levithan highlights the struggles of LGBT, and at the same time he also questions the stereotypes in the prevailing society by challenging the heteronormativity by bringing out contradictions that the society believes in; going against the set societal norms.

Perspective of Religion on Homosexual Attraction

The typical 'Christian' perspective on homosexual attraction is such that, homosexuals were seen as sinful men and women. It is seen as someone going against the wishes and

wants of God. As such, in many cases, many individuals also suffer because of the belief and the Christian perception that has been deeply ingrained in them. Many Christians also tend to abandon their family members who decide to come out openly with their sexuality. The struggle and trauma that one goes through in the name of one's religion is something which is widely seen in the society. But in contrast to that, in this novel *Boy Meets Boy*, it is seen that the Christian perspective when it comes to homosexuals has been altered to a certain degree. As seen in the novel, the alteration is not shown openly and largely. But to a certain extent, there is tolerant on the part of the family. One character which vividly portray the change in Christians perspective is Tony, Paul's friend.

Tony's family were Christian. As such, although Tony knew about himself being a gay individual, he could not bring himself to declare the fact to his family, as he knows about the belief and concept that his family has towards homosexuals. As such, when he met Paul, and Paul ask for his phone number in order to keep in touch with him, he gave him his e-mail instead. The relationship that is shared between Paul and Tony is something which every individual dream of. A person who is there to trust you and support you in whatever you do. Paul also says, Tony "would become someone I could trust more than myself." (Levithan, 37)

Tony was not able to reveal the fact of him being gay to his parents because of their religion. He knew that he will not be set free, until and unless he reveals the truth about himself to his parents. But he could not bring himself to reveal it. And the fact that he could not be himself has lend him to trouble where he was not finding happiness. But Tony's fear turns into reality when one of his mother's friend saw Paul and him hugging in the mountain. As such, the real problem starts. When his parents got the information about Tony, they were disappointed as it was something which they did not expect of from Tony. As a result, they start to consider Paul as a bad influence to Tony, thus, restricting them from meeting and hanging out with each other. Now, Tony's secret was not a secret that he keeps to himself anymore. When Tony's parents come to know about Tony, they did not kick him out of the house. But on the other hand, they also create a situation where he wanted to leave the house and go elsewhere. As Paul says;

Instead, they prayed loudly, delivering all of their disappointment and rage and guilt to him in the form of an address to God... Eventually, they reached a collect-call truce. He went back home and they promised to hold back their condemnation. Their prayers were quieter, but they still filled the air. Tony couldn't trust them any longer- not with the gay part of his life. (Levithan, 96- 97)

The change from the part of Tony's parents, although Tony was still suffering, shows that there is change in the way Christian view the homosexuals. They were not as conservative as it was in early days. Instead, they have become more tolerant towards the LGBT community. Although, Tony's parents were tolerant and understanding towards Tony, eventually they also took their time in understanding the situation, as partly, they also fear as to how the other church members will view Tony as well as their family as a whole as. Given the situation, Tony was then grounded by his parents. Paul also says, "His parents are keeping him under constant watch, afraid he might steal some kisses if they're not on guard. The chances of me getting to see him in the near future are about as likely as me becoming Heavyweight Champion of the World." (Levithan, 115) This is something which is expected out of every parent, especially religious parents like Tony's family.

And Tony on the other hand, instead of running away from home, creating more problems to the family, also decides to understand the situation that his family is going through. He knows that his family also love and care for him in their own way, although, it was hard for them to accept him as gay. He says, "But in their own way, they love me. They honestly believe that if I don't straighten out, I will lose my soul. It's not that they don't want me kissing other guys- they think if I do it, I will be damned.... To them, though, its everything." (Levithan, 152) Here, Tony understands his family, and he also know the fact that he is loved. And his justification towards Paul shows that, all this time, he was not abandoned by his family. Tony also further stated;

All I know is that I can't just run off. They think that being gay is going to mess up my whole life. I can't prove them right, Paul. I have to prove them wrong. And I know I can't prove them wrong by changing myself or by denying what I really am. The only way for me to prove them wrong is to try to be who I am and show them it's not hurting me to be that way. In two

years I'll graduate. I'll be gone. But in the meantime, I have to find a way to make this work. (Levithan, 152)

The positive attitude and believe that Tony has towards his parents also give hope to the individuals who are from Christian family. The positivity seen in the novel will also bring positive changes in one life. Also, this shows the level of understanding that is present in the family, for which there will be changes that will be brought upon. As Tony was also trying, it is seen that his parents were also trying to accept him being a gay. Although they were trying to reinforce that as Christians, being a homosexual is a sinful thing, at the same time, it is also seen that it is alterable to a certain degree according to one's level of understanding.

In the novel, when Tony was not allowed to talk with Paul and get associated with him, Tony was exposed to homophobia to a certain extent. But he was not stuck from his struggles. Instead, he also tries to let his parents understand him and accept him. When his parents returned home before Paul could move out from his place, he did not try to hide Paul. Instead, he conveyed his thoughts to his parents boldly. This helps him and his parents, and thus, his parents, to an extent, allowed them to see each other, do their homework together, but not from Tony's room. The challenge to the authority from the side of Tony also leads to the change of attitude from the side of his parents, which leads to a positive outcome. This also shows that, for one to be accepted as the way he/she is, the individual also should learn how to come out of one's comfort zone, and express the reason towards the others. This will then, surely lead to positive outcome, like that of Tony's family. The novel shows that, although Tony's parents find it hard to accept his sexuality, they on the other hand, did not restrict him in letting him to be himself, thus, given freedom and liberation to be whom he wants to be with. The fact of Tony being a homosexual is against their faith and belief, but they also decide to support their son by agreeing with him, at the same time constantly praying for him.

The acceptance from the part of Tony's parents also portrays the contrasting view that is present in today's reality. The former parents will threaten their children to give up their feelings and the identity that they belong to, in order for them not to be looked down by the people and the church members that surrounds them. But here, in this novel, Tony's parents have shown the other side of the society where it is possible for the alteration

when both the party reaches to a certain level of understanding. Here, Tony did not become the target, but his religious parents were the ones who decides to be a supportive parent to their child. Tony did not become the target of humiliation, but instead, he come to know about his parents' love towards him. Hence, the acceptance on the part of Tony's parents has shown the changes that is taking place when it comes to Christian's perspective towards homosexual attraction.

Acceptance

When it comes to queer theory, acceptance from the part of society plays an important role. Their goal is to let the people accept the differences instead of relying upon the said gender norms which defines a an individual. As such, all queer writers stive to instill in the minds of their readers that, one should be ready to accept any individual they come across, living aside the way they try to portray their life or the way the decides with their personality. Every individual wants to live in a Utopian world, where there is no hurdles and hostility faced from the people around them. That utopian world is not something which cannot be achieved. It can be achieved when there is collective contribution. Therefore, Levithan in this novel *Boy Meets Boy*, takes a step forward and created this utopian world, a world where it is okay to be who we want to be, and not be burdened by the pressure laid by the society. Acceptance from the part of the society is seen largely in the novel.

Acceptance is one of the major factors that stands out largely in *Boy Meets Boy*. The setting of the novel is completely different from that of the world that we as a reader imagine it to be. The setting is filled with people who are positive towards the gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgender and various kinds of sexuality that is present in the society. The plot revolves around the town which every gay and lesbian dreamt of, a world filled with positivity, where there is no room for hatred and discrimination. There is no pressure given to the characters when it come to their gender and sexual preference. In this little town, it is normal for two guys and two girls to roam around in school corridor, falling into the arms of each other. Whereas, it is also okay to be with peers from opposite sexes. In many cases, unacceptance leads to tragedy, especially the gays and lesbians. But in this novel, the case takes a turn towards positivity, a possible future which gives hope to the people.

As such, in *Boy Meets Boy*, the love story between two boys is treated as completely normal thing. In this little town, the people were not worried about the differences that surrounds them. Instead, they celebrate the differences and are loved. The characters led a healthy and happy life with no burden given on the part of society, unlike other LGBT novels. Although, at one point of time, the characters also go through dilemma and confusion, they were able to breakthrough and comes out victorious as they were surrounded with people who cares, and has concern over them and their life. As such, with time, they are sure about their sexuality and the person that they wish to be.

This world is a world where Levithan says that he wishes to see and witness in the near future. There is no disappointment but the plot of the novel is filled with hope and bright future. There is no big coming out scenes where the characters decide to take their own life because of the pressure that they get from the society. There is no threat that come along the way. In this little town, it is okay for a 15-year-old boy to have intimate feeling towards the other person belonging to same sex. Also, it is a normal thing for a gay individual to have supportive parents besides them, loving and caring for them with the best they can. Paul, the main protagonist of the novel is one of the best examples when it comes to the theme of acceptance. Since young, he came to know about himself being a gay. Moreover, he was helped and guided by his teacher, which also led him to understand himself better than ever. Instead of the hurdles that comes along with the individual revealing themselves to the world, Paul was surrounded with people who love him and accept him as he is. In the school that Paul goes to, every student hangs out together without any boundary. In the school, Paul also says that he was the first open gay class president in the history of Ms. Farquar's third-grade class. He says, "Joni was my campaign manager. She was the person who came up with my campaign slogan: VOTE FOR ME... I'M GAY!" (Levithan, 11)

As the story progresses, Paul also confesses that he is proud to be a student at his high school, and he never wants to live the place that he grew up in. This statement made by Paul also shows that he is completely satisfied and contented with his life, and the people that surrounds him. He does not have any desire to leave his school, his little utopian town and the people that lives in it. When Paul and Noah went for a date in the park, Paul says "we hold hands as we walk through the town. If anybody notices, nobody cares." (Levithan,

65) This shows that gays were accepted, and this also brings out the image of what 'normalcy' really means.

The underlying truth of the world in which this novel exists is that, there is love and acceptance from the people around, and understanding between the people who were living together as a community. Every individual, despite of belonging to various sexuality were loved and embraced by all. The novel also has a touch of modern feeling in it, because as it is seen, the modern society is becoming a little more tolerant to the gays and lesbians, as compared to how it was before; the time when David Levithan wrote this novel. The change that is seen is tremendous. And the change also brings out the attempt made by queer utopia, a future that is yet to come, but will surely come. The feeling that an individual can be oneself, despite the differences and not be guilty about it is one of the best outcomes seen in this novel. To conclude, the characters in the novel perform gender in various ways; there are masculine girls and feminine boys at the same time. For instance, Infinite Darlene is both the star quarterback and the homecoming queens in the novel. She walks the hallways in high heels and apply "more-than-possible make-up," but will sweat, grunt and break her nails on the field." (Levithan 25) Throughout the novel, there is constant mixture of feminine and masculine which is against heterosexual norm.

When it comes to queer, the only thing they concern themselves with is not only the LGBTs, but they also deal with all kinds of gender, which is considered as the 'others' in the society. Their aim is to bring equality to all, and create a possible world which will give full sexual liberation to its people. Unlike feminism, Queer stands for all kinds of gender and sexuality; the prevailing system which oppress individuals in any ways, which lets them to be discriminated and alienated in the society. And *Boy Meets Boy* has brought out the aim of queer theory through various characters that are presented in the novel. Like the quest of queer, it has created a world which has given hope and comfort to the people who are classified and categorized by the society when it comes to gender. In this novel, Levithan has questioned familiar stereotypes, such as the jock or the cheerleader, and also highlights that gender is something that we do rather than something that we are. Thomas Crisp has also pointed out that, *Boy Meets Boy* is a novel with a mission: It wants to serve as a tool for activism.

Will Grayson, Will Grayson

(Capitalized Will Grayson, and small alphabet will grayson will be used and followed accordingly in this chapter, while referring to each separate character)

Will Grayson, Will Grayson is a novel written by David Levithan and John Green in April 2010. The novel is written in a way, where there was two Will Grayson in the novel. But they were differentiated with the initial- one is referred to with capitalization and one is referred with small letter alphabet. The book's narrative is distributed evenly between Levithan and Green, where Levithan took care of one narrative, that is one Will Grayson's life, and the other took care of the other part of Will Grayson's life. The only plot that they decide to sit together and discussed was the time where the two character with same name will meet, and thus, this will have a tremendous effect in their life as the story progresses.

Both the two Will Grayson in the novel belongs to the same age where they explore and brings to light the struggles that the teenagers go through. Both the two Grayson belong to different region. But both also goes to high school. The capitalize Will Grayson is someone who loves to take himself out from the business of others. In whatever situation it maybe, he is someone who does not bother to explain himself. He believes that by keeping silent and shutting oneself up, it will save both the parties that are involved in the conversation. As such, in the later part of the novel it is seen that this Will Grayson also falls in depression and anxiety when his friends Jane and Tiny did not give enough time to him in listening to his plight. Grayson believes that he should follow the decision of the elders. As such, even though it is against his will, he decides to go along with the wishes of others, as he thinks that it will be the best for him to remain silent and comply with it. Likewise, he says;

You know how people are always saying your parents are always right? "Follow your parents' advice; they know what's good for you." And you know how no one ever listens to this advice, because even if it's true it's so annoying and condescending that it just makes you want to go, like, develop a meth addiction and have unprotected sex with eight-seven thousand anonymous partners? Well, I listen to my parents. They know what's good for me. I'll listen to anyone, frankly. Almost everyone knows better than I do. (Levithan, 74)

Hence, the above lines show the submissiveness of the capitalize Will Grayson towards the advice of the others and the people around him. His submissiveness also lends him in trouble, especially when it comes to Tiny trying to pair him up with Jane. In this situation, although in the first place he did not have feelings for Jane, he was stuck in between because he was unable to speak up for himself, for which his motto is to shut up and stay silent. But as the plot progresses, the thinking and the belief of Grayson in keeping himself silent in every situation also changes.

On the other hand, the other will grayson, whose part was all initialized by small letter alphabets, he was a kind of person who shuts himself out from every people around him. He was unable to get along with his other mates in school. But at the same time, he also had a friend named, Laura, who was with him all along in the novel. Here, will grayson's parents were divorced when the novel opens. As such, he was looked after by his mother, and he sees as to how hard his mother works in order to provide the best for him. As such, in the novel, many a times he also feels pity for his mother because he feels that she is not living a life which should be lived by all individuals.

Grayson is a kind of person who enjoys lonesome; a company with thyself. He does not wish to have a conversation with anyone about his life except Isaac, the guy that he met online. He does not wish to carry any conversation because one thing will lead to the other, and at the end he will be compelled to express himself, thus, carry on with the conversation. As such, in the novel he says, "I feel want to say, 'I feel sorry for you, I really do,' but that might start a conversation, and a conversation might start a fight, and then I'd feel so guilty I might have to move away to Portland or something." (Levithan, 21) It is seen that he wants to convey these words to his mother who is trying hard to have a conversation with him. But on the other hand, knowing the intention of his mother, he decides to strike the conversation off as he does not want one thing to lead to the other.

Here, in this part of the novel, will grayson belongs to gay community unlike the other Will Grayson. Although he was gay, he never bothers to reveal it to anyone around him. He kept it to himself and revealed it only at the later part of the novel. He does not enjoy the company of anyone. And in the novel, he also says that he feels much better when he comes home and finds that his mother was not home. He feels good and glad to be left all alone in his home. As such, he also says that when school gets over, the other mates are excited

about the after activities and the co-curricular activities which they can enjoy and have fun together. But for Grayson, he cannot wait for the bell to ring in order for his return to his home. In his life, there was only one person whom he is close to and can share his feelings openly. That is Isaac whom he met online and spends most of his time with when he comes home from school. The isolation of Grayson from the people around is shown in the lines below;

I haven't told anyone about Isaac because it's none of their business. I love that he knows who everyone is but nobody knows who he is. If I had actual friends that I felt I could talk to, this might cause some conflict, but since right now there'd only need to be one car to take people to my funeral, I think it's okay. (Levithan, 30)

As stated above by Grayson, it is seen that he is not interested in any of his relationship with his peers. He says, "everyone in our school has afterschool activities. Mine is going home." (Levithan, 25) Even his mother is sometimes, a hindrance to him. He also says that at times he wishes that his mother will also be able to get a suitable partner for herself. That way she will also lead a happy life, as well as he will be able to get a life that he wanted; all alone at home, enjoying his own company with Isaac by his side. But like Grayson, Grayson also changes as the story progresses after his meeting with Tiny Cooper, the huge gay guy.

Hence, in the novel, both the Graysons, although they belong to different places, the similarities between them are largely seen. Both want to shut themselves off from the rest of the world. They resort to staying silent when any question arises for them to explain themselves or give an answer to it. Both feel that silence is the best medicine and one need not bother about what the other persons are doing. Also, both the Graysons have supportive parents, especially their mothers. Their mothers were there for them, supporting them and doing what is best for them. But it is seen that, both the Graysons are not willing to carry on any serious conversation with their mothers, for which they also realize their value and the support that they are getting from them.

Both the Graysons are confused about their life and everything around them. With their confusion, it is seen that they decide to take the matter into their own hands, but it turns out to be a failure on both their parts. This also shows that we are social beings and cannot

be kept in isolation. Both the Grayson finds happiness and are contented with their life only after their acceptance and the support and encouragement that they have got from their friends and the people around them. The one differences in them is that, one Will Grayson is heterosexual, whereas, the other will grayson is homosexual. But despite their differences, both are also searching and longing for love, a love that will help them keep going in their life, which they also find as the novel progresses.

Thus, this novel *Will Grayson, Will Grayson* by David Levithan and John Green is one such novel which portrays both the life of a heterosexual and homosexuals. There is no biased seen in any relationship. Both the sides also go through trauma and confusion, for which they can attain their breakthrough only when they decide to accept themselves and value the life that has been given to them. As such, both the sides of life are brought forth in the novel by the two Will Grayson. The novel is one of the perfect examples for the when one talks about queer, where there is no bias, and all kinds of love and life is brought into context.

Identity Crisis

Identity is one of the most common topics when one talks about the life of all the young adults. Oxford Dictionary defines identity crisis as, “a state of confusion arising from an inability to reconcile conflicting aspects of one’s personality.” With the changing growth and development taking place in one’s body, one is able to differentiate the truth and also the false things that are being portrayed before us. As such, when one is unable to classify and differentiate one’s wants and desire, there identity crisis and also role confusion comes in. This is one of the major problems that is seen in the life of many people, especially the school goers; the characters in the novel.

When one talks about queer, they want to bring equality to all genders, which is not limited only to the LGBT community. But they are talking about all the rights of the people as a whole, collectively. They are talking about a society, a future where there is no discrimination based on one’s preferences and one’s sexuality. They stand for the condition where; a man need not worry about their masculinity and woman need not care about them portraying their femininity in front of the people and society as a whole. But in today’s context, it is seen that many youths, especially the gays and lesbians are unable to cope up

with the social standard of the society. As such, when they are unable to identify themselves with the world, the only thing that is left for them is to isolate themselves, as they do not feel the need to express and explain themselves to the people around them. The result is something which they perceive will only bring disappointment; which in turn, their action also results to depression. And this is something which Levithan and Green has vividly portrayed in their novel; young teens trying to find their way out, thus, going through countless hurdles in midway.

Will Grayson

In the novel, one Grayson is narrated by Levithan, whereas, the other Grayson is narrated by Green. First, we will talk about the life of Will Grayson, whose part was written and narrated by Green; initials are that of capital alphabets. Will Grayson is surrounded by his friends, Tiny Cooper and Jane. He was someone who believes in the concept of silence. Whenever he is faced with situation which compels him to give an explanation or an answer, he makes sure that he stays silent and ignore the things that are being asked by the other party. And this, he feels is the best remedy to continue on living in a community without any troubles coming one's way. The reaction from the side of Grayson towards life is something which every individual goes through at one point of life. When there is no one to help and understand, the remedy that one finds is to isolate oneself from the rest of the world, which in turn brings more harm, chaos and confusion in one's life.

Grayson was someone who believes that following the concept of others will bring change and also benefits to oneself. As such, he does not care to associate or bring up his ideas. But instead, he goes along with what has been decided for him by the others in his life. His less words and his notion that communication only brings confusion has led him to belief that the decision that are brought upon by others are the best for him. Which in return, is himself losing his own identity and the freedom and liberation that has been given to him. Will does not belief in the notion that one can make the decision for oneself in life. As such, even when the story opens, he says;

When I was little, my dad used to tell me, "Will, you can pick your friends, and you can pick your nose, but you can't pick your friend's nose." This seemed like a reasonably astute observation to me when I was eight, but it turns out

to be incorrect on a few levels. To begin with, you cannot possibly pick your friends, or else I never would have ended with Tiny Cooper. (Levithan, 1)

The above extract from the text shows that Grayson does not have the will to make decisions for himself. He believes that one cannot make decision and pick things for oneself. Grayson is someone who denies himself when it comes to his own feelings and desire. In the novel, it is seen that Grayson was driven by the plans of Tiny Cooper. Tiny wants to make a connection between Jane and Grayson. As such, he tries his best to bring them together. At first, the tactics used by Tiny is something which Grayson does not acknowledge at all. But on the other side, he was unable to refuse the game played by Tiny. As such, he landed up in trouble by letting her to think that he too has interest in her. In the process, Grayson was unable to bring out his real self, thus, the atmosphere becomes tense in the process. Grayson, in his own thoughts, there are lots that he wanted to say it out lot. Many things are going on his mind about Jane, but he is unable to speak out his thoughts. As such, when he was with Jane, he thought to himself;

I realize this is not, like boyish. I realize that properly speaking guys should only think about sex and the acquisition of it, and that they should run crotch-first toward every girl who likes them and etc. But: The part I enjoy most is not doing, but the noticing. Noticing the way she smells like oversugared coffee, and the difference between her smile and her photographed smile, and the way she bites her lower lips, and the pale skin of her back. I just want the pleasure of noticing these things at a safe distance- I don't want to have to acknowledge that I am noticing. I don't want to talk about it or do stuff about it. (Levithan, 45)

Hence, Grayson wants to be put in a position where he is safe. He does not want to express himself and let others know about his real self. Thus, in doing so, he is trying to hide his real identity, thus, hiding his true self in the closet. Grayson represents the heterosexual world, where there is chaos and confusion when it comes to one's thoughts and feelings. As such, he, instead of trying to think about the whole process, he starts to rely on the decision of the others around him. In doing so, he lost the will to take decisions for himself, thus, not realizing that he is losing his identity in the process.

In the novel, Grayson seems to highly regard the decision made for him by his parents and the people around him. As such, when Tiny pushes him towards Jane, it did not take time for him to fall in love with her. But his indecisiveness and his will to remain silent, thus, suppressing his own thoughts and feelings has led him to the way of depression as the story progresses. In the novel, the fact that Tiny continuously pushing him towards Jane is something which really tires him out. As such, he says to himself without speaking it out to Tiny about his frustration;

I'm tired of going where I'm pushed. It's one thing to get pushed around by my parents. But Tiny Cooper pushing me toward Jane, and then pushing me toward a fake ID, and then laughing at the fuckup that resulted, and then leaving me here alone with a goddamned second-rate hot do when I don't even particularly like first-rate hot dogs- that's bullshit. (Levithan, 90)

Here, Grayson knows that he has been pushed around by Tiny Cooper. Tiny Cooper is someone who always has a way out, who is expressive when it comes to what he wants and desires. But Grayson is just opposite to how he is. He wants to find a way out, in order to release his frustration. But Grayson was unable to boldly speak up for himself. This is something which is very prevalent when it comes to the young teens. They are fighting hard to retain the identity that they hold, but meantime, knowing the fact that they are not being themselves, and are driven by the people around them; the courage and confidence in them is not enough for them to come out from their comfort zone, and from their own little closet that they have set for themselves. This has made them to sunk deeper and deeper in their identity crisis.

In the novel, Grayson, guided by Jane and Tiny Cooper, has led Grayson to go for a fake ID, as for him to enjoy along with them. Through them, Grayson also comes to know that this was something which everyone is attaining for. As such, he also decides to go for a fake ID. But later on, when he was finally about to make use of the ID that has been provided, he comes to realize that there was a mistake in it, which has pulled him back in attaining the concert. Instead of sympathizing with him, Jane and Cooper just laugh off at him, thus, he was left all alone; nothing to do which drove him to the porn store where he met the other will grayson. Here, the fake ID also shows that the individuals want to be accepted and be belonged to. They do not want to be different from the rest of the world. As such, they try

their best to fit in, but when they fail to fit in that world, they also fall into the pit of depression where there is no escape. At this juncture, they also realize that all along they are all by themselves. Here in this situation, Grayson wanted to show his friends that although he was left out from the concert, he himself had a good time; which he fails to prove it when Jane and Cooper finally come out from the concert. Here, the feeling of wanting to be belonged to is something which is a driving force in each life of young teens.

Hence, the confusion and the feeling of wanting to belonged to on the part of Grayson has shown his struggle and his confusion when it comes to his own identity. He wants to please the other party, for which he decides to be silent in order not to create any more confusion in their relationship. He does not want any complications resulting out for the sole purpose of his actions. As such, he is stuck in between self and others. And his inability to express and be who he is has frustrated him enough in the novel. And the struggle that Grayson is going through in the novel is something which every teen, at one point or the other goes through when it comes to the formation of their identity.

will grayson

On the other hand, the other will grayson which was narrated by David Levithan is also another character which portrays identity crisis in the life of the teens. will grayson was a homosexual man. His world was filled with anxiety and depression for which, since, the starting of the novel he has been taking pills in order to help his depression. He was taken care of by his mother. His mother and father divorce while he was still young. As he has been growing up and living together with his mother, he has seen how his mother struggles each day in order to provide the best for him. He sees through his mothers' problem. But instead of comforting her and speaking out his minds, he decides to keep it to himself, as he does not want to prolong the conversation from one to the other.

Will grayson is a kind of person who just shuts out himself completely from the rest of the world. He does not want to get himself associated with anyone. He loves and enjoy his own lonesome company. He was a gay individual who never shares his sexuality to anyone. On the other hand, he also does not feel the need to share with anyone because he feels that it will just become a hurdle to his life. When the novel opens, the first words that grayson said was, "I am constantly torn between killing myself and killing everyone around me. those

seem to be the two choice everything else is just killing time.” (Levithan, 20) Here, grayson does not find any happiness in his life. He does not want to value others, as well as does not want the care, love and affection from others. All these are some silly thoughts that he believes is possessed by human beings.

Everything around grayson seems silly and not worth it. Every morning when he is leaving home, his mother is always there to wish him ‘goodbye’ or ‘bye.’ But for grayson, this is the silliest thing that one can wish for each other. He says, “I do not say ‘good-bye.’ I believe that’s one of the bullshittiest words ever invented. It’s not like you’re given the choice to say, ‘bad-bye’ or ‘awful-bye’ or ‘couldn’t-care-less-about-you-bye’. Every time you leave, it’s supposed to be a good one. Well, I don’t believe in that. I believe against that.” (Levithan, 21) All the thoughts running in his minds contradicts with the things happening around him. But he does not care to explain or express himself in either way.

The action that grayson portray outside is completely different from what he is feeling inside. But he is someone with very less words, he cannot bring himself to justify it. He is just hidden behind his own thoughts, behind the wall that he has created for himself in the meantime. When it comes to his mother, he knows very well about the sacrifices that she makes for him. As such, he also knew that he should appreciate her. But these are something that battles inside his minds and thoughts. When talking about his mother, he thought to himself, “I feel sorry for you, I really do. but that might start a conversation, and a conversation might start a fight, and then I’d feel so guilty I might have to move away to Portland or something.” (Levithan, 21)

In the novel, grayson know very well about him, being gay. But he did not reveal this to anyone, not to his mother or to his friend maura. As such, he finds comfort in keeping in contact with isaac, the person that he met online. Every day he wishes to chat with isaac and tell him all about the happenings of his day. With isaac, he does not hide his true self. And he also finds comfort with the fact that there is someone out there who is just like him. He made sure that he doesn’t mention this friend to anyone because he does not want to go through any kind of interrogation about his love life. But when time comes for them to meet, he could not hide his excitement; only to be disappointed at the end of the day. The fact that grayson was finding comfort and confidence in revealing his real self to the others, but not to his online friend isaac, shows that he was not willing to come out of his comfort

zone. The identity that he portrays on the surface is that of others. In the same way, as grayson cannot be himself in school, he longs to go home and spent time with isaac, his online friend.

In this present day, the youths are unable to come out of their comfort zone and reveal their real self. They are scared of the obligations that will come along their way with them revealing them true self. The same confusion was going on with that of grayson. He was also worried about as to how his mother would react when she comes to know that her son was gay and thus, will not be able to provide her any grandchildren. But little did he know of what was going on in the mind of his mother as he, grayson was not taking the initiative of asking her opinion and the things that she has to say regarding his matter. Hence, inability to accept oneself and also others at the same time contributes greatly to identity crisis in the novel. The characters are lost in their own thoughts and are unable to get hold of themselves and the reality that surrounds them.

When grayson meets tiny cooper, he was astonished because he feels that there is nothing that is there in tiny which draws his desires towards him. Tiny was a large gay person who can never go unnoticed when he enters the room. As such, even for grayson it was hard to not notice him. But at the same time, he was also not willing to accept the fact that he is drawn towards tiny cooper. As such grayson says,

the sick thing is, I have to admit there's something a little bit attractive about him. I don't get it. Its lie, you know how sometimes you see a really sexy baby? wait, that sounds fucked up. that's not what I mean. but it's like, even though he's as big as a house (and I'm not talking about a poor person's house either), he's got a super-smooth skin and really green eyes and everything is in, like, proportion. so, I'm not feeling the repulsion I would expect to feel toward someone three times my size. I want to tell him I should be out killing some people now, not taking a stroll with him. but he takes a little of the murder off my mind. It's not like it won't be there later. (Levithan, 143)

The above extract from the text shows that grayson knew very clearly as to what his feelings towards tiny is. But at the same time, he is not willing to accept the true feelings that is within him. Thus, in the process he also tries to comes up with excuses for which he

presumes is not fit for both of them to be together as a couple. He was not willing to accept his own desire, instead, trying to surpass it. Hence, the reaction from the side of will grayson shows that he was not ready to face his real self. He feels that his real identity should not be made known to the world. For which he also feels that isaac was someone whom he should be with, as with him, he does not need to worry about how people will look at them as, as the conversation between them remains only within themselves.

Will grayson looked forward for his meeting with isaac. As such twenty hours before their meet, he was unable to control his own excitement. He thought about how they would talk and converse. Grayson was worried as to what he should wear when he meets isaac. He went through his closet and as he could not decide for himself, he says that he feels like murdering his closet, as he could not come to conclusion. Although he wears the comfortable cloth that he has, he was worried that it might not be up to the taste of isaac. As such, he wanted to wear and dressed in something will get the attention of isaac but he could not decide which is best suited for the day. The confusion of grayson here shows that he was trying to be someone else. If he is confident in his own personal identity, he will not worry about the things that will run through the minds of isaac about his choice of his clothes. But at this juncture, grayson was looking into himself through the eyes of others, for which he is unable to come to a conclusion of being himself. This is the drawback of trying to fit in someone's world which in actual, we don't belong to.

The frustration of trying to fit in is expressed by grayson in his conversation with tiny cooper when they were discussing about depression. This shows that grayson wants to start being himself and not depend on any other things. He wants to tell the world who he is, but he feels that no one will be there to listen to it. Henceforth, he says;

we're coming dangerously close to the conversations I'd have with maura, when she'd say she knew exactly what I was going through, and I'd have to explain that, no, she didn't, because her sadness never went as deep as mine. I had no doubt that tiny thought he got depressed, but that was probably because he had nothing to compare it to, still, what could I say? that I didn't feel depressed- instead it was like the depression was the core of me, of every part of me, from my mind to my bones? ...that I hated those pills so much, because I knew how much I relied on them to live?... no, I

couldn't say any of this. Because, when it all comes down to it, nobody wants to hear it. no matter how much they like you or love you, they don't want to hear it. (Levithan, 209)

Hence, from the foregoing discussion it is clear that both the grayson are longing for acceptance and understanding from the people around them. They are fed up of getting pushed and not being able to explain themselves, thus, come to a concluding end. But all their striving seems unworthy because they feel that they don't belong to it. And hence, the confusion when it comes to their identity is faced by many who are seen and labelled as different by the society. Because of the label that is instilled in them, they are unable to accept themselves and who they really want to be. In the novel, Tiny Cooper was one person who is not willing to submit to the identity set by the society. He also says that there is nothing wrong with being in love and he also does not feel ashamed by his hugeness and the eyes that are drawn towards him as he passes by because he knows that he will not be able to do anything about it. He accepts himself as he is.

The reason as to why individuals face with identity crisis when they are in their teen age is because of the label that the society labels for each individual. It is expected that one should act and live according to one's gender. The pressure that they get from the society pushes them towards isolation which in turns results to depression, like the characters in the novel. And as such, the aim of queer is to remove this label set in the society; and for all to live as equal, with freedom and liberation given to all without any bias towards any gender and sexuality.

Self-Discovery

Britannica Dictionary has defined self-discovery as, "the act or process of gaining knowledge or understanding of your abilities, character, and feelings." (Britannica, *self-discovery*) Self-discovery and acceptance is very important when it comes to a person's life. When an individual does not have knowledge about what one needs and wants, his/her life becomes a meaningless one with no will and purpose to live on. As such, to be appreciative of one's life and be confident with what one is, one should be able to discover oneself at the very first instance.

In *Will Grayson, Will Grayson*, self-discovery stands out as one of the central themes. All the characters, especially the two Will Grayson, throughout the novel they are striving towards finding themselves and discover themselves in order to feel belonged to and be accepted by the people around them. In the novel, both the Grayson are unable to bring themselves to get associated with the people around them as they are unable to accept the flaws around them. They are just confined to their own little nutshell, which in return has caused immense problem to their life as seen in the progression of the novel. As such, they were able to find their way out only when they are able to discover their true self. The whole novel revolves around the discovery of self, and one's thoughts and feelings; what the characters really wants in life.

From the starting of the novel, there is confusion arising because of the two contrasting characters who were both named as Will Grayson. One Will Grayson shuts everyone out of his life, and the other Will Grayson is seen suffering from depression, unable to leave the pills that he depended for living. But although there are two characters speaking from their own experience and views towards life, their perspective and their aim remains the same. For which they are able to come at a concluding end through their meeting, and at the same time discovering their own self. Self-discovery has brought two contrasting plots together into one clear cohesive story line, within the same high school story told by two different characters.

As the story progresses, it is seen that both the Grayson are suffering and struggling in their own way because they believe in shutting themselves out of the world and the people around them. The Capitalize Will Grayson believe in silence and shutting up when there comes a time for him to express and explain himself. He thinks that it is best to keep oneself away from any lousy conversation in order to prevent oneself from indulging further communication and conversation. On the other hand, the other Will Grayson was suffering from depression and he also at the same time does not have any interest in getting himself involved with his peers and his loved ones. Even his mother is seen as a hurdle towards his life at some point of time in the novel. Both the Grayson are unable to come out from their inner self because they are unable to discover the joy of sharing and listening to the other. As such, almost throughout both are searching and fighting to find someone whom they truly love and whom they truly want to be with. But it is impossible to love someone

without loving oneself. And this is something which both the Grayson lacks when it comes to their individual self.

Both the Grayson are trying to find the love of their life. As such, the first Grayson was crushing on Jane Turner, while the other, later after meeting the first Grayson has got connected with Tiny Cooper, whom the first Grayson defines and describes him as, "Tiny Cooper is not the world's gayest person, and he is not the world's largest person, but I believe he may be the world's largest person who is really, really gay, and also the world's gayest person who is really, really huge." (Levithan, 1)

Will Grayson was not sure about his feelings towards Jane. As such, when Tiny Cooper tries to bring them together, he was not able to accept it, at the same time, he was not able to bring himself to deny it because he does not want to hurt the feelings of Jane. Hence, he was pushed around by Tiny. In most of the cases, Grayson just comply with the ideas of others, not giving importance to his own feelings. For him silence is something which can rescue every problem. He feels that silence helps oneself to contemplate about the situation, thus, not bringing in or adding anymore problems to it.

When Grayson starts to develop feelings for Jane, he does not feel the need to declare it to her. Instead, he feels that things will work out better when he keeps it within himself. As in, he says, "she's cute and she's really smart in precisely the right slightly pretentious way, and there's a softness to her face that sharpens everything she says, and I like her, and it's not just that I should be honest with her." (Levithan, 129) The thinking of Grayson contrast with that of the others. For the rest, they feel that expressing one's feelings and emotions helps in relationship, but as for him, he chose to be silent about it, because he thinks that, that is best for him and also for Jane.

In any way, Grayson does not feel the need to communicate with the rest. As such, when he comes to know that his crush Jane has a boyfriend he went through mental breakdown and falls into depression. This happened because he was unable to express his feelings towards her. When he faces this crisis, he feels that there was no one he could turn up to, to share his feelings. Jane was occupied with her boyfriend and at the same time, Tiny Cooper was also busy with his paly and also his relationship with grayson. Henceforth, Grayson was really down, and as a result, he once again shut himself out from others. Even Cooper tells

grayson that Grayson was not talking to him, and he does not know the reason behind it. Before, Grayson was someone who does not acknowledge the romantic relationship between two people. Everything that the two does in order to get close with one another, thus, keeping the relationship alive is something which Grayson thinks that he will not be able to bring himself to. But the moment he acknowledges his feelings towards Jane, he unconsciously starts to do things which he despises previously. This change is shown vividly in the below extract lines from the novel;

The next day, Mom drops me off early. I go in and slip a note in Jane's locker, which I've gotten in the habit of doing. It's always just a line or two that found from some poem in the gigantic poetry anthology my sophomore English teacher taught from. I said I wouldn't be the kind of boyfriend who reads her poetry, and I'm not, but I guess I am the kind of cheesy bastard who slips lines of poetry into her mornings. (Levithan, 251)

After Grayson reveals his true feelings for Jane, he started to notice every single thing in her. He was also excited and happy about looking forward to meeting Jane, thus, spending time with her and communicating with her. This is something which Grayson never imagines himself to be in. Jane also tells him, "I just think if you don't say the honest thing, sometimes the honest thing never becomes true, you know ...*if you don't say the honest thing, it never becomes true.*" (Levithan, 254) The things uttered by Jane to Grayson were something which everyone needs to understand and put it into practice. And the same was done by Grayson. And with this, Grayson was able to tell Jane,

I just realized something. I really like you. You're amazing, and I so want to be your boyfriend, because of what you just said, and also because that shirt makes me want to take you home now and do unspeakable things while we watch live-action Sailor Moon videos. But but but you're totally right about saying the honest thing. I think if you keep the box closed long enough you do kill the cat, actually. (Levithan, 254)

Here, after going through the struggle, finally Will Grayson was able to speak up about his thoughts and the fact that he cares about Jane. Previously, Grayson's motto was silence and shut up. But now his concept has changed, contradicting to the previous one. With this

change he was also able to express out the frustration that he had towards Tiny Cooper. He tells him;

You totally ditch me every time you have a boyfriend, and then you come crawling back when you're heartbroken. You don't listen to me. You don't even seem to like me. You get obsessed with the play and totally ignore me except to insult me to our friend behind my back, and you exploit your life and the people you say you care about so that your little play can make people love you and think how awesome you are and how liberated you are and how awesome you are, but you know what? Being gay is not an excuse for being a dick. (Levithan, 257)

Here, when Grayson was able to throw this out of his mind to his friend Cooper, he was relieved, at the same time Cooper was also able to express his feelings towards their friendship. This has brought the two closer and also more understanding towards each other. Hence, through his friends and the people around him, Grayson finally was able to express his thoughts boldly, which has helped him as well as the people around him. He was able to bring out his insights, thus, discovering himself to the extent where he was finally lifted from his burden of shutting off people from his life.

will grayson was suffering from depression. As such, he was not able to even declare about the fact of him being gay. Instead of associating with others, he says, 'I am constantly torn between killing myself and killing everyone around me.' (Levithan, 20) The lines show the kind of life that grayson is living. The only person that grayson was really into was his friend Isaac whom he met online, whom later on he comes to know was not real but someone who was created by Maura. grayson knows about the feelings that Maura has towards him. But he did not care to explain it to her, about him being gay because he knows that once he opens up about this there will be tons of questions that will be flooding towards him. And he does not want to be stuck in that moment. As such, he always tries to take himself away from her. will grayson does not have any joy in conversing and engaging in any activities with the rest. As such, when he sees his teacher trying to teach them and engage them in the communication process, he feels that it is a worthless job. Likewise, he says,

I have no idea why anyone would want to become a teacher. I mean, you have to spend the day with a group of kids who either hate your guts or are kissing up to you to get a good grade. That has to get to you after a while, being surrounded by people who will never like you for any real reason. (Levithan, 23)

Hence, the above lines explain the insights of will grayson. This shows that he was not open to the change and the things happening around him. His thoughts have completely diverted from reality. But him, trying to reason out his teachers also shows that he is striving towards discovering himself in the process. will grayson has given up everything in life. But when it comes to Isaac, he finds himself wishing to work things out with him. As in, he also tries to refrain himself from it because he fears the disappointment that it will bring once, he lost it. But things started to change as he continues on with Isaac. But he did not want to keep his hope up. Therefore, he says,

this is dangerous because as a rule I don't let myself wish for things. too many times when I was a kid, I would put my hands together or squinch my eyes shut and I would devote myself fully to hoping for something... and every single time, I'd be met with a resounding wall of complete indifference... I never hoped for everything to get better- only for one thing to get better. and it never did. so eventually I gave up. I gave up every single day. (Levithan, 35)

will grayson was unable to tell his mother about him being gay. But after he went to Chicago to meet his online friend, after his return he saw his mother waiting for him. He was compelled to tell out the truth. But since he has not confronted to his mother, he thought that things will become a mess; coming with the revealing. As such, he says, "look, mom, I am totally gay, and I'd appreciate it if you could get the whole freakout over with now, because, yeah, we have the rest of our lives to deal with it, but the sooner we get through the agony part, the better." (Levithan, 164) He expects his mother to be in agony, thus, cursing him for not giving her and grandbabies with a wifey, expressing her disappointments to him. But the things that he expects and the reaction of his mother contradicts with each other. Instead of agonizing over it, his mother was willing to accept him as he was. At the same time, she also gives him a hug, which as a result give him more confidence.

Soon the whole school comes to know about grayson being gay. He was not at all comfortable with it, but he is also relieved because now he can freely express his thoughts and feelings. Now things have taken a complete turn. His belief in enjoying his own company has now changed. Even his mother was willing enough to invite Tiny over dinner, at the same time giving them time to get to know each other. But despite it, grayson also finds it hard when Tiny comes over to his school to meet him. He does not feel comfortable holding his hands, giving his large built. But he decides to go along with it because it is something which he cannot ignore. As in, in the end, when tiny and him breaks up, he got enough courage and confidence to go searching for him in the midst of his play. All these things change and took place because finally, grayson was able to discover his feelings and also the people around him. The discovery has led him to live a happier and more comfortable life.

Tiny Cooper

In the novel, the one person who is able to come out victorious despite all odds is Tiny Cooper, Will Grayson's best friend and will grayson's boyfriend. Tiny Cooper does not feel the need to pretend as someone whom he is not. He knows the attention that he gets when he is in school or is out with friends. But this least bothers him, because he knows that he cannot do anything to change the way he is. As such, he accepts himself as he is. Thus, he decides to make a play out of his life; showing the world as to how his life goes and how he was able to get through all of it. Cooper is someone who falls in love easily. At the same time, it is seen that, he also had numerous boyfriends in the past. Because of his personality, his friends around him does not care much when it comes to his love life because they knew that he will get hurt at one instance and the next instance, he will be crushing on someone else. Despite the things that are said, and is going around him, he just says, "People are just such idiots, ... As if there's something wrong with being in love." (Levithan, 4) Here, it is seen that Cooper cares least about the opinions of the others.

From the very first place, Tiny Cooper as the person who discovers what he really wants and he does not hesitate to go to any extent in order for him to achieve his goal. As such, when he decides to bring a play about his life, he was not supported. But he did not give up, instead he brings people together and form a group where the characters were selected for the play. Because of his unceasing effort, he was able to bring to get budget from the student's council in order to direct his play. Henceforth, at the end of the story, it is seen

that he was able to achieve his goal successfully without any hindrances. The fact of him being gay and portraying his life before the audience has led many to understand the kind of life that gays are living, and that they are also same as any other normal beings. He was able to touch the hearts of many through his play. And in the end, everyone cheered for him and showed their support for him, encouraging him to move forward successfully.

From the life of the two Grayson's and Tiny Cooper, it is evident as to how important self-discovery is in one's life. Tiny was able to go smoothly with his life because he was not dragged behind by others in the novel. His target and his wants were very clear since the beginning of the novel. But contrasting to that, the two Grayson's went through lots of hurdles and struggles in between because they were unable to discover themselves, and discover what they want in life.

Hence, the struggles that one goes through in life is something which none can escape from. But the result depends on what one decides to handle it, thus, turning the negativity to positivity. But the moment, one decides to be laid back, they meet their tragedy, thus, bringing the burden upon themselves; unable to move forward. The social construct and the opinions of the people will be many. But the decision is upon one's own individual self as to how they view the opinions and influences from the external force. As such, queer theory strives towards breaking up this traditional notion that one has in life. One should be able to break away from the traditional thoughts, thus, be open to the changes that are taking place in one's life and one's society. Only then, the dreams of queer people will be achieved. And at the same time, like the characters in the novel, the queer people should also not shut themselves out from the rest of the world. But they should strive towards discovering themselves and bringing forth their thoughts and feelings before the people; only then, everyone will be able to live a happy and contented life.

Thus, in the novel, the characters were struggling with their life because they are unable to identify themselves, failing to discover their desire. But once they are able to sort every piece together, finally, all has come to a concluding end, where everyone was happy with the things going on around them. This is the discovery that everyone should make, in order for people to accept and understand us in the society.

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CHAPTER - V

CONCLUSION

When looking at the present scenario, there are many people who are coming out from their so-called safe zone, trying to aware the people of their existence. Many has made use of the social media platform that has been provided. There are many individuals who are trying to talk about LGBT community and their rights as to why they should be included and be treated as normal in the society instead of discriminating them. Many are questioning as to why it's that hard for people to accept the diversity in people. Be it homosexuals or heterosexual, everyone is born equal and should be treated equally.

David Levithan is one such writer who has got enough experience from the world he lives in. He has seen the dark side of the life that the LGBTs are living. The worst scenario is the abandonment and isolation of the individuals. Therefore; in many of his interview he says that he does not want to keep on writing about the things that can be seen and are known by the people. As such, in most cases, the trauma is presented again and again which is impacting the homosexuals to live a more hidden life. But on the other side, Levithan also opines that this is not the end. This is not the way it should be. Leaving aside the problems, there are also the bright side which very less people try to explore.

Many a times Levithan was asked whether the characters in the novel portrays the life that he has led. He did not deny the fact that it was him, neither it was nothing to do with his life. But he also says that, every authors' work has something related to his/her life. Levithan also says that in order to let the world know about LGBT, every author should be willing to fight for the freedom that should be given. He also brought an instance by saying that, when he published his book, *Boy meets Boy*, be it in library or bookstore, the storekeeper and the librarians try to push the book backward in order for the people not to come across it. Therefore; in every possible way, he tries to push his book in the front in order for the people to notice it and grab it. This is the courage he was talking about. When one wants to succeed, one also needs to be willing to go extreme until victory is achieved. He has gone through the worse, but the difference is he was supported by the people around him; who genuinely wishes the best for him. Likewise, he expressed this in his novel *Boy Meets Boy* by saying, "In this space, in this moment, we are who we want to be. I am

lucky, because for me that doesn't take that much courage. But for others, it takes a world of bravery to make it to the clearing." (Levithan, 184) As such, in his novels, especially the selected novels that have been discussed in the above chapters, he brings out his concept about the life that and society that he wishes to see in the society.

Every Day

Levithan says that he always wonders as to how it will be for a person to live as a genderless person. He wanted to portray the life through his work, in order for the society to know the reality, the thoughts that runs through the people who they define as 'other' without considering the life they are living. Hence; In the novel *Every Day*, David Levithan wants to present before his audience that it is not impossible for a person to adapt the gender that is set to him/her in the society. As the person grow each day, the way he thinks and act also will change. Gender is something which is stable. It is dynamic. Therefore, the society should not look at the way the person is when he or she is born. In the novel, A does not care what the society thinks of them as. They live the life they want. They do what they feel is comfortable for them. The opinions of the society do not matter to them. They are least bothered by it. When it comes to one's outlook appearance, A says;

I am always happiest when I am just attractive enough. Meaning: other people won't find me unattractive. Meaning: I make a positive impression. Meaning: my life is not defined by my attractiveness, because that brings its own perils as well as its own rewards. (Levithan, 148)

When it comes to Rhiannon, Levithan has portrayed her realistically. A typical societal person when she first met A. Rhiannon is always worried and concern about how the society will look at her. She knows that she loves A, and she wants to be with them. But at the same time, she also could not accept the fact that A will not be there with her at all times. This shows that Rhiannon, as a girl is scared to face the world alone because all her life, she feels save because of the male folks around her. This is the reason why she could not give up Justin, although she knew that Justin does not concern her and does not treat her like the way he should. She was also a kind of person who concerns the outlook appearance the most. Therefore, when A inhabits the body of someone who is attractive and reach up to the norm set by society, she is happy and accepts whatever A offers. At the same time, her

reaction changes completely when it comes to persons like Vic and Marc. Therefore, she says:

I mean, you're different person every day. And I just can't love every single person you are equally. I know it's you underneath. I know it's just the package. But I can't, A. I've tried. And I can't. I want to- I want to be the person who can do that- but I can't...And there are so many things you and I can't do...And I can't keep having it, when I know what the real answer is.
(Levithan, 278)

In this novel, Levithan's aim was to deconstruction the gender construction that has been constructed by the society. The main aim of queer theory is to deconstruct the constructed gender norm set in the society which has destroyed many lives. As such, the goal of Levithan is to bring equality in the society, and not to discriminate based on one's gender. In this heteronormative society, the act of the homosexuals is seen as a disgust which cannot be digested. Therefore; many gays and lesbians live in fear, fear of being recognized by the society. This is portrayed vividly in the novel. Also, Levithan with his character Vic, who was a transgender, brings out the image of how the society and parents can change to better, more accepted towards the transgenders. In many societies, the life of trans is not heard or seen because they fear the raged of the society. At times, many families also decide to abandon their son or daughter when the notice he transitions that is taking place. Therefore; in order to challenge this norm, Levithan sets a completely different setting for Vic. A says,

Vic was lucky in the parents he was given. They didn't care if he wanted to wear jeans instead of skirts, or play with trucks instead of dolls. It was only as he grew older, into his teens, that it gave them some pause. They knew that their daughter liked girls. But it took a while for him to articulate- even to himself- that he liked them as a boy. That he was meant to be a boy, or at least to live as a boy, to live in the blur between a boyish girl and a girlish boy.
(Levithan, 254)

In this world, it is a known fact that everyone is not privileged enough to be born to a caring and loving family. But like A, it is possible for everyone to accept themselves as they are and

to be confident about it. It is time for the LGBTs to show the world that, the society should not look at them and classify them as 'other'. But it is time to come out and tell them that everyone is equal, and should be accepted by all. Although, A was confused and tried to change his life, they come to know that there is nothing they can do about it. Therefore; the only thing is to accept their life, and go forward with it. And when they finally accept themselves, they also got accepted by the people around, especially Rhiannon.

If in the novel, A was not able to accept themselves for who they are, they will eventually meet their downfall. Negativity is the source of all evil and tragedy. But in the novel, A did not resort to this way. Instead, when they know that nothing can be done about their life, they accept themselves, not only did they accept themselves but they also succeeded in changing the minds of the people around them. This is the differences that Levithan wishes to see in all the minds of the people in the society. Once, an individual accepts himself, automatically the people around will notice the change, thus, change accordingly.

Every individual, living together as a society and community are different in their own ways. No two human beings are the same; even two identical twins have differences in them. But knowing the fact, it is us, who decides to change the concept, and turn the wheel towards our own beliefs, thus, discriminating the people whom we think is different from us, like the people in the novel, labelling A as the devil, trying to capture them by using different means and techniques. And as seen today, this is something which each of us are also doing in our way. But this thinking and mindset should be changed, as each knows that there is freedom and liberation given to all. And at the same time, each individual, like A, should not run away from one's life and destiny, but when nothing can be done, should be able to stand firm and resort to acceptance from people around; same as A did in the novel.

In a world where we can be of anything, it is the duty of each and every individual to spread love instead of hatred. Everyone in this world deserves to be loved and cared. None should be alienated from the society because of their love interests and individual's personal preferences. It is not the duty of we people to judge each other nor comment on anyone's life, living together as a community. Just as the gender and identity of the protagonist in the novel *Every Day* changes each day, even the people and individuals living in a society, as a community all differs from each other. In a world of diversity, one cannot expect all human beings to have similar taste and interests. Every individual is created differently. All are born

free in this world. Likewise, as human beings, no one have the right to take control over someone's life and interests. With the fast-changing world, the mentality of all individuals also should be upgraded. One should understand the change that is taking place each day. Hence, in this novel, David Levithan brings out the image of 'performance' that Judith Butler talks about when it comes to the set gender construction, thus, destructing the 'performance' through his character; coming out victoriously at the end of the novel.

Two Boys Kissing

David Levithan is the voice for the voiceless who dreams of bringing a change in the society, thus, creating a possible future for all, especially the queer. As such, it is seen that David Levithan, instead of bringing a topic which is irrelevant to society, he tries to bring out something which every individual in the society is well aware off, but are not willing to come out from it, thus, accept it at the same time. As such when it comes to his novel *Two Boys Kissing*, he did not hide around the bushes, or tried to portray something in the surface, thus, contrast it with the insights of the story. Instead, he was straightforward with his opinion and in portraying his ideas. As such, from the title, one can clearly see and understand as to what the story will be about.

Levithan in this novel talk about two boys who were trying to go for the longest kiss, thus, bring a change in the society by creating a world record. In this society created by Levithan, there were some characters who were open and is confident with themselves being gay, but there are also some who were not able to reveal themselves in fear of being judged and discriminated. As such, in this novel, the characters try to break the traditional social norm which is accepted by the society, thus, breaking the norm and coming out victorious from it.

When it comes to the traditional norm of sexuality, only those relationships and intimacy from opposite sex are accepted by the society. But when there is attraction between two individuals of the same sex, it is regarded as a sin which cannot be accepted by the society and the people around. Acceptance of homosexuals in this kind of society is far from reality and talk of the people. As such, the homosexuals in this kind of society lived a life hidden behind bars, not being able to come out from their own closet. This led them to take their own life, a life filled with regrets and darkness. And as shown in the novel, this is a kind of

life led by the chorus in the novel, where they say that the present life led by the youngster is something which is their lifelong dream which was not achieved while they were still alive.

In this novel, Levithan has brought into scene two contrasting life and society. The present society and the society that the chorus lived. By bringing the two society, Levithan was able to bring out the changing social norms taking place in the society, with the changing generation. As such, he starts his novel by bringing a statement made by the chorus. The said, "You can't know what it is like for us now- you will always be one step behind...You can't know what it was like for us then- you will always be one step ahead." (Levithan, 1) In the novel, the choruses are the ones who play the central role in bringing out the difference between the present and the past. They are someone who has gone through and experience the worst that one can go through in life. They were also the ones who had created the present life led by the homosexuals in the society. As such, with them in the scene, one is able to clearly classify and differentiate the two-contrasting society through them.

The Chorus talks about the kind of society they lived in. Like the present youths, they were also many among them who wishes to be with their loved ones, which is opposed by the society. The society they live in is also filled with homosexuals, which is the same as the present society. But the difference is that their world wasn't like that of the present world. All their life, they were made to stay hidden. And those people who decides to come out from their closet were made to meet their own tragedy. The present society is something which they imagine in their sleep, but not something which can be experienced in reality. But as of now, their dream has become a reality, for which the chorus are also happy and excited about. The chorus also says that many of them were abandoned when they decide to comes out openly about themselves. The people who were close to them were the ones who decides to leave them and isolate them before anyone else. Even their parents who brought them to this world has shown a different side of them. As such, they said,

Some of our parents were always on our side. Some of our parents chose to banish us rather than see us for who we were. And some of our parents, when they found out we were sick, stopped being dragons and became dragonslayers instead. Sometimes that's what it takes- the final battle.
(Levithan, 102)

But contrast to that of the Choruses world, the present world has become much more pleasant to live in. They are accepted to an extent where they do not feel isolated. They have supporting parents and siblings who are willing to stand by their side despite the criticism that they receive from the people around them. Like that of Harry's parents. During the kiss, when there were people who were criticizing the act by saying as to whether their parents were aware about their boys taking such steps in the public, Harry's parents stood up and confidently accept that they were Harry's parents and they were not ashamed of their son kissing another boy in public. The act and confidence shown by Harry's parents is something which will not be seen in the past. This shows that the parents of today's generation are becoming more accepting and more tolerant towards homosexuals as compared to that of the past.

One of the aims of queer is to break the label that is made based on one's gender. The belief that man should be masculine and female should be feminine. And when it comes to traditional society, it is believed that when it comes to relationship and marriage, there should be a male and a female, and not male and male and female and female. Henceforth, in this novel, this belief is broken by the two characters Craig and Harry. When they decide to go for the longest kiss challenge, even their school authorities and teachers were there behind their back, supporting and protecting them. There are people who were encouraged and amazed by the act of the two boys. The courage that they have portrayed is something which is praised. But as seen it all, there are also people who were not happy with the act, thus, criticizing them, calling them evil and other unpleasant words. But in response to that, Levithan in his novel says,

One of the protestor's signs catches my eyes. HOMOSEXUALITY IS THE DEVIL'S WORK, it says. And once again I think about how people use the devil as an alias for the things they fear. The cause and effect is backward. The devil doesn't make anyone do anything. People just do things and blame the devil after. (Levithan, 142)

In this novel, the classification that is made when it comes to the color and dresses of a male and a female has been degraded and not acknowledged. Be it male or female, everyone can dress according to how one wants and wishes. There should not be any label made when it

comes to the clothes worn by an individual. This is shown by Avery in the novel. When Ryan asks Avery about his pink hair, he says,

I know, strange color choice, right? For a boy born as a girl who wants to be seen as a boy. But think about it- it just shows how arbitrary gender is. Pink is female- but why? Are girls any more pink than boys? Are boys any more blue than girls? It's something that has been sold to us, mostly so other things can be sold to us. My hair can be pink because I'm a boy. Yours can be blue because you are a girl. If you free yourself from all the stupid arbitrary shit that society controls us with, you can be happier.... We did not choose our identity, but we were chosen to die by it. (Levithan, 80-81)

The above statement made by Avery has deconstruct the notion set by the society when it comes to one's gender; the fact that there should be differences in being a male and a female. It is also seen that gender construction is something which is set by the society and thus instilled by the society. It is something which is laid down in order to suppress the minority, "use the arbitrary very deliberately to keep their own power." (Levithan, 81)

Hence, the novel portrays the fact that gender construction is something which is set by the society, and not something which is present when the society come into being. As such, the social norms are set by the society in order to instill power for few people in the society. It is for the betterment and benefits for some few in the society who wishes to hold the power in the society. Hence, Levithan, in *Two Boys Kissing* has deconstructed this social norm in the society, thus, portraying a society where the traditional norm is not followed. As such, in this novel, the changing society is seen and portrayed vividly, which is also seen that for changes to be brought to society, it depends on the changing mindset and actions of the people who live together in the society. Further, through this novel, Levithan has brings forth the aim of the queer in deconstructing the instilled social norms of the society when it comes to gender and sexuality.

Boy Meets Boy

Levithan is a writer who is optimistic about the future queer in the society. When his first book YA book was published, many criticized and did not accept his book. At that time, the things that are written is purely a dream for the LGBT community. But with the passage of

time, it is seen that the things that he has portrayed in his book is slowly becoming a reality in today's society. The world is changing each day, with the changing generation. As portrayed in all his novels, the feeling of homophobia will never be completely absent in the life of the LGBTs living in a heterosexual society. But to an extent, it can also be removed from the scene, which is vividly portrayed by Levithan in his works.

With the believe of David Levithan in bringing change in the life of the LGBTs in the society, his novel *Boy Meets Boy* is a way of framing a better world, a world that he wishes to see in the future days. It is a possible world where the homosexuals can be who they want to be without being discriminated by the people around them; a utopian world where there is freedom and liberty given. In this little world created by Levithan, there is no hurdles faced by the characters. Although at certain point of time, the characters are faced with struggles, they also attain a kind of breakthrough which is very less seen in the other YA works. Also, the struggles faced by the characters are not the central focus of the novel. Instead, their coming out from their comfort zone, revealing themselves, striving for acceptance by the people around them is the central focus; portraying a completely different atmosphere; an optimistic and encouraging scene for the gays and lesbians who feels neglected and are not recognized by the people around.

Boy Meets Boy is a novel which has vividly portrayed the kind of life that the queer theory is striving for. Queer theory strives for a society where everyone is treated equally without discrimination. There is no bias based on one's gender or one's sexual preferences. A person can be who they are, and who they want to be without the fear of being isolated and discriminated. And hence, the same has been portrayed in the novel. Levithan in this novel has created a kind of society where the future queer children will live; a completely different world than that of the present society filled with chaos and discrimination because of the beliefs and for the proposed betterment of the society, which in turn is creating confusion, thus, destructing the life of the people living together collectively in the society. The differences between the reality and the world portrayed by Levithan is seen when Paul says, "I am amazed by the love I feel for so many people. I am amazed at the randomness, the comedy, and faith that brings us all together and makes us hold on. I open myself wide to take it all in. The scene plays out like a rhapsody." (Levithan, 185)

Courage is something which stands out when it comes to this novel. Because of the courage that each character holds, they were able to come out victorious at the end of the novel. And this courage is seen and portrayed particularly by Tony in the novel. In the novel, Tony was one who went through a lot of struggle in order to be accepted by his family. His family belongs to a devote Christian family. Although, his parents come to know about him being gay, they were not able to bring themselves to accept him because of their faith. This is because, generally, when it comes to Christianity, homosexual is something which is labelled as a sin by the people and the community. As such, Tony was placed in such a situation where he was not able to meet his best friend. There was no one he could turn to. But the courage that he has shown has surpasses all these hurdles in the novel. In doing so, he says to Paul,

But maybe they will know someday. I don't know. All I know is that I can't just run off. They think that being gay is going to mess up my whole life. I can't prove them right, Paul. I have to prove them wrong. And I know I can't prove them wrong by changing myself or by denying what I really am. The only way for me to prove them wrong is to try to be who I am and show them it's not hurting me to be that way. (Levithan, 152)

Here, in the above-mentioned lines, the courage shown by Tony in trying to change the minds of his parents, is something which is needed to be practiced by all the individuals in the society. They should not work towards changing themselves for the betterment of the people around them, but they should work towards letting people to understand who they really are, thus, accepting them accordingly. And this is the message which Levithan is portraying in his novel, which is portrayed through Tony. On the other hand, Paul, in seeing the change in Tony; instead of running away from the mess, he says;

I find my greatest strength in wanting to be strong. I find my greatest bravery in deciding to be brave. I don't know if I've ever realized before, and I don't know if Tony ever realized it before, but I think we both realize it now. If there's no feeling of fear, then there's no need for courage. I think Tony has been living with his fear for all his life. I think he's converting it to courage. (Levithan, 156)

Hence, in this novel, David Levithan has brought forth the belief of his, a belief that the future life of the queer will change; a safer world, filled with love and kindness, where every being will be able to live a breathable life, instead of being tied down by the norms and hurdles that comes along the way. Through his writing, David Levithan has explored various issues which have in a way mirrored the contentions of today's society, particularly, when it comes to same sexual orientation. In the present context, there are many who has accepted same sexual relationship, but at the same time, there are also many who are not able to accept the differences. Instead of accepting them, many are jailed and also led to death because of their sexual preference which is labelled as different and not normal in the society. As such, the issue of sexual identity is something which is a sensitive and a debatable topic even in the present scenario.

According to David Levithan, this should not be the case in the society. There should be no discrimination and alienation done based on one's sexual preference, but the decision should be rest upon the individual. As such, Levithan decides to take a turn from this bias, thus, portrayed a completely contrasting setting in his novel. In trying to burn down the negativity, thus, coming out with positivity, Levithan has created a world where the LGBTs can come out from the closet, thus, be confident in who they are and not being conscious about the forces that comes from the outside. In this world created by Levithan, there is no space for negativity and thus, judgement based on one's personal and individual preferences. Like the aim of queer, Levithan has portrayed a world where every differences and preferences of an individual is embraced and love. Instead, those who label others' preferences are the ones who stands out as different, and far from being normal in the society. And for this to be successful, it needs the collective effort of all the individuals in the society, and also for the homosexuals to have courage and be confident for who they are, instead of hiding away from the people around. Thus, Levithan is the voice for the voiceless, standing up for all the people who are suppressed and degraded by the majority in the society.

Will Grayson, Will Grayson

Will Grayson, Will Grayson is a novel which brings forth the image of the struggling and rebellion teen's life. In this novel, Levithan and Green did not just base their focus on the life

of homosexuals. But instead, they were able to bring to two contrasting life together, where the aim and views of life of the former and later are able to come to a sameness conclusion. Through the life of Grayson and grayson, the reader is able to come to know more about the life of the teens. Every individual, be it homosexuals or heterosexuals, everyone goes through the same problem, and thus, one should not be put front, leaving the other behind. Here, the two authors are trying to portray a kind of life where every individual should be treated equally without any bias despite their individual differences that is there in them. In the novel, it is seen that, both the Grayson suffers the same faith, for which they are able to break through, through the positive response and attitude that they get from the people around them.

Teen life is a crucial stage for all going through the process of growth and development. Many are confused about their life, thus, goes astray because they are not guided and are not surrounded by the people around them. At the same time, every individual also should be responsible enough to handle the situations and challenges that comes along with it. It is at this stage that individuals lose track of their life. This is portrayed vividly in the novel by the characters. The insights and sufferings of gay teens are seen when Tiny runs to grayson to share with him about his mental breakdown, which may does not understand and take it for granted. For which, grayson thought;

I think the idea of 'mental health day' is something completely invented by people who have no clue what it's like to have bad mental health. the idea that your mind can be aired out in twenty-four hours is a kind of like saying heart disease can be cured if you eat the right breakfast cereal. Mental health days only exist for people who have the luxury of saying 'I don't want to deal with things today' and then can take the whole day off, while the rest of us are stuck fighting the fights we always fight, with no one really caring one way or another, unless we choose to bring a gun to school or ruin the morning announcement with a suicide. (Levithan, 224-225)

On the other hand, when one is able to fully discover oneself in the society, there is something which also cannot take the person away from the things that are instilled to them. For homosexuals, it is the phobia that is present in them. And the people who are able to overcome it are the ones who survive the fight. As such, grayson was also affected by the norms of the society he lives in. But he was not shaken by it but decides to face it,

which led him to come out successfully from his comfort zone. When Tiny comes to visit him at school, he says,

The truth is, I do mind. But I know that since he's my boyfriend, the answer should be that I don't mind at all. He'd probably carry me to class in his arms, if I asked him nicely. I take his hand, which is big and slippery. But I guess I can't hide the worry on my face, because he takes one look and let's go.
(Levithan, 228)

Hence, throughout the novel, the authors are trying to convey the thoughts of queer theory. They are creating a possible future for queer, and at the same time bringing out the remedy for people to accept each other despite the differences. When one is ignored, it will lead to isolation of oneself. As such, the result will harm everyone. So as to say, Levithan and John, through the novel is trying to bring out the need for everyone to look out to each other, thus, creating a world where there is no discrimination based on one's gender and sexuality, but where everyone is accepted the way they are, which is one of the main aims of queer theory. As such, the aims of queer can be achieved when every individual, regarded as educated comes out and educate the world, taking a step forward and being a little tolerant towards lesbians and gays in portraying their love. By then, the rest of the people will follow the path of equal treatment of the LGBTs in the society.

Conclusion

Homosexuality is not accepted in many parts of the world, including India. It is considered as a crime which is still punishable before the law. For decades, homosexuality is considered and seen as a disease which is curable and can be treated by undergoing various medications and therapy. Their importance and needs are not realized in many cases. They are suppressed by the majority. Even in this present scenario, many homosexuals are falling into depression, thus, taking their own life because they were not acknowledged and accepted by the people and the society, they live in. As a result, "Queer theory is a deeply introspective discourse that draws strength from the questioning deconstructive temper of contemporary postmodern literary and aesthetic practices as well as from the embattled and beleaguered conditions that have constituted, and in a large measure still constitute, the material reality of many gay and lesbian people's everyday existence." (Mohan, 122)

In this present society, many writers are coming up against the discrimination of the LGBT community, defending them of their rights which is not given and enjoyed by them till date. They are fighting every day for their lives and the dream to live in the society, considered as “straight” like any other individuals. As, such Queer theory seeks to deconstructs the notion of the society when it comes to one’s sexual identity by problematizing and bringing to light about the world of the homosexuals. Homosexual literature is written, read, criticized, and taught within a generally hostile environment. Although we may argue about the degree of such hostility, and although we may debate its precise nature with regard to different kinds of repression, suppression, and oppression, this pervasive hostility is nevertheless an indisputable fact. To recognize this is to appreciate the sociology of literature. Thus, Gender theory offers opportunities for collective action among heterosexual feminist, lesbians, gay men, transgendered people, bisexuals, and a host of others defined as ‘other’ by the forces of tradition and conservatism. In *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) argues that:

‘Queer’ represents, among other things, an aggressive impulse of generalization; it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal...For both academics and activists, ‘queer’ gets a critical edge by defining itself against the normal rather than the heterosexual. (Warner, 26)

Queer theory has laid the foundation for the people to work towards achieving a better society, thus, walk towards positivity. Now their decision is laid upon the thought of an individual. Each individual should once again, think back about the past society and also the present society, and thus, bring the change that is needed in the society. No society can proceed and progress when one keeps on dwelling to the past. Likewise, it depends on an individual whether to change oneself, or to be adapted with the past. But in general, it is also the duty of every individual to adapt oneself with the changing situation, and not be instilled to the past. With the changing society, the mindset of the society should also be changed. As such, Malpas & Wake says that,

Even if we are never able to exercise the type of agency first implied by Judith Butler over our genders and sexualities, we do possess a certain type of analytical agency. We choose whether or not to engage critically with the world around us and with our own identities, we choose to ally

ourselves dogmatically or more supplely with certain theories or methods, and we choose finally to experiment or not experiment with new ideas and different eroticisms. Furthermore, we choose the care with which we interact with others and with their identities and positions in the world. Gender theory, at its best, urges us to see discussion and careful, non-sensational consideration. (Malpas & Wake, 113)

Malpas & Wake also says that gender construction is a social norm which is created by the society. As such, it is open for interpretation and challenges, which can also result to different changes that are being made and brought to the society in the process. According to them,

‘Queer theory’, beginning in the 1990s, has taken such radical political energy and translated it into philosophical/academic language and applied it to the interpretation of a variety of cultural forms. It is radically anti-essentialist theory, arguing that everything- desire, sexual norms and gender, certainly- is interpretable as social construction and open to challenge and change. (Malpas & Wake, 107)

When Levithan started to write, and published his first book, he did it in the closet, because at the time the topic about LGBT is a serious unlike now. Although he wrote it, he was not sure about the result. But at the end of the day, he was glad that the book he has written has brought together many people. It has connected to the feeling of the people who are still behind the bars, unable to come out from it. Many has expressed their gratitude to him because his book has served as a comforter for many. Levithan was recognized because unlike other writers, instead of writing the reality, he tried to create a reality, which is being optimistic about the future that is to come. According to him, it is up to us as to how we want to create the world. It depends solely on the people who are living. Therefore, he tried to create a society which is a dream to many, with the hope that it will be achieved in the coming days. And his dream seems to be fulfilled with time. Because now he can see that things have changed a lot, compared to when he started to write novels on LGBTs and now. The things that he has written in the books as a dream are now been realized in many societies. Which is to say, the society is changing, being more tolerant towards the homosexuals and other various section who are regarded as others. Even in his novels, he

tried to portray that fact by showing that the young parents seem more accepting, comparing to the elder ones. As a result, the present generation is changing with time, and soon the world will be a much better place to live in. After 10 years of his writing, *Boy Meets Boy*, in an interview he says,

It's amazing how much has changed in ten years. When I wrote *Boy Meets Boy*, marriage was only equal in one state. The idea of a drag queen quarterback seemed like a flight of fancy. Or even a queer homecoming queen. But, oh, how wonderful to report that *Boy Meets Boy* becomes truer every day. This morning I read about the Supreme Court agreeing to hear arguments against California's discriminatory Proposition 8. There have been drag queen quarterbacks and LGBT homecoming kings and queens. There are even kids who realize who they are in kindergarten, just like Paul. What seemed like fantasy in 2003 isn't fantasy at all in 2013. Which is as it should be. (Levithan, *Boy Meets Boy*)

Hence, the interview given by Levithan has proved that things are changing to better. The aim and dream of queer are slowly being achieved with the passage of time, as what seems impossible in that passed, are being achieved and are made possible with the passage of time. So, as to say, one should not be discouraged by one's effort given without seeing any positive changes. But with time, the efforts that are made will surely be seen with time and with the changing society. As such, in *Two Boys Kissing*, the Chorus declares that their dreams and the things that they have imagined are being led and enjoyed by the present generation. Henceforth, one should not lose hope; not dwelling on the past, but look forward to the future and create reality and Levithan does in his novels.

Thus, for the society to change, the first step should be taken up by each individual. An individual should change his mentality and the way he approaches towards change, only then he/she can work towards changing the people around. For a society to change and prosper, there should be collective effort from each side, only then there will be changes that can be brought. As such, D'Emilio's in his work, *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, he says,

Only when individuals began to make their living through wage labor, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for

homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity- an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one's own sex. (D'Emilio, 12)

The works of David Levithan is also criticized because some thinks that he focuses his attention only to the life of the gays and not on the lesbians. They feel that as an influencer, he should be giving his attention on both the two sides of life, and not limiting his attention to one. As seen in almost all his novels, it is seen that Levithan only talks about gays, and very few about the life of the lesbians is mentioned in his novels, particularly the selected novels that have been studied and analyze in this dissertation. But nonetheless, none can deny the fact that the influence of Levithan in the field of LGBT community is something which cannot be ignored and unseen by all. Hence, his works are seen as a source of inspiration and motivation for all who are not confident in themselves, thus, at the same time hoping for a better world and a better society.

Hence, analyzing different queer novel of David Levithan in this dissertation has helped in understanding the psychology of the queer teens and also the remedy to tackle the bridge that has been made in the society. The select novels has shown the experiences that the gays and lesbians goes through in their daily life, and at the same time how they are able to come out from it. Thus, Levithan through his writing, is able to bring out the positive changes in LGBT community, and at the same time portraying the positive and brighter side of the society. As earlier said, he was not trying to reflect reality, but he was trying to create reality through his writing; which he knows will be the future of the society; thus, applying the same in his work; marking his stand through the happy and homophobia free life of his characters, living in a heterosexual society. Levithan says that the path of queer is the path of inclusion, and trying to include as many voices as possible, which he portrayed it in his novels.

"Individually, one can bring change to oneself. But collectively, we can create a utopian world."

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