

Oliver and David: Straight-Acting Gay Men in Queer Narratives

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the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my/our own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I/We have acknowledged all main sources of help.

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Abstract

The majority of countries and people continue to believe that those who do not fit into a binary gender scale are not 'normal.' They overlook the fact that gender is merely a social construct. Sexual orientation is not a fixed trait; rather, it varies from person to person. Because females are not the norm of society and are only the second sex, the world has seen and continued to see discriminations against them. Similarly, individuals of the LGBTQ+ community face increased discrimination in a variety of areas as they challenge the socially established gender notion as well as society's expectations. People who do not fit into society's mainstream norm are frequently stigmatized. The majority of them are seen as outsiders in society. The term "queer" refers to anything out of the ordinary or contrary to society's dominant norms. Queer theory emerged from the third wave of feminism, and it challenges society's dominant norm as it imposes its regulations on those who refuse to accept them. Since LGBTQ+ people are rarely at the center of society, they are also known as queer people. The queer narratives are great initiatives for changing heteronormative culture and ensuring a safe environment for LGBTQ+ individuals by advocating tolerance. However, because the storylines frequently end in sorrow and tragedy, the narratives unknowingly reinforce the ideas of a straight society as the authors try to portray a piece of reality. Since the stories are not fantasy, the authors are unable to depict something unrealistic that is outside of their setting. Numerous working factors impact a same-sex couple's tragic future, including their conflict with morality and desire, as well as societal expectation, religious conviction, and, most importantly, parental support. These factors are the driving force that encourage queer people act like a straight person throughout the rest of their life which push them toward a tragic ending both in reality and fiction which reinforce the ideologies of heteronormative society continuously.

Keywords: queer; LGBTQ+; queer narrative; tragic ending.

Dedication

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Chapter 1

Introduction

“But I am not a housewife- men can never be housewives”

-David (Baldwin 81)

Our perception of reality is largely based on an auto-negotiation process. A relationship between two things is when we label something good only because it is not as bad as the other. Our linguistic system is similarly based on a negotiating process in which we learn about anything, both abstract and physical, by comparing it to something else. It eventually shapes people's ideologies, as well as their cultural and societal perceptions. The concept of moral and immoral also works in this way. We consider an act immoral because it is not as moral as the other side of the dichotomy. As a result, we can understand how we use a dichotomy in our daily lives, where we use a binary scale to measure practically everything. When we measure things, some will undoubtedly come out on top, while others will fall behind. We construct a sense of good and bad, or more particularly, superior and inferior, in every sector, from religion to culture to society to politics and everything in between. This binary distinction has given rise to an ‘us-versus-them’ mindset, in which we prioritize one thought and relegate the rest to the periphery. Everyone tends to be in the position of ‘us’ as the conditions of ‘them’ are not anything good. This scenario can also be seen in gender identities, where heterosexuality is perceived as the standard and all other genders are thrown to the margins. People begin to accept as true that, like sex, gender is an innate and natural process. They misinterpret it by thinking, that gender was assigned to us when we first get into the world along with some masculine or feminine set of roles, as in James Baldwin’s novel *Giovanni’s Room*, David also believes. However, they are wrong.

Even if we use the terms gender and sex frequently and interchangeably, there is a fine line between these two terms. In an article titled “Gender Aspects in Tropical Agriculture - a qualitative case study in the forest margin zone of Central Sulawesi” the authors explain sex as a biological determination that is concerned with bodily structure and mostly determined by it. For example, the most common distinguishing body structure among human beings is by examining their genital organ. If a human being has a penis, his sex is male. If someone owns a vagina as their genital organ, they are generally categorized as female. Even if these two categories are most common, some people are born with two genitals simultaneously as well as with incomplete genitals who are put in the third category. They are often considered as someone who is neither male nor female rather in-between these two sexual categories. Therefore, on the basis of reproductive structure and genitalia, when we categorize human beings into male, female, or someone in-between these two, is considered their sex. It is something that human beings generally cannot alter, unless they go under surgery, as they are born with it. Similarly, their sexual role is very rigidly defined by their reproductive system which they are, generally, incapable of changing. A male, for example, does not naturally give birth to offspring because he lacks the female reproductive function. Nevertheless, with advancements in medical technology, this is also becoming a possibility. When it comes to natural processes, however, a female generally gives birth to a child. As a result, our sexual roles are practically fixed, and we cannot modify them on our own. As a consequence, sex is a biological factor. Gender, on the other hand, is a cultural and social product rather than a biological trait. Gender came into being as a result of social or cultural differences, as well as emotional categorization. Masculinity and femininity are two concepts that are widely used to explain gender, with the male being connected with masculinity and the female being associated with femininity.

Masculinity and femininity are not defined by our chromosomes but rather by society, culture, and religion. Masculinity and femininity come with numerous sets of gender roles. Hence, these are explored through socialization with other social beings, unlike sex. Gender roles also can be flexible, unlike sexual roles as men can perform the tasks of women and vice versa. It does not require specific genital organs to perform gender roles. Both men and women can do household chores, cook, play football, and drive cars which refers to the flexibility of gender roles. It does not necessarily make them either masculine or feminine, as David thinks of it. While arguing with Giovanni in, David once said, he never wants to become Giovanni's submissive little girl. He can never play the role of "housewife" because "men can never be housewives" (Baldwin 81). David reflects the thoughts of gender-biased society as these gender roles are stereotyped with prejudiced ideas. Such as, a man is not supposed to cry as showing emotion is thought to be the feature of a woman. To hold the idea of masculinity, a man must act in a way where he refrains himself from everything that a woman does, otherwise, he will be considered a feminine or effeminate man. Similarly, when a woman behaves, talks, walks or sits like a man she is considered a tomboy or a masculine woman. Moreover, David's characterization reflects, white privilege is also present in queer people where white gay men "benefit from these alliances" produced by the state or system. On the other hand, people of color, black or brown, Italian or African, are massively and "increasingly targeted by this prison-like "carceral state". These "carceral states" judge human beings as criminals in spite of being innocent of their actions or words. By committing these hate crimes, the states show their immense prejudice against a certain group, and then, as a result of prejudice, the system discriminates against them through verbal, physical, or emotional torture (Ojeda-Sague 184). Racial oppression and homophobic activities are two vivid examples of hate-crime by the state. The tragic consequence of Giovanni in James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* also reinforces the idea of hate-crime against colored queers as Giovanni, being an Italian in Paris

ends up in imprisonment and death; where David, a White American guy did not have to face any such consequences

In “Distinguishing Sex and Gender” the authors have explained that gender often comes with “various role definitions” as well as “sex-typed interests” and “mannerisms” (Rose and Hatemi 90). This means, according to biological determination, a male is supposed to be sexually attracted to a female and a female to a male. This concept misinterprets every male and female's sexual preferences in general, influencing their gender roles once again. Because sexual preferences are not divine or God-given, a guy may be attracted to another guy. In the same way, a woman may be sexually attracted to both other women and men. As a result, a man who is attracted to another man is classified as gay, whereas a woman who is drawn to another woman is classified as a lesbian. Bisexuals are people who are sexually attracted to both men and women. Non-binary, trans, gender questioning, curious, and other gendered phrases are now only a few examples among many. After birth, a person might be assigned the male sex and labeled as a man. Even after being present in this gender, he may identify himself with someone of a different gender. To the outside world, a man may be adhering to gender roles, but deep down, he may be exploring his identity in new ways and developing feelings for other men. Hence, sexual orientation is a subject of analysis and preference. “A man and woman can be attracted to one or either” of them. “A masculine woman” is not necessarily a lesbian rather she can be “straight”. Similarly, a “masculine man can be gay” too (Rose and Hatemi 90).

In a society, ironically, where being a straight person or heterosexual is the norm, anything beyond this is nearly unacceptable. A feminine man has often criticized the way a masculine woman is, by society. A man is not supposed to like the pink color as it is associated with women. A woman similarly is not encouraged to drive a plane as this is something that men are assigned to do by society and the system. If somehow a man ends up breaking the

gender role by showing sexual attraction toward another man or a woman toward another woman, people backlash them immensely. These people are considered as the queer people or LGBTQ+ community who are not heterosexual or cisgender. Heterosexuality means the opposite of homosexuality where a person is sexually attracted to another person of the opposite sex. Cisgender means a person whose gender identity and sex, which were assigned during his or her birth, align with each other. Hence, cis-male and cis-female are the rigid norms of society. Since 1990, this term is used to define or categorize non-heterosexual people according to their sexual preferences. Even if this term came into light some years ago, it does not mean all people before that were heterosexuals.

Different states all over the world view homosexuality differently according to their technological and economic advancement, dominant religious views, societal expectations, and ideology. Religion has tagged homosexuality as a sin for which it has massively influenced the ideology of society where everyone sticks to heterosexuality as the only norm. Queer theory, as Oaks Guy criticizes being a straight man, is nothing but an attack on "the regime of sexuality itself " (380). Queer theory has deconstructed the socially built and received "sexual taxonomy", he says. Mentioning the word "social" also shows its artificiality of it. Hence, it believes the idea of gender is socially constructed and there is a lot of fabrication and sugarcoating going on where it loses its originality and validity. Queer theory accepts the existence of fluidity as well as the arbitrariness of social constructs. Queer theorists maintain that sexuality has a unique conceptual standing. They believe that sex is the "master key" to personal and social identity (Guy 381). Heterosexual or straight people, hence, criticize the LGBTQ+ community for considering themselves 'natural' or the center of the society by pushing the queer people to the margins due to their 'fluidity' in sexual preferences. They create a sense of normality and abnormality by categorizing and then disrespecting people

according to their sexual preferences. Masculinity equals normal and effeminate men are abnormal according to the societal view.

However, as people are becoming more educated in this era of globalization, they are trying as well as pretending to become tolerant toward all human beings in every shape, form, and preference. The social, cultural, parental, and religious setting plays a vital role in shaping a human being. Children who are not straight grow up feeling “different” from others. From the age of five to six, children usually understand their sexual identity. The words attached to their feeling are often thought of as dangerous and negative (Ratigan 91). There is a famous saying by Simon de Beauvoir that, “one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman”. It is society that makes us a product of it. By being a product of their society, if anyone tries to act beyond its artificial standard, she or he is often otherized. These same-sex stories both in real life and in fiction, often end with irony and tragedy rather happy endings (Thomas 596). While television series, books, and authors are trying to break heteronormativity, they are simultaneously reinforcing the tragic consequences of homosexuals and their relationships. Books like Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* or André Aciman’s *Call Me By Your Name* are simultaneously considered daring and wise novels that treat this “controversial” subject beautifully. Apart from its identity as a gay novel, *Call Me By Your Name* is considered a “brave”, “naked” as well as a “poetic” and “sexually awakening” love story by American author Nicole Krauss and a British magazine *Tatler*. Books and authors like these are appreciable as they are boldly narrating homosexuality in their novels produced in the heteronormative society. However, it again reinforces and regenerates the same gendered societal and religious expectation that brings nothing but a tragic ending to them.

Therefore, this paper aims to analyze the underlying cause of reproducing the same problem queer novels set out to challenge or change which covertly encourage a heteronormative environment. By demonstrating how James Baldwin and André Acimen have

depicted homosexuals, it points toward their challenges, and the consequences of their actions in this heterosexual culture. Moreover, it also examines if racial and religious tensions were a driving force in any of the novels, allowing them to feel in control of their relationship or not. By comparing two of the major characters, David from *Giovanni's Room* (1956) and Oliver from *Call Me By Your Name* (2007), this research put them on the same line even though they belong to different time and context.

Gay men like David and Oliver, hence, act as straight due to their conflict between morality and desire, societal expectation and religious conviction and most significantly, lack of parental support which push them toward a tragic ending and reinforce the ideas of the heteronormative society.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study looks at why gay characters act straight in public, leading to a tragic outcome that promotes heteronormative beliefs despite the fact that queer narratives are supposed to challenge them. This research is organized to solve this research question by examining existing secondary data. It looks at relevant journal articles and finds out if this issue is addressed in the cited works or not. Tragic ending of queer narrative is however not addresses directly for which my research answers the research question. The dilemma of morality and desire, convictions of societal regulations and religion, as well as lack of family's support forced these queer characters to act like straight men which led them to a heartbreaking ending. Their stories remain unfinished due to their incapability to accept them their reality.

Biology versus social construction: Sex and Gender

“Gender and sexual orientation are not empirically stable” according to Matt Brim and Amin Ghazani (17). Their article titled “Introduction to Queer Method” tries to examine why queer theory is more a queer method than a theory. The queer method tries to question the “origins and effects of concepts and categories”. They do not simply aim to “reify” these categories as these keep on changing and “do not always with lived experiences”. As Brim and Ghazani explain, the things or actions we are observing depend largely on by which scale we are measuring them. It, moreover, tried to break the idea of “fetishizing the observable” (16). Women kissing or making out with other women is always been a subject of seduction that “satisfies the straight male gaze” rather than a gay couple making love (17).

For the idea of preserving one's manhood, many non-straight men fear coming out to themselves and the world. Their article examines how we limit our knowledge by assigning an “identity category” like gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) to people who are homosexual. By

doing so, according to the authors, we “exclude” people who enjoy “same-sex arousal” but are not comfortable attaching themselves to these GLB identities (17). I differ from the authors on this statement for two reasons. First, there are not only these three GLB categories to classify homosexuals. There are gender identities like non-binary, curious, unsure, trans, and many more. Queer is an umbrella term that includes almost all gendered people. Hence, there is barely any scope where people from any gender get excluded. People who appreciate queer people are not necessarily queer themselves. However, those who have a hatred for homosexual activities are homophobic. But, if someone calls themselves straight but enjoys same-sex arousal, such as being a man, enjoys watching other men making love, are not totally straight.

The second reason is, that if they do not want to self-identify themselves as any of the labels, it simply means they want to get excluded from these categories, we are not excluding them. Usually, people who do not want to bound their gender identity into either male-female or masculine-feminine can be considered under the non-binary category, if they want to. Hence, they are not excluded as the authors are saying. That is why, I agree with the statement of Savin-William that, any instance of same-sex behavior in a person can categorize that person as homosexual which is not rigid but fluid, the changes according to their choice and time. I do not think, as the authors say, the idea of categorizing people limits our knowledge. If we do not categorize people, how are we supposed to identify them? Obviously, not everyone’s sexual preference will be the same and it will change from time to time as a person grows up, encounters incidents, and gains experience. Hence, it is good to categorize gendered identities of human beings so that they can freely enjoy and reflect on what they are desiring for without following the societal expectation. We are not limiting our knowledge but rather becoming aware of the idea that different people can have different sexual preferences such as pansexual, asexual, bisexual, and many more.

A straight thought about homosexuality

Straight men often criticize the people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community as it seems abnormal to them. Oakes Guy in his journal article titled "Straight thinking about queer theory" criticizes the concept of this theory. He states queer theory is very "self-conscious" as well as an "uncompromising" program (379). This points their "special passions against" the norm of the 19th century. He further criticizes the theory saying, queer theory shows a "ruthless criticism of everything that exists" (379). Queer theorists use their ideas to challenge fixed categories that are not only against mainstream heterosexuality but also against gay and lesbian people. Queer theory, hence, is an attack on "the regime of sexuality itself" (380). Queer theory has deconstructed the socially built and received "sexual taxonomy". Mentioning the word "social" also shows its artificiality of it. Hence, it believes the idea of gender too is socially constructed and there is a lot of fabrication and sugarcoating going on where it loses its originality and validity. Queer theory accepts the existence of fluidity as well as the arbitrariness of social constructs. Queer theorists maintain that sexuality has a unique conceptual standing. They believe that sex is the "master key" to personal and social identity (381).

Religious influence on shaping gender identity

Religion plays a massive influential role in shaping our personality and also our sexual preferences as it is considered a code of life. Bernard Ratigan writes in "Growing up Catholic, Growing up Gay" that, growing up gay and a Catholic at the same time is never "a happy combination". He states, that it may be shown as a very happy and rich incident in fiction such as in novels or media representation but in reality, it is not. The author connects religion with homosexuality saying, religions that understand the deeper essence of human beings unfortunately often become the reason for "sexual repression". Such religions are Catholicism, Islam, and Judaism which oftentimes act as the "potential source of repression". This may be welcomed by a cultural critic but less welcomed by a religious or secular

preacher. This idea often makes children fall into a dilemma because they cannot find symmetry between what they feel and what their surrounding is teaching them. Their “subjective experience” is not reflected in what they learn from their family, education in religious institutions, or even media (90). Hence, they go through a troublesome growing-up process that continuously lets them ask, “Where do I fit in?” The author shares his own experience saying, he grew up as both a Catholic and a gay. He tried to gather many homosexual novels during the 1960s translated from French that used the word “forbidden” in their translated title. The French set a standard of “*École Normale Supérieure*” or normal as the superior for which homosexual relationships especially gay relationships often resulted in “disgrace” or “suicide”. However, the author says, at least the French people got the chance to experience it publicly which he could never have.

From the age of five to six, children usually understand their sexual identity. The words attached to their feeling are often thought of as dangerous and negative. “You’re lucky. My father would have carted me off to a correctional facility”- Oliver says to Elio about his fear of coming out (Aciman 227). Religions like Catholicism hence show a tendency to contradict their sexual orientation and what they ‘should’ experience (Ratigan 91). Mothers know their children best but even if they understand their children’s sexuality or their children come out to them, the parents sadly ignore it saying it is “just a phase” from which they will get over soon. Hence, due to family, religious and social pressure, many young homosexuals are pushed to live a ‘normal’ life by ignoring their sexual orientation and marrying someone opposite to their sex. They pass “secret double lives passing as ‘straight’” (Ratigan 92).

The Jewish view homosexuality as a crime. In Leviticus 20:13, it states, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death”. This book has a greater influence on homosexuals as Dr. Dershowitz

states in *The New York Times* (“*The Secret History of Leviticus*”). Even if Jewish books prohibit the idea of homosexuality, André Aciman in his novel *Call Me By Your Name* shows love during the summertime in Italy between two Jewish men. Frederick S. Roden in his journal article “Queer Jewish memory: André Aciman’s *Call Me By Your Name*” connects, Plato’s statement on love in his philosophical book *Symposium* where he states love should be the unification of two souls and only this can be the highest level of love. The author says Aciman applies Jewish identity to Plato’s *Symposium*’s model of love, to depict same-sex love and the patriarchal generation’s mandate (Roden).

As a product of the heteronormative society, many queer people fear coming out in front of the world as the consequences would be worse. As a result, men who are gay act like straight guys and pass their whole life faking a different personality. In the article “Immaculate Manhood”: *The City and the Pillar*, *Giovanni’s Room*, and the Straight-Acting Gay Man”, Harry Thomas states, both Baldwin’s novels *The City and the Pillar* (1948) and *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) are common in one aspect- both talk about homosexual relationships and both of the novels end ironically. It enables us to question the fact why these same-sex stories often end with irony and tragedy rather than a happy ending (596). From contemporary gay male discourse, the author says, gay men often act “straight” to appear more “masculine” and take more pride in differing from homosexuals. The protagonist David of *Giovanni’s Room*, above all, is concerned that wanting other guys will erode his entire manhood (606). The author moreover attaches race with sexuality to criticize Baldwin’s writing. Being a Black author, he tried to keep his novel as White as possible. David, the protagonist is a white gay man who uses his lover Giovanni, who is darker since he is Italian, and. He took “pleasure in private” like those white plantation masters without ever recognizing them in public equally (Thomas 608). Throughout the novel, David is mostly preoccupied with his masculine identity; the dilemma of how to be both a man and be

with a man at the same time. Hence, while he was living together with Giovanni, soon his masculine identity within him woke up saying, “I am not a housewife- men never can be housewives” (Baldwin 81).

The psychological aspect of homosexuals and their fear of coming out

MD Jack Drescher writes in his research article named “The Closet: Psychological Issues of Being in and Coming Out” that, this categorization or “classification privileges the role of self-definition”. He defines the idea of “coming out” as “revealing” a person’s own “homosexuality” in front of others like friends, family, society, and the world. He considers coming out a never-ending process for homosexual people. Because, on regular basis, they go through an internal conflict with themselves thinking about whether or not to reveal their truth and identity.

Even if they decide to come out, they again fall into another conflict thinking, to whom they will reveal their truth. He identifies some antihomosexual attitudes in his article. "Homophobia," "heterosexism," "moral condemnations of homosexuality," as well as "anti-gay violence" are all antihomosexual views. He furthermore adds saying, “hiding” behaviors perceived as children often remain into young adulthood and throughout their middle age to old age. These concepts of hiding or concealing lead many LGBTQ+ individuals to hide this crucial aspect of their identities even from their near and dear ones. The author recognizes the difficulties faced by a gay youngster while growing up. These people will face more antihomosexual attitudes later in their life as they grow up as adults. “Periods of difficulties” in accepting their sexuality, "either to themselves or to others", are frequently observed in the histories of homosexuals. Antihomosexual attitudes are rarely addressed due to a lack of parental support, in the homes of the "children who grow up to be gay". Homosexuals, moreover, are frequently “subjected to antihomosexual” views by their “own families and communities”, beginning in childhood. The author, moreover, defines gays and lesbians by

saying, people who are either deliberately "prepared to act on their homoerotic" urges or expose a "homosexual" personality to other people are considered "gay or lesbian". These people such as gays and lesbians generally get "homosexually self-aware" when same-sex sentiments and urges "can no longer be kept out of [their]consciousness". Those who are subjected to this, at one point in their adulthood, may be able to come out to themselves.

However, the author again reminds us of the reality that, "[A]cceptance is not a pre-determined outcome for homosexually self-aware people" who want to merge with the mass public identity and share their feelings with them. The author gives an example of a religious and at the same time, homosexually self-aware person, who might choose chastity or reluctance to homosexuality to prevent the difficulties imposed by his religion. It is because to his religion, and to him as a follower, homosexuality is a "problematic integration of his religious and sexual identities".

Pressure on the queer people by the states

Antonio Pele summarizes Achille Mbembe's book *Necropolitics* (2003) by highlighting some key major aspects to it. Cameroonian philosopher Joseph-Achille Mbembe (1957- present) initially wrote an essay in 2003 and thirteen years later in 2016, published his book *Necropolitics* (title translated from *Politiques de l'inimitié* in 2019) to explain and break this idea of subjugation of nations by their states. By utilizing French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault's idea of "biopolitics"¹ or, he explains Necropolitics.

In his article titled "Achille Mbembe: Necropolitics", he says, through death, execution, genocide, and even punishment of a group of people, the government holds the authority to decide who is supposed to live and who is not. They create a hierarchy in the society among human beings and assume the power to kill anyone who does not align with

¹ Biopolitics: A political reasoning that is concerned with the management of life and populations as its subject.

their ideology. Incidents like “pauperization” or acknowledging a human being as immensely poor, “precarization”, “wars” and “crisis”, a certain group or groups of people are executed by the centers of the society. This hostile condition, both mentally and physically, of a group of population in a society, where they are dominated so much that they do not own the authority over their own lives to live as free human beings are considered Necropolitics by Achille (Pele).

Alexander J. Means writes in his research article “Foucault, biopolitics, and the critique of state reason, Educational Philosophy, and Theory” how Foucault has seen biopolitics complementing and complicating Marx’s idea of power and state. Foucault discussed biopolitics as originating from and reinforcing two main modes of power which are sovereignty and discipline, in his lectures. According to Michel Foucault, “biopolitics” is concerned with the “management of population” with the “power” of taking their lives and “training the body” by disciplining. Hence, Achille Mbembe connects necropolitics with Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* where he explained in which way and what reasons “human masses are eliminated” for the sake of “protection and survival”. He uses examples of Nazi and Stalinist ideology and their reign over the territory which brought genocide and war. In the present world, it also exists as, people who do not align with the societal expectations are “subjugated to conditions” and live a life of zombies or “living-dead” as they are not allowed to speak even if having a voice, or even cannot show their desire even if they feel like other human beings. The moment they are not fitting into the prevailing or dominant ideology, they are backlashed, beaten severely, dehumanized, and most tragically imprisoned or killed. This “subjugation of life” is very much present in this heteronormative society, where people who do not align with the prevailing norm, are heavily punished. Many first-world countries are trying to change but most parts of the globe cannot accept homosexuality

and act tolerant toward all human beings beyond their gender identity and sexual preferences.

In *Queers against Death*, Gabriel Ojeda-Sague answers the question, why do some states try to accept homosexuality so easily while some others cannot? He uses the reference to “Black skin splits the birth (and death) of queer Palestinian” to show the idea of “pinkwashing”. Pinkwashing refers to a state or government’s expression of friendliness toward the queer or LGBTQ+ people, in order to diminish or decrease its negative effects. Pinkwashing is also present in media representation which is considered hypocrisy as the intention is not pure. For monetary gain or popularity, first-world countries usually use this strategy. It refers to how “A political entity may adopt [...] a positive posture toward gay rights as a foreign policy tool” so that the political entity may distinguish itself from other surrounding forces and “mark itself as modern” (Ojeda-Sague 187). He refers to Achille’s essay “Necropolitics” (2003) saying, “*Queer Necropolitics* could not exist without his essay”. However, without exploring who is exploiting us/them and who is being exploited, theorizing trans necropolitics would be incomplete. The author does not forget to identify a problem or limitation with *Queer Necropolitics* that, this terminology is very much or “overly dependent” on Achille Mbembe’s idea of Necropolitics, for which *Queer Necropolitics* needs the help of Mbembe’s Necropolitics to become clearer. Gabriel Ojeda-Sague tries to explain “hate-crime legislation” against queer people of color by referring to Sarah Lamble’s essay “Queer investment in punitiveness: sexual citizenship, social movements, and the expanding carceral state”. He refers to this essay by saying, the “police force and the carceral state” are the origins of many “hate-crime legislation”.

Queer people of color: Double oppression

The consequences for queer people, especially those of color, are death or prison. The author Ojeda-Sague tries to show the ironic life of queer people by saying, “*Queer*

Necropolitics turns to the prison” (Ojeda-Sague 184). White privilege is also present in queer people where white gay men “benefit from these alliances” produced by the state or system. On the other hand, people of color, black or brown, Italian or African, are massively and “increasingly targeted by this prison-like “carceral state”. These “carceral states” judge human beings as criminals in spite of being innocent of their actions or words. By committing these hate crimes, the states show their immense prejudice against a certain group, and then, as a result of prejudice, the system discriminates against them through verbal, physical, or emotional torture. Racial oppression and homophobic activities are two vivid examples of hate-crime by the state. The tragic consequence of Giovanni in James Baldwin’s novel *Giovanni’s Room* also reinforces the idea of hate-crime against colored queers as Giovanni, being an Italian in Paris ends up in imprisonment and death; where David, a White American guy did not have to face any such consequences. “[T]rans feminine bodies of color in the US” who work as sex workers face a massive hatred and elimination by the policymakers and laws of the state. Their lives and safety are at huge risk because they almost have no right over their own lives and actions. The author briefly shares the story of a black trans sex worker Alexis. Some particular places of Washington DC, are “marked with “Hell No”!” which indicates the banning of the entrance of people like Alexis due to police activities (Ojeda-Sague).

The author, Gabriel Ojeda-Sague refers to “Queer politics and anti-blackness,” by Morgan Bassichis and Dean Spade, uses the phrase, “Gay is the New Black”. It does not mean all the gay people are Black. It rather means, the way once the history has seen the Blacks being enslaved and tortured by whites, it is again going to be maintained and repeated through the subjugation of homosexual groups by homophobic heterosexual communities.

Homosexuality and science

In “Health, Masculinity, and the Third Sex” James Patrick Wilper tries to explain health relating to gender. Initially, the author claims about “medical theories” that consider “same-sex sexuality” as “degeneration and mental illness concerning with “third-sex theories”. Novels like *Maurice* and *Imre* have “fiercely” resisted these misconception of illness concerning with sex. To the author, *Maurice* is an “artistically” proficient portrayal of queer genre novels, which would, without a question, go on to become the foundation of “gay and lesbian literature” (Wilper 115). Wilper refers to *The Intersexes* where the subject is a man and describes his love for another man. The subject claims, he is properly “masculine” but owns a “soul like a woman”. He is a man but he loves another man “passionately” even knowing that this idea can bring him punishment. Hence, he calls it a “mad hopeless struggle” that has been cherished within him since his childhood but he has finally “given up struggling against [his] fate” as the consequence is going to be tragic. As none of them is going to end up with each other happily, probably giving up “struggling” is the only thing homosexual people can do (Wilper 116).

Wilper gives the example of *Maurice* as a homosexual man who had a desire for other men but at one point considered that as an illness. He showed his penis to doctors so that they could examine what is wrong with him or if his masculinity is in the right spot or not. One of the doctors named Jowitt says, he barely has knowledge about homosexuality yet he connects it with a “psychological illness saying it is the work of the “asylum”. (Wilper 130). Similarly, another doctor named Barry believes, the problem Maurice was going through cannot be explained by scientific theory because his illness is not related to medical or psychological factors. Therefore, Dr. Barry calls Maurice’s homosexuality something related to the devil calling it an “evil hallucination” or “a temptation from the devil” (130).

Judith Butler on gender fluidity and gender performativity

Vasu Reddy in an interview with Judith Butler, one of the most influential American academics, asks her about gender performativity which Butler has coined in 1990. Will Fraker in another article titled “Gender is dead, long live gender: just what is ‘performativity’?” explains what has Butler written about gender performativity in her book *Gender Trouble*. Fraker says that, in this pop cultural world, people frequently use the phrase that, gender is a social construct. However, Butler meant something else through her idea of Gender performativity where she claims, that gender is neither predestined by “biology” nor “made up by culture”. It rather points toward the fact that gender is determined by “repeated words and actions”. These two factors, all together, shape us as well as shaped by us. However, mostly these kinds of “repetitions are” not done with one’s own will. People mostly do not even realize what they are saying and do it so repetitively that it becomes a habit. Wives automatically assume their role as regular cooks of the house by preparing food for everyone in the family regularly. By doing so, the husbands do not get the habit of cooking food along with their wives. By performing this action repetitively for years after years, as a result, it becomes a norm in almost every household where the wife is the cook and the husband barely takes this role. Consequently, the idea of femininity is attached to this repetitive task by our subconscious mind where refraining oneself from household tasks seems to be masculine. The author similarly uses the example of driving cars with masculinity and femininity.

Judith Butler has written about gender and the problems attached to it in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* which is widely used as a reference for gender and queer studies. Vasu asks Butler whether she has improved the idea of gender as a social construct by coining the term gender performativity. She answers by saying, no identity is “made in a single moment in time”. All identities, according to Judith Butler, are created over and over again. This does not imply that we create completely new identities every time. It simply means that, because

identities are “dynamic and historical”, they require time to emerge. She says we are constantly evolving into something or becoming something. The phrase “being human” also reinforces the idea that we are always trying to become human beings by doing and not doing some actions. No one is born a human by characteristic rather one becomes a human being every day, with experience. She furthermore mentions a human being’s “private struggle” saying, there is always a conflict in asking if it is possible for us to become anything else tomorrow than what I am today? This evolution or becoming of identity is not only limited to “private struggle” but rather with the “social” grounds too, based on which identities are “supported and articulated”.

John Storey in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture An Introduction* also mentions Judith Butler’s idea of gender. In a chapter named “Gender and sexuality”, John Storey refers to Butler’s concept of gender saying, “gender is not the expression of biological sex” (Storey 160). Gender identities are “performativity constructed in culture”. Hence, according to Butler’s book, “repeated stylization of the body” creates or constructs gender. These repetitive acts are performed through a “highly rigid regulatory frame” for so long a period that, it becomes normal (161).

Morgenroth and Ryan argue how Judith Butler has broken the idea of gender and sex binarism through her book and theories and most significantly, her ideology. In their article titled “Gender Trouble in Social Psychology: How Can Butler’s Work Inform Experimental Social Psychologists’ Conceptualization of Gender?” they say, through her famous book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler's theories can add to and improve "experimental social psychologists'" notions of gender to a greater level. Gender, according to Judith Butler, is not something that one is born with. Gender refers to what a person does on a regular and consistent basis. She goes on to say that, gender identity is a "by-product" of recurrent gender performance, rather than being founded on some inner reality (Morgenroth and Ryan 3). She

mentions feminist activists as examples of presenting gender identity as an essential element of the person. She claims that many female and feminist writers have historically and currently reinforced the gender binary concept. However, it eventually does nothing but serves the interest of "patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality". The authors refer to an interview in 2015 where Judith Butler said, we are no one to impose on another person because "every person" must own the authority to "determine the legal and linguistic terms of their embodied lives" (The Conversion Project). Gender identity, as Butler says in her interview, can be anything including fluid or firm. But, what is important for us is to create a space in this world where every human being from all gender is free to live without any "discrimination" and "harassment". Butler somehow does not challenge the "sense of self" of the people rather she questions "the necessity" of a common "gender identity" essential for political activity (Moregenroth and Ryan 3).

Antihomosexual language

Judith Butler uses the idea of language with gender identities saying, people are "interpreted" following some "social mean". We have certain terms of language for expressing our very own idea which is not originated from within us but rather "already given to us from elsewhere" (Reddy 116). We express our own intimate thoughts or identities through a "language that we never made in order to say who we are" (Reddy117). Vasu Reddy, in the interview with Butler, talks about the act of homophobia of Zimbabwean president Mugabe as this act goes against Christian morals and values. Judith Butler says, Mugabe's whole statement of "comparing homosexuals to animals" as well as disrespecting gays and lesbians saying they have "sacrificed their very status as a human being" is massively questionable. These statements of ideas might seem almost harmless but this "speech is public discourse" for which it affects many other aspects of a country including employment, movement of people, adoption rights, healthcare, and the authority to live and

die. Hence, Judith Butler expresses her fear by saying, homophobic words are synonymous with “murderous words” as it not only dehumanizes a group of people but also question their right to live as a free man (119).

Homosexuality and philosophy

Carlos Ball writes in his journal article titled “Essentialism and Universalism in Gay Rights Philosophy: Liberalism Meets Queer Theory” about the history of gay and lesbian emergence and theories as well as philosophies concerning and contradicting it. During the last half of the 19th century, the origin of “homosexual identity” took shape. Nevertheless, it does not mean homosexuality was not present before that time. With the acknowledgment of the term “queer” or queer people, many antihomosexual acts also got a rise. By putting this identity into light, acts like “sodomy was inextricably” connected with homosexuality. Mostly, this was done through “discourse of science, medicine, and psychiatry”. He uses Foucault’s reference saying, homosexuals were considered as “sodomite” and a new kind of “species” (Ball 272). The 1970s “social construction of sexuality” by Michel Foucault caused a huge “paradigm shift”. As people believed by then, “homosexuality was a natural phenomenon” and it is not determined by any sort of “culture or discourse”. During this era of confusion about homosexuality where philosophers and academics were coming up with new views on it, people felt in a dilemma. One group believed homosexuality was a “secondary psychological disorder” and the others believed it to be a human being’s “normal desire” that can occur to different degrees. The authors say, the celebration of bodies and pleasures, according to Foucault, is the foundation of a "transformative process" in the realm of "sexuality" (Foucault 108). " The Council of Trent "throughout the mid-sixteenth century, according to Foucault, was a breakthrough moment in the "history of sexuality" since it was when " Christianity demanded its believers to "control and master [their] sexual desires" (Ball 272).

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research question

This research examines why gay characters behave straight in public, leading to a tragic ending that reinforces heteronormative notions despite queer narratives were supposed to question them. To answer this research question, this research is organized by analyzing existing secondary data such as research of scholarly authors, interviews and opinions from newspapers and magazines as well as relevant books. Two of my primary sources on which I have conducted my content research are James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* and André Aciman's *Call Me By Your Name*.

3.2 Data collection method

Initially, I have designed the data collection in an order where I aimed to research according to thematic analysis. Hence, to find out existing literary works as well as credible research articles about sex and gender, as well as about homosexuality, I have relied on Jstor. It initially looked at the pattern of existing sources. To illustrate, this research is very much concerned with sexual and gender identities to understand as well as their preferences, it initially gained knowledge through researching articles on gender. It distinguished between gender and sex for which, this paper looked for research articles referring to the famous philosophers and activists' works. Hence, this research mentions philosophers and intellectuals like Michel Foucault, Achille Mbembe, and Judith Butler to understand how they have moulded gender and sex as well as their criticism regarding these ideologies. The second theme of the research was to find out relevant articles relating to gender and homosexuality so that the research is done precisely. Without having proper knowledge of

sex and gender as well as their preferences, researching about homosexuality would not have put much effect. Besides, the research paper needed some opinions, interviews as well as recent and past activities about rules and regulations regarding queer people and same-sex marriage. To find out about historical events like the Stonewall riot and recent antihomosexual activities, this research has taken help from newspaper articles and already existing interviews. It looked for the theme first and has chosen articles accordingly which fulfil the research questions of this thesis paper. It looked for credible articles and tried to take help from recent research works more than past. However, since both the novels', Giovanni's *Room* and *Call Me By Your Name*, settings were in the 20th century, my research paper also includes articles which were published before 2000 to examine the underlying cause. This research has started by focusing on the idea of binarism in all aspects including gender and sex which creates a division among people. This study has, then, responded in the thesis statement on how it is going to answer its research questions that asks the reason of gay men acting straight in queer novels which unfortunately reinforce the notions of the heteronormative society rather challenging it by depicting their tragic endings.

In the methodology section, the research paper explains how it has conducted its research and talks about the literary genre as well as the literary theories which have been applied in later portions. The research takes help from existing sources for which in the literature review, it writes about relevant content and information regarding its further research. While doing so, this research paper also finds gap and it aimed to fulfil this gap by conducting this research through analysis. It moves to its analysis part to do a content analysis of the primary sources with the help of existing pieces of literature as well as the researcher's own interpretation.

3.3 Research Gap

The analysis has contributed to the research to answer the research questions as well as to find out what more it could have done in a broader aspect. Finally, this research concludes with a proper understanding where it restates the three claims which states why homosexuals are forced to act like straights which and sums up the gathered idea in brief. To make my research more effective, after that, I used research papers which referred to the two of my primary texts *Giovanni's Room* and *Call Me By Your Name* in their articles. Even though James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* has enough research articles, the contemporary novel *Call Me By Your Name* has inadequate research materials. Rather than journal articles, since it has a popular screenplay version, I have found many movie reviews of it. As my aim was to put David from *Giovanni's Room* and Oliver from *Call Me By Your Name* on the same line, I found inadequate researches which have done any comparison or contrast between these two characters. However, even if this is a research gap I have found while analyzing my data, I believe, my research can fill the gap to some extent and future researchers can find a precise comparison and contrast of *Giovanni's Room's* David and *Call Me By Your Name's* Oliver, by looking at my research paper.

Later on, to understand the reason behind antihomosexual activities as well as homophobia, the pressure of religion and societal expectations, I have used articles accordingly. By doing a meaningful and relevant content analysis of two of the primary texts, with my own interpretation as well as with the help of an adequate literature review, I have conducted a qualitative research applying Queer theory. Further, by analyzing literature review, the research answers root cause of homosexual people acting as heterosexuals, this research applies Queer Theory which is considered as a modern theory that got established roughly during the 1990s. It is often considered as a stream of feminist theory that started to focus on genders of all forms after the third wave of the feminist movement.

3.4 Theoretical analysis

People frequently misread homosexual literature, supposing that it is either written by gay authors or written only for the LGBT community. It is not true that a gay author always writes or is solely interested in gay literature. Gay literature does not have to be limited to eroticism or sexual scenarios between two men; it can also portray a homosexual's psychological battle as well as his bonding with another person of the same gender. Let us take a look back in time. The sexual orientation of several well-known authors had been an overheated subject of great debate. Many of Shakespeare's plays have elements of cross-dressing or what we now term drag queen in modern language, making him one of the authors who was assumed to be homosexual. His narratives sometimes contained elements of same-sex affection, for which the interpreters questioned his sexuality. Oscar Wilde, another well-known author, was sentenced to prison for committing 'sin' by engaging in sodomy. People's psyche was formed in such a way that gay sex and homosexuality were regarded as more immoral than literal crimes like murder, rape, and so on. As a response, the judge claimed that this was the "worst-case" he had ever dealt with before imprisoning Oscar Wilde for two years on hard labor ("Oscar Wilde is sent to prison").

This research is conducted through the application of Queer Theory which is considered as a modern theory that got established roughly during the 1990s. It is often considered as a stream of feminist theory that started to focus on genders of all forms after the third wave of the feminist movement. The word queer literally means odd or unusual. Queer theory hence focuses on the oddness of sexual orientation, wealth distribution or class system, race and almost everything. Sexuality – or, more accurately, sexualities – is fluid and humanly performed, according to queer theory. It challenges socially accepted norms and binary divisions, focusing on sexuality (heterosexual/homosexual), gender (male/female), class (rich/poor), and racial (white/non-white) orderings. The queer theory thus, argues for

rights outside of these categories. My research focuses on the portion of queer theory that talks about the fluidity of sexuality and how the norm straightness that is both subtly and overtly dominating everything which is not heterosexual.

During the last half of the 19th century, the origin of “homosexual identity” got a shape. Nevertheless, it does not mean homosexuality was not present before this time. Carlos A. Ball writes in his journal article titled “Essentialism and Universalism in Gay Rights Philosophy: Liberalism Meets Queer Theory” about the history of gay and lesbian emergence and theories as well as philosophies concerning and contradicting it.

With the acknowledgement of the term “queer” or queer people, many antihomosexual acts also got a rise. By putting this identity into light, acts like “sodomy was inextricably” connected with homosexuality. Mostly, this was done through “discourse of science, medicine and psychiatry”. He uses Foucault’s reference saying, homosexuals were considered as “sodomite” and a new kind of “species” (Ball 272). The 1970s “social construction of sexuality” by Michel Foucault caused a huge “paradigm shift” in the then society. As people believed by then that, “homosexuality was a natural phenomenon” and it is not determined by any sort of “culture or discourse”. During this era of confusion about homosexuality where philosophers and academics were coming up with new views on it, people felt as well as fell into a dilemma. One group believed homosexuality was a “secondary psychological disorder” and the others believed it to be a human being’s “normal desire” that can occur to different degrees. However, all of these ideas again got modified due to “constructionist arguments” in the later decade. Homosexuals or mostly queer theorists believed in an “antiessentialism” (272). Essentialism talks about certain attributions that are available to everything even before their existence to make them what they are. As essentialism believes, by attaching these particular sets of attributions, is fulfilling everything. This theory is highly rigid as it also applies these predetermined set of characteristics to

gender as well. The most common of them are masculinity and femininity. It does not believe in the fluidity of gender for which queer theorists are against essentialism in general.

However, the author identifies a criticism saying, the queer theory might become a little “problematic” as it does not fit into “identity politics” easily. Identity politics supports the assumption that classifications including "race, gender, and sexual orientation" should always be treated as innate or "natural identities that are not subject to change" (Ball 273). The denial of desire and celebration of bodies and pleasures, according to Foucault, is the foundation of a "transformative process" in the realm of "sexuality" (Foucault 108). "The Council of Trent "throughout the mid-sixteenth century, according to Foucault, was a breakthrough moment in the "history of sexuality" since it was when " Christianity demanded that its believers "control and master [their] sexual desires".

In our society, heterosexuality is accepted as the norm and the only way to lead our sex life. It is the only natural thing to do and humans with morals and ethics will certainly follow this path but queer theory challenges that idea. It questions the fact that a man is only allowed to have sex with another woman and vice versa. It appeared in the early 1990s as a result of queer studies and women studies and it tries to establish that other sexual activities are just as normal as heterosexual activities. According to Jay Stewart, "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" (Stewart). Michel Foucault, also believed that sexuality is socially constructed meaning that it is based on how society wants people to interpret it rather than the actual truth. Scholars were influenced by his work and they used the term queer theory informally in the 1990s. At early centuries, queer was used as a pejorative term to show disapproval toward the homosexuality. It only became legitimized in academia after Teresa

de Lauretis arranged the first queer theory conference in 1990. Michael Warner, Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Adrienne Rich are some of the early queer theorists. There is a social inequality against people who do not live their life sexually in a way that society wants. People have their own preferences and when it does not meet the criteria of a certain society it becomes a problem. Queer theory critiques the notion of media, society, scholars and other media trying to establish heterosexuality as the proper, nature certified form of sexual activity. It is not intended to protect any particular identity or establish a new identity, it tries to critique heteronormativity to ensure that there is equality for every sexual preference and every identity.

Queer theory functions in a similar way to Jacques Derrida's deconstruction. Derrida recognized that the language of idealistic conceptions cannot be rigidly comprehended. Language is highly subjective, making it impossible to pinpoint a single point. Within our language module, we limit the concept of gender because there is no vocabulary familiar to us beyond man and woman. Gender signifies only two options to us: man or woman, with no in-between. We can see how a lack of vocabulary keeps us ignorant about many aspects of life. People of other genders are alien to those who do not know any other terms beyond man and woman. As a result, our speech system has a significant influence on how we perceive reality. Jacques Derrida understood the fluidity of language and its ever-changing forms in the 1980s, which led to the formation of deconstructionism. As the name suggests, it deconstructs the rigid binary ideas and opens the door for many more ideas beyond and in-between those. Similarly, gender and queer theory destroys the rigid binary concept of gender and breaks the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Queer theory is related to both politics and literature. It evolved from feminist studies during the 1990s and took its form believing in the fluidity and subjectivity of gender and gender perspectives along with ensuring their rights. It investigates the power of dominant social norms, particularly the

oppressive nature of dominant sexuality as well as the suffering they impose on people who are unable or unwilling to live by those man-made norms.

Queer theory is very much fluid and open-ended. Hence, by applying ideas developed by scholars in the field, I am conducting my thesis paper to analyze the identity formation and identity crisis of Oliver and David in a social context where they put their partners in a conflict.

Chapter 4

Analysis

Despite being gay, Oliver and David was forced to act like straight men due to their conflict with morality and desire, societal expectation and religious conviction as well as lack of parental support that led them to a tragic ending. Though queer narratives like *Call Me By Your Name* or *Giovanni's Room* are supposed to challenge the very straight-male ideology, they end up reinforcing them by pointing toward the unfinished love stories of same sex couple like Oliver-Elio and David-Giovanni which indeed is a lacking of queer narratives.

4.1 The conflict of morality versus desire

Harry Thomas writes in an article titled "Immaculate Manhood": The City and the Pillar, Giovanni's Room, and the Straight-Acting Gay Man" that, *Giovanni's Room* (1956) depicts a "man" who is "sexually attracted to men". Men who are sexually attracted to other men are considered gay. David, the protagonist of *Giovanni's Room* was not as straight as he pretends to be which is clear in his thoughts and actions. He shares his first encounter as a gay man at an early age with his best friend Joey with whom David explored his sexuality. However, to him exploring his sexuality is similar to exploring some "horrifying taint" in him which proves how inferiorly he sees himself (Baldwin 10). He confesses to himself that, the first time he felt something for a boy was when he was taking a hot shower with Joey. However, rather than accepting the fact, he "blamed" the heat for his reluctance to get dressed up in front of Joey. At one point, David realized, he was very "fond" of Joey. Eventually, David came out of his comfort zone and tried to have sex with Joey. He realized, that maybe Joey is the "most beautiful creation" he had ever seen (13). Immediately, David started to see his own body as "gross" and the "desire" growing in him was "monstrous". The boy, whom he adored with all his heart a little ago, is no longer the person he wanted to love without any

hesitation. He viewed Joey's body as a medium to "lose" his "manhood"; the manhood that he cherished with all his heart, and which is the only identity he wanted to hold onto. Losing his manhood with a man seemed like losing his whole identity. He was ready to let go of the person he loves, rather than lose his long-cherished manhood. He thought more and more about what Joey's mother and his father would say if they see their boys in such an unnatural embarrassing situation.

This type of "hiding" behavior is very much present in people like David as it was perceived as children due to their poor parental support. This type of behavior often remains into young adulthood and throughout their middle age to old age. These concepts of hiding or concealing lead many LGBTQ+ individuals to hide this crucial aspect of their identities even from their near and dear ones (Drescher). They pass the rest of their lives in self-deception, without coming out to their friends and family as well as to themselves. He "cried for shame and terror" and "for not understanding how this could have happened to [him]" (Baldwin 13). Eventually, David leaves his first same-sex lover like a coward thinking what he did was a gross and sinful deed. He makes up an "untrue story about a girl" to seem 'normal' in front of Joey and never meets him again. Initially, in the novel, David seems confused and alien to his sexual orientation as he had no previous experience except with Joey. David might be assigned the male sex after his birth but that does not determine his gender and sexual preferences. With passing time and experience, anyone can explore a new side of their sexual preference as this is very fluid rather than rigid. The incident with Joey makes him live in "great pain" and he considers his interest in men as a "maze of false signals" which reflects his denial to accept his feelings and desires. He thinks, with Joey's incident, he was able to locate the "germ of the dilemma" he was having, yet his thoughts were trapped within him, the way he was trapped in his own room. His sexual orientation seemed "more foreign" to him than the "foreign hills" outside his window due to a lack of previous experience and

knowledge in his heteronormative world (Baldwin14). David could not understand his dilemma and accept his truth as a non-straight man.

David is a product of this heteronormative society, having witnessed males being sexually attracted to women and vice versa throughout his life. His father is his only source of shelter and support, both financially and emotionally, and his father's reaction to this has been omnipresent throughout his life. His father was a stereotypical heterosexual male who intimidated his son. David's father tries to bridge the gap between child and parent by introducing them as "buddies," but David preferred to be his "son" rather than his "buddy" (20). He wanted to tell his father anything that was bothering him, but "speaking" to him was an "agony" for David (21). Baldwin beautifully shows how "manhood" and "money" are related to a man's "self-respect" as David has noticed his aunty Ellen attacking his father always saying, he is losing his manhood running after girls (18). Baldwin juxtaposes two perceptions and shows how David is caught between these. It also depicts how males are meant to treat girls harshly and tough, and how femininity is portrayed as a source of material lust and inferiority who rely on men's money. As if spending money on females is the only way to make them happy, or that femininity requires financial reliance on men. It perpetuates that version of manhood in which males become less 'masculine' as a result of their over-friendliness with women. David's aunt thought his mind was the same as his father's, who would lose his dignity chasing after girls. However, his aunt once comments that, when David will become a man, "nobody would be able to rule [him], not even [his] father". David admits to himself that, a time "certainly" came which proved his aunt's prophecy to be true. However, does it become true? No, because his thoughts were ubiquitously ruled by society's standards and his father's ideology. He could not become the man he wanted to be suspecting that something is wrong with his sexual orientation. He was living his life with an ultimate dilemma where he wanted to know himself more but simultaneously had to hide from himself

and from society to act like a 'normal' man who is interested in women, not men. Eventually, this novel ends "disastrously" and this tragic ending unfortunately reinforces the very heterosexual ideas rather challenging it. Queer novels portray their protagonists acting as straight human beings for external forces which strengthens the very straight ideologies here again. These "same-sex" novels finish "horrifically" and it is a matter of attention that, Baldwin here depicted a "new social type" which emerged during the middle of the 20th century. He reflects the societal pressure by saying, "hetero-homosexual binarism is hegemonic". "Homosexuality" as he says, is a "recent creation". In the early days, people defined a man's sexuality not by looking at his "sexual partner(s)", but by his "gender performances" (Thomas 596). As long as men are sticking to the "masculine codes" and taking the "active (penetrative) role in sex with other men", they are considered "normal" and masculine.

However, men who take the "passive role in sex with other men" were called "fairies". David has an extreme fear of adopting the role of "fairies" as it hinders his masculinity and normality to a larger extent. Hence, "gender performance" was more important to define as normality than "sexual object choice". The protagonist David of *Giovanni's Room* falls under this new social type of masculine gay man who was not straight but too coward to accept the reality. To him, gay men or "effeminate" men were "strange womanish creatures" (Baldwin 66). He takes "pride in differing" from other homosexuals as a straight man to act normal and masculine by fitting into societal expectation (Thomas 597). This also indicates how he sees women as an inferior creature; as if being women is a matter of shame where being men refers to heroism.

At one point David lives in "constant motion" so that he can escape his reality but "ennui" hits him hard as he falls in a loop of "meaningless friendship", "desperate women", the

load of his work, and "joyless seas of alcohol" (Baldwin 23). Thus, to "find" himself, he leaves for France from his home country. When we leave our homes and go to a new city or country, most people do not recognize us since we are new to the area. David, too, is merely a faceless human being who no one knows in that new place, among the crowd. He has no one to judge him, so he may become anybody he wants to be. Despite the fact that he was far from his father's dominance in France, he required his financial help. He has the confidence and courage to discover his actual self and explore his sexual orientation in a more open manner than he did in his own country. When he was in his "second year in Paris," he met Giovanni, who was living a miserable life in Paris. This "constant motion" or mobility is a vital part of modern people who are constantly moving to escape from their reality. They act as if life is a race and they are chasing something. Their restlessness, on the other hand, causes them to become extremely confused and unstable. Constant movement is evident not only in David's migration from America to Paris, but also in his personality. He is unable to commit to a single partner. He switches partners as frequently as he switches residences. Even though he is attracted to Joey, he rejects him to avoid having to face his reality. As an adult, David was faithful to his girlfriend Hella, but he did not take her seriously. While he was already spending time with Giovanni, he thought she was "a lot of fun to be around" (Baldwin 9). James Baldwin subtly yet boldly shows how partners are also viewed as commodities in postmodern novels who can be replaced or cheated on easily.

David's version of masculinity is somehow shaped by his morality as it again becomes clearer to the reader as he was discussing the alternative ending of Giovanni's fate with Jacques. According to David, if Giovanni had settled in Italy rather than in Paris, having a wife whom he could beat up and "a lot of children", his fate would be different. Yes, Giovanni would die at a point but to David, that would be a death of peace and satisfaction with social acceptance

rather than a death of shame and suffering. This ideology of David again regenerates a very straight thinking about a gay man being a gay man, to fit into societal standards.

James Baldwin, further, mentions the drag queen subculture through the eye of David who sees it as deformation or "grotesqueness" of men. Colin Edward Carman writes the definition of a drag queen in an article titled "drag queen performance art" explaining, a drag queen as a "man who dresses in women's clothes". They usually perform in "nightclubs" or during "gay pride" programs who perform in front of the audience to entertain them. Carman considers drag queen culture as a "subculture" which means these performers are a small cultural group within a larger culture group which usually refers to the homosexual community (Edward). This is why they do not attract "mainstream appeal" rather a certain group of people who are gay. To David, drag queens seemed like a bizarre object who can never "[go] to bed with anybody" because both straight and gay men would "certainly not want one of them". Men dressing up as women and seducing other men, made him feel "uneasy". Men having sexual intercourse with other men in women's dress is similar to "monkeys eating their own excrement" (Baldwin 29).

David's hypocrisy and fear is simultaneously reflected here as he shows too much hatred for the drag queens, being a bisexual himself who is attracted to men besides women. He is once again ashamed of confronting his truth, and he continues to project a false hatred toward same-sex couples and 'non-masculine' guys such as drag queens in order to define his masculinity. He distinguishes himself from gay guys by remarking on how "uneasy" they make him feel, similar to how people feel sick after seeing monkeys eat their own stool (Baldwin 29). As a result of the spotlight effect, David gets quite self-conscious in the nightclub thinking people were taking bets on David's sexuality. Ryan Calderaro shares in an article named "Reducing Social Anxiety: The Spotlight Effect" that, the spotlight effect is a psychological

term when we "overestimate" too much what other people are thinking about us. This causes, as Calderaro says, huge "social anxiety" for a human being which is also vividly present in David's personality. This spotlight effect was dominant in his trait not only in the nightclub but throughout his whole life for which he was frequently concerned about how other people is going to accept him, how he is going to face his father, and most significantly, how society is going to see him. Hence, he kept on trying so hard to differentiate himself from gays. David feels as if he was the talk of the town for that night in the nightclub, and "people were taking bets" on the fact that, finding out if he was a straight man or not. As he was thought to be "causing a minor sensation" with another soldier that night, he became very self-aware to prove his innocence by showing his disgust for such homosexual activities. David feels he can never do "such a thing" no matter how "drunk" he was (Baldwin 29).

Jacques, his companion, asks him once, to invite Giovanni to have a drink with them. David nonchalantly blown of Giovanni's topic saying, he has feelings for girls and hence, if it was Giovanni's sister instead of him, David would surly invite her. He strongly claims he does not "spend money on men" to show his "immaculate manhood" in front of Jacques (32). David tries to be as "clean" man as possible as a product of this heterosexual society throughout his whole journey in this novel. He hides his identity to the world and most significantly to his own self to reflect the gender norm as a men and fulfil the societal expectation on gender.

Being a Black author, Baldwin tried to keep his novel as White as possible. David, the protagonist is a white gay man who uses his lover Giovanni, who is non-white since he is Italian, and other women like the plantation masters used the slaves. He took "pleasure in private" without ever recognizing them in public equally (Thomas 608). It reinforces the racial tension where again the very white-straight male ideology wins and the others fall into the margin. The title *Giovanni's Room* itself reflects how the room was the only private yet safest

place for David where he could completely be himself and surrender his arrogance before his reality. This is the only space where he is out of the spotlight effect of this heteronormative world and accepts who he is or what he wants. He does not feel people's gaze on him who can constantly judge him for being anon-straight man. As a reader, I must say that, David probably pretended to have attraction for girls besides men so that he could act as a straight man whenever he wants to. Thus, it is not wise to call him a bisexual because, his bisexual identity seemed fake, and gay more real. Giovanni's room was the only safest place for his innermost desires to be fulfilled without any second thought. At one point, David starts to make out with Giovanni as he feels something for this Italian man from the core of his heart but simultaneously he was constantly preoccupied with the thought that, it is not how a masculine clean man is supposed to act.

He never considered himself an effeminate or 'unmanly' man who might end up getting attracted to another man. Hence, despite enjoying intimate time with Giovanni, he eventually fails to acknowledge him appropriately as his lover in front of the world. He keeps on talking about his so-called fiancé Hella now and then to suppress his desire for Giovanni and act as straight as possible. Hella eventually gets back to David again and he keeps this girl in dark hiding his desire for Giovanni. He presents himself as straight as possible in front of her, by being close to her and making out with her breaking Giovanni's heart. Even when Hella wants to know what Giovanni is to him, he presents him as merely a roommate in front of her. To him, Italian men like Giovanni's are not like him as they are very "demonstrative" (122). They give a "so old-fashioned" vibe to him as he said to Hella to make her believe he sees nothing special in Giovanni than a roommate (121). At one point, he decides immediately to leave Paris with Hella so that he could escape Giovanni without any kind of explanation. Even when Hella wants to get married to him here, he rejects it saying he "need[s] to get out of here" in no time otherwise he may have to live with Giovanni again.

“Getting out of Paris” seems more like escaping “Giovanni’s Room” so that David could get rid of the burden of being a gay man (123).

The irony lies in this novel when Giovanni cries in front of his coward lover asking the most painful question, “Can we never have a life together?” David’s silence answers his question (125). Eventually, David’s straight acting nature attacked Giovanni like a sharp sword for which he appeared as an “evil” to Giovanni who told “nothing but lie”. Even after begging David not to leave him in this room alone which holds so much memory together, David justifies his cowardness by saying, he was never permanent for Paris and he was supposed to leave this city one day which Giovanni should have understood earlier (128). The societal gendered responsibility affected his personality so much that he misunderstood Giovanni’s love saying, Giovanni only wants to stay with him as it makes him feel stronger than him which makes David look very womanish man. He mocks the life of a woman saying, he can never play the role of a submissive man or more clearly, as a wife, who will cook food, clean closet, lie with Giovanni after he returns from work, kiss him and “be [his] little girl” (129). He mocks Giovanni’s manliness saying, Giovanni does not have the “guts to go after woman”. The irony however lies in his comment as David himself never got the gut to go after the person whom he loves. He is ready to lose the man he loves to save his clean masculinity. He can escape his reality just by lying to the world, to Hella, to Giovanni, and most ironically to himself. He lied so much that at one point the lies appeared as true to him and he eventually lives in a pretentious world himself.

4.2 Societal expectations and religious convictions lead to a tragic ending

If I were asked whether André Aciman's character Oliver is a straight-acting gay male or not, I would reply yes, just like David. However, Oliver, unlike David, appears to have a steadier

mind and behaviors, as if he knows what he's doing and where his activities are heading him. Elio's impression of him was altered from "he was going to be a difficult neighbor" to "[falling] for the skin of his hands" which shows the consistency in Oliver's behavior around Elio (Aciman 9). Arguments may arise, if Oliver was consistent in his action, why would he not confront Elio directly ever? Yes, in the initial part of the novel "If Not Later, When?" Oliver was just a newcomer in Italy who still needed time to understand the environment and more specifically, his neighbor Elio who was seven years younger than him. He was a nonchalant guy who could easily "escape into town at night" (21), hype up any situation, entertain any dinner table conversation, and dance with gorgeous women on late-night programs to figure out Elio's reaction to him (113). Unlike David, he made sure that this young fella Elio was feeling for him. He made Elio desperate to win him, so he pretended to be unconcerned around him. Elio, like Oliver, was an observer who noticed that Oliver was the type of person who was at ease with himself, his body, his appearance, and his choices. Oliver had no aversion to his identity, unlike David, who struggled to embrace his own. David was constantly preoccupied with looking as straight as possible or questioning himself if something was wrong with him. However, Oliver "was okay with himself" (20). He was "a very witty man" to Elio's professor father too. He eventually makes Elio yearn for him slowly but so deeply that in the first portion of the first chapter Elio confesses his attraction toward men, to the readers. Elio confesses his bisexuality saying, he has never seen any boy who had ever wished "to be both man and woman- with man and woman". Elio indeed felt something for men before besides women like Marzia but Oliver's arrival makes him want to "share his body" with his own. His desires were flaming but he feared being hurt by Oliver's nonchalant behaviors and simultaneously yearned for this careless man to hurt him because he was ready to bear it with all his desires (25). Oliver makes Elio want him more and more with his gesture (115). Elio finds his smell on the bedsheets which was a "strange scent"

but had reached all over Elio's soul tearing his skin. Oliver was hard to get initially for which Elio got closer to him first by "kissing" Oliver's pillow "savagely" by wrapping his legs around it. This desire seemed an irresistible "shameful urge" to Elio but at least he was true to himself that he had a desire for Oliver. Probably it was more lust than a love initially but it transformed into one, as the novel develops. Elio realized it is indeed "better to speak" than "die" which was absent in David's nature (63). David was reluctant to "speak" or more significantly to confront himself and his lover about what he wanted. Eventually, he dies inside throughout his whole life slowly by not being able to accept and confessing his reality of being a homosexual. The suppression of truth, hence, is equal to death according to Aciman. "Monet's Berm" is the second part of this novel, when Elio and Oliver develop their relationship both physically and spiritually by being each other's soulmates. When David was very much ashamed of being 'submissive' in his relationship with Giovanni or being a 'womanish man', Elio was always ready to wrap his "legs around him like a woman" (87). Why did Elio become comfortable with his desires? It was because he imitated Oliver as a role model and Oliver was comfortable with his desires. Elio indeed learnt so many things from Oliver. He liked Oliver as a human being before as a lover for which he was attracted by his personality. He was impressed how a man can be so comfortable with his own body which made him want to adapt his personality too. Subconsciously, Elio was influenced by Oliver's nature as lovers tend to copy each other which makes them similar. This way, Elio was comfortable too with his desire for another elder man, Oliver. "People who hide don't always like who they are," Marzia says to Elio doubting him but Elio never confronts his lust for Oliver in front of her rather than makes love with her. Elio likes who he is but he was too young to understand his psychological reactions toward being a bisexual. His body seemed like a bridge between a man and a woman's body. A place that can get connected to both sides. He was attracted to Marzia and simultaneously, to Oliver. More than Marzia, he

wanted to know Oliver's body through him (Aciman 124). Unlike David and Giovanni, Oliver and Elio take their time to understand their needs. They felt a magnetic attraction for each other where one wanted to be the other. A relationship where Oliver made Elio feel they could dive deeper into each other's bodies and souls. Where Elio can find himself within Oliver by calling him by his name. The moment Elio called Oliver by his name, Oliver did the same which made him enter into a universe, which he never shared with anyone in his entire life (134). Oliver became a more intimate part of Elio than Elio's own self unlike how David never made Giovanni feel like this. Even in the end part of *Giovanni's Room*, Giovanni was only a roommate to David who once "rescued" him and gave him a filthy space to live in.

Now, if Oliver was so much better than David, why am I considering him as a straight-acting man like David. The answer can be found by observing how both of these novels ended. Homosexual novels mostly have a tragic ending and this rate is higher than straight love stories. Why do these novels have tragic endings? Tragedy occurs in the love stories when one or both of the lovers lack their responsibility or when the societal expectation does not offer the lovers a fate to live a happily ever after life. I must say both David and Oliver lacked their responsibility as a partner and as human beings who did not think twice before leaving their lovers alone and helpless. David was always a confused man who did not know where he was heading and for what. He has trouble accepting his truth. Societal expectations like gender roles played a vital role in shaping his childhood to adulthood. He hated effeminate men as a 'masculine' man is not supposed to act as a submissive woman. He himself feared he might end up becoming an effeminate man in front of Giovanni for which he hated being open about his relationship. Showing love to his male lover would reduce his manhood as David thought. He always would bring up his attraction to girls and talk about Hella to prove his straightness in front of other people. He only made

love to Giovanni behind the closed doors of Giovanni's room and never acknowledged him as a lover in front of the world. Hence, he acted like a straight man even when he felt sexually attracted to other men. I will put Oliver in the same category as David because he also ended up escaping from Elio. Oliver indeed loved Elio a lot. He made Elio realize his bisexuality, flame up to his desire, want him with all his heart, and eventually dare to love him. He holds the key to Elio's happiness and they both find peace within each other. After their trip to Rome, Oliver leaves for his country leaving Elio behind, alone. Eventually, he comes to meet Elio's family after two years just to let Elio know, he was going to get married to a woman, after kissing him like a lover. Elio genuinely tried to be happy as he was nothing to hold onto anymore. Oliver was a Jewish man, eventually getting married and being a father of two sons, even after loving Elio still like the early days in Italy. Religions such as Islam, Jew, Christian view homosexuality as a crime or sin. In Leviticus 20:13, it states, "If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, the two of them have done an abhorrent thing; they shall be put to death". This book has a greater influence on homosexuals as Dr. Dershowitz states in *The New York Times* ("The Secret History of Leviticus"). Even if Jewish books prohibit the idea of homosexuality, André Aciman in his novel *Call me by your name* shows love during the summertime in Italy between two Jewish men Oliver and Elio. Frederick S. Roden in his journal article "Queer Jewish memory: André Aciman's *Call Me By Your Name*" connects, Plato's statement on love. In his philosophical book *Symposium*, he states love should be the unification of two souls and only this can be the highest level of love. The author says Aciman applies Jewish identity to Plato's *Symposium*'s model of love, to depict same-sex love.

However, Oliver goes on to live a life like a straight Jewish man. His nonchalant behavior has, once, made Elio crave him more but this same behavior became the reason for his audacity to escape. He did not feel obligated to go for a transparent discussion with Elio

about their future. He leaves Elio like David had left Giovanni. The context and actions might be different but the way both of them have hurt their lovers is no less than one another. They escaped from their responsibility as a lover to acknowledge their partner in front of society and of their own selves. The same Oliver who was okay with being himself, could not accept the reality at one point and get married to a woman to prove his manhood. Both the incidents indeed had an influence on the artificial societal expectation but as a human being both David and Oliver showed their cowardness as neither of them has not even tried to face the world with their reality.

Elio felt, Oliver always knew “exactly what [he] was feeling” and was sure that he “liked” him just the way Elio liked Oliver. Oliver was a sensitive and “shy man” to Elio who did not know initially how to stare at the person he likes without looking rude (Aciman 159). Even after knowing Elio’s feelings toward him, Oliver casually told him one night that he will be leaving Italy soon which left Elio feeling wounded, abandoned and destroyed. After their trip to Rome, which was apparently like a honeymoon, Oliver eventually leaves for his country and Elio returns to Italy without any proper farewell. “Neither Oliver nor [Elio]” was “precise about [their] last days together” which left both of them in confusion for the rest of their lives (163). Their story remained unfinished to them. A proper farewell could give both of them hope or hopelessness about their future together. Oliver was not as disrespectful as David was to his lover where Giovanni ended up begging him for staying. Elio never begged but that does not prove Elio was not hurt. If Oliver, in real, had cared for his lover, he would at least offer him an explanation of why he chose to not live with him in the future and why he would choose to marry a woman whom he does not love a bit like he loves Elio. The final part of the novel “The Ghost Spot” reveals their pain of separation and a sense of nostalgia and lamentation for their times spent together. When Anchise, a caretaker of Elio’s home, wants to help Elio by carrying his backpack, he denies as the burden of one’s own must be

carried by themselves because others cannot ease the burden anyhow (212). It was metaphorical which reflects his mental condition after Oliver had left him alone with the burden and longing of loving someone whom he cannot have.

The consequence would have been different if Oliver was bold enough to accept his identity and choose to live life with someone whom he really loves rather than someone who society thinks to be perfect for him. He left Elio “without saying goodbye” which reflects maybe in the future there is a hope they could meet again (217). Oliver indeed visits Elio’s house with his wife and two sons after some years but Elio could never gain the courage to see him happy with someone else. This nonchalant behavior of Oliver who acts as if nothing happens appeared disturbing to me as a reader. How could someone be happy after knowing they have broken someone’s heart into pieces. If Oliver was not a straight-acting gay man, he would obviously have confessed to his wife about his reality. He tried to fit himself into the societal expectations just like David. By committing antihomosexual hate-crimes, society shows their immense prejudice against certain groups like gays or lesbians, and then, as a result of prejudice, the system discriminates against them through verbal, physical, or emotional torture. Racial oppression and homophobic activities are two vivid examples of hate-crime by the state. The tragic consequence of Giovanni in Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room* also reinforces the idea of hate-crime against colored queers as Giovanni, being an Italian in Paris ends up in imprisonment and death; where David, a White American guy did not have to face any such consequences

Oliver and David differ from each other in some aspects. Oliver always wished to be connected with his lover Elio even if he knew he will not be able to live a life together with him. Fifteen years later, even after Elio showed up at his workplace suddenly, he hugged him with all his heart. He was beyond happy to meet his fifteen-year-old lover Elio after so many years who has been transformed into a grown-up man (232). He has a sense of guilt with

which he was living all these years if Elio could ever forgive him or not (233). He knew he has created a lifetime “loss” for Elio and also for himself yet he had cherished his memories with him forever. He has kept the “fresco” that each of them had bought from San Clemente. He framed the postcard of Monet’s berm he bought with Elio. Both Elio and Oliver realized, how closely they belonged to each other and now, because of time and fate, “they belonged to others now” (236). As a human being, Oliver wanted to keep Elio closer to him by meeting him with his wife and sons but simultaneously he realized, that maybe when Elio is “too old to care” he may come to meet them, but not now. This respect for his lover and guilt for his own cowardness was, however, very much absent in David’s behavior. David wanted to leave Paris so that he does not have to live with Giovanni anymore. He has an urge to get rid of his lover as soon as he could. He wanted to close this chapter of his life as he was ashamed of his reality. David feared his father so much that his father’s reaction after knowing his reality was always stopping him to live the life he wanted. This could be a reason to justify what he did to Giovanni and Joey. However, Oliver also told once to Elio, his father would have killed him if he knew about his relationship with another man, unlike Elio’s father. Where Elio’s father tried to become his son’s best friend in his need, Oliver’s father would have acted totally in an opposing reaction. Despite having a conservative strict father. Oliver was never disrespectful toward Elio but David was to Giovanni. Hence, I doubt if having a strict father could be used as a justification for David’s wrongdoing. Both David and Oliver was the product of this heteronormative society but Oliver has respect and tolerance for all human being in every size, shape, color, and gendered form. David, however, was always reluctant to show respect and acted judgmental toward people who does not fit into society’s standards. Even if he was a homosexual himself, he showed hatred for both himself and others who fall into this category. David felt submissive in his relationship with Giovanni for which he felt he was playing the role of a woman which attacked his masculinity. He assumed his role as a

woman and obviously since he did not have equal respect for all the genders, he hated being something other than a 'masculine man'. This could be a reason for his constant anger about being a homosexual. Oliver, on the other hand, was not the submissive but rather the dominant one in his relationship with Elio. He never felt he was being any less than a 'masculine' man while having sex with Elio.

However, Elio also never felt his manhood was reduced as he was not the dominant partner in his relationship with Oliver. A similar theory applies to Giovanni as well who did not assume his gender role. Hence, neither Oliver nor Elio nor Giovanni ever felt 'womanish' while being in a relationship with other men rather they were comfortable in accepting who they were. David, on the contrary, was in tremendous conflict with himself in accepting his identity and being tolerant of it. Where one group of the society still believes homosexuality is a "secondary psychological disorder", accepting one's own homosexual identity might not be as easier as it seems to be (Ball 272). However, the irony lies in their consequences as none of them were able to live a life with their beloved because of their cowardness. The societal expectation, their parental care in childhood, and their religion play a major influential role in shaping their ideology and their capability while making life-changing decisions. This societal expectation made David differentiate between genders and gender roles which made his life so miserable at one point.

4.3 Lack of parental support and fear of coming out

Children who are not straight, Retigan says, grow up feeling "different" from others. From the age of five to six, children usually understand their sexual identity. Even if Oliver's childhood story is not shared, David and Elio both explored their homosexuality during their early teen's age. The words or attributions attached to gay people's feelings are often thought of as dangerous and negative. Religions like Catholicism, and Judaism show a tendency to

contradict their sexual orientation and what they 'should' experience (91). Mothers know their children best but even if they understand their children's sexuality or their children come out to them, the parents sadly ignore it saying it is "just a phase" from which they will get over soon. Hence, due to family, religious and social pressure, many young homosexuals are pushed to live a 'normal' life by ignoring their sexual orientation and marrying someone opposite to their sex. They pass "secret double lives passing as 'straight'" (92). For David, his mother died when he was a child yet she kept on coming to his dream. Probably, David was not finding the love and space he wants to share with his father for which he was seeing his mother. He used to "scream" for his mother. David found his father intimidating who tried to be his "buddy" yet David was afraid of him. His father wanted him to "look on him as a man" the way he will see himself in the future. David once thought he was like his father but at one point he realized, he is very much different from him. The version of "man" his father wants him to become, was lacking in him, as David felt in the back of his mind (Baldwin 20).

Living in the same room with his father made him feel he was living in a place he does not belong to. Indeed, in a broader aspect, he was living with a heterosexual father, who, like many other parents would never consider it a normal thing for which David passed "secret double lives passing as 'straight'" (Ratigan 92). Even if he was deeply in love with Giovanni when Jacques asks him why his love makes him "frightened and ashamed" when he should be proud of it. David pretends to not understand this question but Jacques interprets it by saying, David must be feeling that, this love affair would "change" him into someone else and it might "not be safe" for him (Baldwin 55). He was true indeed as David confesses to Giovanni in the last part of the novel that, this relationship makes him feel like a wife or a "little girl" rather than a masculine man (Baldwin 129). This was because he never got the courage neither from his father nor from society to accept his reality and respect it.

Drescher in an article says that these people often face a massive antihomosexual attitude for

which they tend to hide their identity for the rest of their lifetime. Antihomosexual attitudes are rarely addressed due to a lack of parental support, in the homes of the "children who grow up to be gay". Homosexuals like David, Oliver, Giovanni, and Elio, moreover, are frequently "subjected to antihomosexual" views by their "own families and communities", beginning in childhood. For Elio, in my interpretation, this scenario was not relatable as his father Mr. Pearlman never imposed his thoughts on his son. He himself was a sensitive yet very wise man who was liberated in his thoughts. He had seen human beings as humans beyond their gender identity, religion, or profession. Oliver was his student who lived in his house for his supervision in his dissertation. After Oliver has left their place, Mr. Pearlman sits with his son as he felt to talk to his heartbroken child right now. Aciman shows the beautiful relationship of this Father-son through their conversation after Oliver has left Elio. "You're too smart not to know how rare, how special, what you two had was" is what Mr. Pearlman says to Elio to let him understand he knows everything about their relationship. Unlike the homophobic society, he consoles his son saying, this phase with a broken heart "is going to be very difficult". Elio's heart overwhelms by getting the warm hug through his father's conversation during such a time (Aciman 223). His father empathizes with his son's pain saying, "[n]ature has cunning ways to find our weakest spot" (224). Many people interpret Mr. Pearlman as a homosexual too but I believe, he was being the strongest support system for his child when no one was around Elio. The parental words attached to the child's feeling hold a huge psychological impact and for Oliver, this was thought as dangerous and negative. "You're lucky. My father would have carted me off to a correctional facility"- Oliver says to Elio about his fear of coming out (Aciman 227). Unlike any other straight father, Mr. Pearlman empathized with his child and it does not necessarily make him gay. This parental support is what lacked in both David and Oliver's fathers. Probably, due to this support and encouragement, Elio was able to wait for Oliver even after 20 years of their separation.

Oliver and Elio meet twenty years later in Italy where he shows his father's ashes. This boy loves his father so much that he goes to the place where Mr. Pearlman's ashes were buried. Elio and Oliver talk about whom they have lost during these 20 years- Vimini, Anchise, and his father. They indeed lament over the dead but none of them speak up about their dead relationship which too was buried, maybe for the society, but not for them. For one last time, Elio craved for Oliver to call him by Oliver's name so that he could call him back. However, Oliver leaves once again (248).

Why do characters like Oliver or David end up in tragedy or at least an unfinished story. Do they feel any social or political, religious or family's pressure over their sexual orientation? I would answer yes. We have numerous Oliver and David as well as Elio and Giovanni around us whom we do not acknowledge. Giovanni's Room and Call Me By Your Name respectively depict the stories of 1960s and 1980s homosexuals. However, this era was not very welcoming in appreciating people other than the heterosexual community. Even the first-ever gay marriage took place on the 1st of April in 2001 in the Netherlands. It automatically makes us clear, that the legalization and acceptance of homosexual relationships is a very new thing. We can already think of the challenges and difficulties homosexual couples like David-Giovanni and Oliver-Elio had to go through before the legalization of their marriage. While featuring the news of the first gay marriage marking 20 years, a news article reports almost thirty states followed this example and almost all European Union countries including Britain and the United States immediately legalized same-sex marriage around that time (nbcnews). Like the real-life Dutch couple Gert Kasteel and Dolf Pasker, who got married in 2001 as the first-ever gay couple, Oliver and Elio or David and Giovanni could also be fictional gay couples with a happy ending.

4.4 Discussion: Tragic Consequence strengthens heterosexual beliefs and is a result of antihomosexual views

Can, solely, legalizing same-sex marriage alleviate the problems that same-sex couples face? Why do they have to live in fear and why cannot they express their sexual preferences like a free human being. By showing the unfulfilled love stories of these same-sex couples in queer literature and in real life, the very straight mentality is continually reinforced. Can we, however, fully blame the authors for portraying gays as straight people? Authors, on the other hand, are products of this heteronormative environment, and rather than portraying a fantasy, they are attempting to depict a slice of reality in their works. Because of the threat of antihomosexual viewpoints held by society, the state, religion, and even their own families, queer people are forced to act like straights. In truth, people like Oliver and David are products of a predominantly straight-male society, and they, too, are caught between coming out and staying silent. They fear the reaction of the society toward them that makes them feel inferior. However, is it possible to eliminate antihomosexual actions or homophobia to a greater extent by enacting laws? Demands for LGBTQ+ rights did not emerge overnight; rather, they had to endure several riots, hate, and obstacles before claiming their proper place as a free citizen. Can society offer a better life for people like David, Giovanni, Oliver, and Elio, if these demands were already met in 1956 and 1983, the settings of *Giovanni's Room* and *Call Me By Your Name*? Can we confidently assert that if same-sex marriage had been legalized earlier, they would be able to live as any other couple?

Regrettably, recent events have forced me to respond harshly. Even with the legalization of same-sex marriage and the recognition of LGBTQ+ people's rights as free human beings, they are still subjected to antihomosexual actions and widespread prejudice by the general public. Unfortunately, many jurisdictions pass legislation protecting LGBTQ+ people's rights, just to set themselves above other countries and appear 'modern.'

Because of this Pinkwashing, we cannot promise a secure place for people like David and Oliver, where they would not have to deal with conflicts choosing between morals and desire. Let us step back and take a look in the history to see how little the world has evolved in this regard.

The Stonewall riot or Stonewall uprising of 1969 in New York City is often referred to as the turning point for LGBTQ+ people as it is considered the beginning of their movement. In Stonewall Inn bar, which was also considered a gay bar, was raided by police on 28 June 1969 which humiliated the homosexual people as well as drag queens, whose body was checked by female police, flamed the anger of other homosexuals who came down to the road with placard without any second thought. The police and state humiliated these people due to their gender-inappropriate clothing as well as unnatural sexual behavior. However, this riot was able to create a new path for other forthcoming gay movements and gay rights. One year later after this riot, the first-ever gay parade occurred in America with a chant, "Say it loud, gay is proud" ("Stonewall Riots"). In a setting of 1956 or 1983, we can realize how difficult the lives of these characters were who had no other option but to act as straight males. Even in this 21st century, antihomosexual activities have not stopped. It is still very much present in different shapes. Allison Hope writes in a recent 2022 *CNN* report titled "Opinion: The anti-LGBTQ backlash could have deadly consequences" that, "attacks on our community are sadly nothing new". Allison notes an irony about pinkwashing stating, that LGBTQ people are "grooming children". It enabled them to shatter false fantasies such as the United States has truly recognized and respected "our LGBTQ lives and experiences". The most recent examples of anti-LGBTQ activities were presented in Allison Hope's report. A gay club in Brooklyn was intentionally and systematically set on fire by someone on 3rd April 2022. A gay parent with their children was humiliated and threatened with "anti-LGBTQ language and homophobic tropes" by someone on a train while visiting San

Francisco. Moreover, as three people were coming out from a “drag show” in a city in California, they were attacked. These are a few of the numerous examples of homophobic attacks and antihomosexual activities even in 2022. When a group of people is fighting for living a life of their choice without harming anyone, the dominant group of people cannot stand it. The reason for this homophobia and attacks are the ideology behind it. As I have started my research saying, people always tend to differentiate between good and bad. This very idea of good and bad is also hugely subjective because their version of bad is not necessarily a bad thing.

Only because homosexual people’s sexual preference is different from that of heterosexuals, do they face massive hatred, attacks, and even killing. In this very straight-white society being a gay minority, people like Giovanni always suffer as they struggle to survive here. White privilege is present in queer people as well where white gay men “benefit from [state’s] alliances” produced by the system. On the other hand, people of color, black or brown, Italian or African, are massively and “increasingly targeted by this prison-like “carceral state”. These “carceral states” judge human beings as criminals despite being innocent by their actions or words. By committing these hate crimes, the states show their immense prejudice against a certain group, and then, as a result of prejudice, the system discriminates against them through verbal, physical, or emotional torture. Racial oppression and homophobic activities are two vivid examples of hate-crime by the state. The tragic consequence of Giovanni again reinforces the idea of hate-crime against colored queers as Giovanni, being an Italian in Paris ends up in imprisonment and death; where David, a White American guy did not have to face any such consequences (Ojeda-Sague 184). This place itself is like a hell for these people who cannot even live like free citizens. Couples like Oliver and Elio, despite longing for each other for twenty years, cannot gain the courage to say how much they want to live the rest of their life together. As if, no matter how modern

the world is becoming, this group of people frequently ends up suffering. Homosexuality is a sin tagged by religion and society as it goes against nature. However, how a person is feeling for another person is never in their hands. It comes wholly from the heart. Yes, the idea of family is indeed the base of this world. Yes, it is true same-sex parents cannot produce children naturally. However, is it better to be with someone for whom they do not gain sexual attraction just to produce offspring? Or, it is better to be with someone whom they love naturally, without having children or maybe adopting one? While the whole world is going through massive crimes like murder, rape, treachery, and whatnot, some people are still considering homosexuality a crime. Society is very much vocal in backlashing people from the LGBTQ+ community, but when it comes to being vocal against genuine crimes like rape or murder, they act blind. This is the very root cause for people like David and Oliver to act like straight men throughout the rest of their life just to save themselves from these extreme hatreds and to satisfy the social expectation.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Both of the novels ended in tragedy, which is a typical cliché in homosexual fiction. In real life, it is predictable that homosexuals face discrimination as a result of society's rejection of their lifestyle. These people's choice of loving the same gender as them has traditionally made them feel ashamed of themselves and led to a miserable life. They had to flee and are still fleeing because their family and friends would abandon them, they would be labelled criminals and sinners, and they would eventually end up in police custody. Who would want to live a life like that? Why would they express themselves in the name of truth, with the aim of transforming society, and other highly ethical motives and phrases, when in reality they would suffer the severe repercussions alone; we may simply show our support but will carry on with our own lives at the end of the day. Although society's views are steadily shifting over the globe, this particular ending for LGBTQ+ people has not changed as much as we could have wished for in the twenty-first century. When authors attempt to narrate the story of the LGBTQ+ community, they will look around the society or the queer people around them and will almost always come across a sorrowful conclusion, which we can see reflected in their novels. They are attempting to present the true tale, the story of our society, and this is what our culture has to offer — a horrible conclusion for queer people. Whatever the cause, sad endings in books have an effect on our thoughts, reinforcing the idea that anyone who chooses the LGBTQ+ pathway should sign a piece of paper stating that they are willing to suffer in their present and forthcoming life. In no way, we can blame the writers because they are trying to depict reality, not fantasy; but maybe, in this case, we need fantasy, we need a happy ending, no matter how much unrealistic that may sound in present reality. Otherwise, it is a forever loop of the darkness of society thrusting its objection against homosexuality and the fiction

repeating those words with a tragic ending without even trying to repeat the words. When the path is full of obstacles and objections, can we really blame characters like David and Oliver? If the system decides to punish them, cut their hands, put them in prisons, torture them, or even burn them alive-do they really have a choice? Society and religions are always dictating our lives even if we do not agree with them for which everything we do or think of doing is very much hegemonic. Religions have always shaped our viewpoints about the world. As already mentioned once, the two verses from Leviticus, “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” - have clearly told us what to think of homosexual people and homosexuality. If we look at other established religions today, we may see similar sentiments — religion degrading its own believers because of a decision it made for the masses. Religions have labelled it a sin, and individuals who follow those religions will believe it is a sin as well, without questioning it because they are not expected to question their God's judgments. When religion tells us to hate and kill LGBT people, it is difficult to believe that society will ever accept their existence from their hearts. We can approve same-sex marriage by law and maybe it will restrain religious followers from killing homosexual people but with the hatred, they have inherited from their religion, how can we ever restrain that? Beliefs or religion which understand the deeper essence of human beings unfortunately often becomes the reason for “sexual repression”. Such religions are Catholicism, Islam and Judaism which oftentimes act as the “potential source of repression”.

This may be welcomed by a cultural critic but less welcomed by a religious or secular preacher. This idea often makes young people fall into a dilemma because they cannot find symmetry between what they feel and what their surrounding is teaching them. Their “subjective experience” is not reflected in what they learn from their family, education of religious institutions or even media (Ratigan 90). Hence, they go through a troublesome

growing up process which continuously lets themselves ask, "Where do I fit in?" Religions have always been changing in human history. When one religion failed to meet the needs of the people, they simply formed a new one. Religions have become much more settled as time has passed, and they have developed with humanity. Society keeps religion going, and religion keeps society going, but when both are opposed to homosexuality, it is tough for homosexuals to live a normal life with a happy ending. David was never at ease with his sexual orientation. He had a relationship with other men but he always looked down on men who were interested in other men, same as him. In his own world, he was always superior to the rest of the gay people. He was afraid of what his father would think, what society would think about him if they find out his true color. Society's viewpoints and opinions became his opinions gradually and he had to think that he is different from others because this was the only way for David to accept himself. Society branded the gay people as the insect, criminals of the society and he could never become that. It was much easier for him to think of himself as another 'masculine' man of the community following the ethics and morals or more simply, gender roles set by society. However, he could not refuse the urge to have intercourse with other men and those men were always beneath him in his mind. Oliver was influenced by society too as he always thought of his relationship with Elio as temporary. After a while, Oliver went on with his life, he got married to a woman and had kids and led a normal life approved by society. He never had the courage or did not want to go down that path with Elio but he always treasured the memories he had with Elio. It was not enough to go against the rules of society but he accepted himself, he accepted that part of his life and he accepted Elio. There are plenty of David and Oliver around the world who are afraid to come out as gay or lesbian, who are afraid to accept themselves. The social order does not allow people like them to lead the life they want to lead by promoting an anti-homosexual attitude. "Homophobia," "heterosexism," "moral condemnations of homosexuality," as well as "anti-gay violence" are a few of the anti-

homosexual views among many which are prevalent in almost every society both covertly and overtly (Drescher).

People view homosexuals with suspicion as if they were witnessing a murderer, thief, or rapist. Their primary identity is replaced by their sexual interests, regardless of who they are or what they do. They are frequently bullied by others and are subjected to verbal and physical assault. Homosexuals are, as if, the epitome of what a devil would look like. Homosexuality is a sin and a punishable offence in every faith. It prevents LGBTQ+ individuals from living their preferred lives since religion dictates society in some way. Religious people are all around us who prefer to project their beliefs and ideas onto others and force them to follow the path that they are following. The moral or the right path described by the religious conviction makes it easier for them to describe the queer community as a sinner and condemn them. People being the product of the heteronormative world, cultivate a hatred among them for homosexual people because they are not abiding by the laws made by them. In the afterlife, they will go to hell and in this life, they should be punished in the ways religion described and religious people try their best to make sure that happens. Homosexual people like Oliver and David find it difficult to accept themselves as a normal human being with morals and ethics defined by their family, their religion and their society. If they were normal, why would they be attracted by the same sex as them? They start to think the same as a society and begin to hate themselves. Coming out to the near one, let alone to the world, does not even cross their minds. Even if it does, they immediately change their decision thinking of the consequences.

The state or policymaker also discourages homosexual behaviours by tagging illegality with it. Many states think of homosexuality as something which is not allowed by the nature and if any people conduct in sexual activities unaccepted by the nature must be sentenced to lifetime imprisonment. In the present world, homophobia exists, as people who do not align with the societal expectations such as gender roles are “subjugated to conditions” who live a

life of zombies or “living-dead” as they are not allowed to speak even if having a voice, or even cannot show their desire even if they feel like other human beings (Drescher). The moment they are not fitting into the prevailing or dominant ideology, they are backlashed, beaten severely, dehumanized and most tragically imprisoned or killed. This “subjugation of life” is very much present in this heteronormative society, where people who do not align with the prevailing norm, are heavily punished. Many first world countries are trying to adjust and change but most parts of the globe cannot accept homosexuality as well as act tolerant toward all human beings beyond their gender identity and sexual preferences. Family do not come into their help either. They favor removing their children from their families to get accepted in society instead of helping them to lead their preferred lives. A very vivid example of abandonment by the family would be found in countries like Bangladesh and India where parents abandon their children who are born as intersex or *Hijra*. Likewise, homosexual people cannot think of their family as their support system anymore. For their child’s sexual preferences, the family often feel ashamed to live with the society. Queer people, thus, hide themselves from the world, society, family and oftentimes themselves. “Hiding” behaviors perceived as children often remain into young adulthood and throughout their middle age to old age. These concepts of hiding or concealing lead many LGBTQ+ individuals to hide this crucial aspect of their identities even from their near and dear ones (Drescher).

Homosexual people only have themselves to depend on and that is not enough in this present world which is highly dictated by anti-homosexual attitudes. That is why most of them do not feel comfortable coming out with their "unnatural" sexual preferences, and even when they do the consequences are even harder than it was before. James Baldwin and Andre Aciman echo the reality and at the same time unexpectedly kill the hope of homosexual people to have a happily ever after. “Acceptance is not a pre-determined outcome for homosexually self-aware people” – both the authors prove this through David-Giovanni and Oliver-Elio couples. Self-

acceptance matters more than social acceptance which was somehow absent in David and Oliver to some extent. Oliver's very last statement about his own sexuality reveals it vividly to the readers. Even after losing Giovanni from his life and this world, he is in dilemma to identify, "what moves in [his] body, what this body is searching" for so long (152). By reminding the name of "heavy grace of God" he finally attempts to move on from whatever was hindering his morality. Oliver, in *Call Me By Your Name*, does not dare to call Elio for one last time by his name, even meeting after twenty years. Yes, Elio never tells Oliver to stay for him, leaving his wife and sons, because that will be impossible for Oliver to do so. By talking about Elio's unfulfilled desire to himself, one last time before Oliver again leaves him like those "blank years", Aciman ends the novel leaving a deeper sigh among the readers. Both of the authors hence depict the sacrifice of lovers, due to societal expectations and due to their own fear. Two of them were caught between morality and desires where their morality won. However, I am concluding my research here by leaving a question to the readers. Did their morality win in real, where they were ready to sacrifice their lovers and their authentic selves only because of societal expectations? I doubt.

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