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I Introduction¹

With the rise of Queer Studies in the 1990ies, the importance of acknowledging sexual and gender identities that do not conform to the traditional heterosexual norm has become evident. Members of the LGBTIQ-community, i.e. lesbians, gays, bisexual, transgender, intersexual and queer/questioning people, were typically regarded as misfits by society and regularly treated as outcasts. Eventually, however, the common awareness concerning these issues is changing towards not only tolerating but also accepting queer identities. Undoubtedly, media, in particular literature, have contributed considerably to the public paradigmatic shift since authors increasingly address LGBTIQ-related issues providing new insights for the readers. Particularly queer literature for an adolescent target audience succeeds in raising awareness by revealing sexual and gender identities beyond the norm, which, additionally induces readers to further reflect on their own perception of 'non-normativity' and the own identity.

In her seminal work on feminist and queer theory, Butler declares "[...] 'gender' only exists in the service of heterosexism" (*Bodies That Matter* 123); it is an arbitrary entity developed and perpetuated for centuries by the Western patriarchal society, which cherishes a binary system that stigmatizes and marginalizes people who refuse to be categorized as either male or female. A call for eventually destabilizing this social dichotomy by openly and publicly displaying a multiplicity of sexual and gender identities has been voiced in cultural studies. Moreover, educational settings, such as schools, provide opportunities for already accustoming young people to accepting queer identities, e.g. by discussing literature for young adults addressing these issues.

The present thesis, therefore, not only aims at revealing different gender identities in young adult novels, but also seeks to contemplate inner conflicts and problems that induce the respective protagonists to disclose their gender and sexual identities. Simultaneously, it will offer insights into the implications for queers generated by growing up in a heteronormative social environment.

In the first part of the thesis, the theoretical framework on Queer Studies and various manifestations of gender identity will be conceptualized by reviewing works of established scholars. A special focus will be attributed to a disambiguation of the gender variances transsexuality and intersexuality. In addition, the thesis will take into account ty-

¹ This introduction is an adapted, extended version of a Research Proposal produced for *English for academic purposes* in the summer term 2016.

pological features of the genre 'Young adult novels' and the significance of LGBTIQ identities within this genre. This outline provides the basis for a thorough textual analysis of two young adult novels featuring three queer protagonists who experience their search for sexual and gender identity rather diversely. The intersexual Max's search for identity in *Golden Boy* (Tarttelin, 2013) is motivated by an accidental pregnancy after having been raped whereas the random friendship between the already transitioned transsexual teenager Leo and the secretly transsexual David in *The Art of Being Normal* (Williamson, 2015) helps both in developing their personal identity.

The aim of this analysis is to answer the following research questions: What inner conflicts and problems induce the protagonists to acknowledge their own gender identity? How is the queer identity perceived and regarded within the protagonists' social environment and what does this perception generate? Due to the protagonists' manifold social contexts, I expect their respective quest for identity to proceed rather differently albeit sharing certain conflicting feelings and fears. With a view to the social regard of the queer identities, I anticipate to reveal to what extent the protagonists are compelled by the heteronormative order to conform in order to avoid stigmatization and marginalization.

Additionally, the thesis strives to destabilize further heteronormative thinking by offering useful insights into queer realities for young adults. In involving students in experiences of fictional queer peers, they will realize the arbitrary character of the familiar binary system. Even though the thesis will not immediately effect a change in society's opinion on the issue, it will ideally contribute to the eventual perpetuation of an open-minded attitude towards LGBTIQ individuals, which, in the end, might positively affect legal regularities for queer people.

Finally, I would like to draw on Sullivan's introductory terms:

[...] the aim of [this thesis] is to queer – to make strange, to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize, to camp up – heteronormative knowledges and institutions, and the subjectivities and socialities that are (in)formed by them and that (in)form them. (vi)

II Conceptualization

1 Queer Studies

1.1 Queer

In recent times, the term 'queer' has entered not only academic discourse, but is also used more commonly in everyday speech even though the majority of people might not understand the underlying initial connotation of it. According to the *MacMillan Online Dictionary*, the meaning of the expression is twofold. It formerly denoted oddness and strangeness, as well as an individual's poor physical state, synonymous to *ill* and *sick*; its contemporary usage, however, diverges considerably from the term's origin. Nowadays, the term refers to the 'queer community', i.e. people who do not identify with the heterosexual matrix, which adopted 'queer' as an autonym, even though in colloquial use it is a mere pejorative for homosexuals, transgender, etc. (*MacMillan Dictionary*).

Degele argues that, through using negative connotations of the term, queer seeks to unsettle normative thinking rather than solely providing a theory (Degele 11). Within the academic field of Queer Theory, 'queer' signifies unstable identities that do not correspond to established norms, as David Halperin describes.

Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without an essence. 'Queer' then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality *vis-à-vis* the normative. [...] [Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance. (62, qtd. in Sullivan 43)

In fact, *Queer Studies* emphasize the irreducibility of sexual and gender practices to homosexuality and heterosexuality. Common perceptions of this academic field often neglect identities outside the binary specter, such as transsexuals, intersex people, cross-dressers, etc. However, 'queer', as a collective term, values the individual irrespective of sexual orientation and gender identification and seeks to render the lives of queer people worthwhile and free from marginalization or stigmatization (Corber and Valocchi 1). Driven by poststructuralist conviction, queer activism eventually succeeds in destabilizing heterosexual norms by indicating the essential arbitrariness of the relation between biological sex, felt gender and sexual desire (Jagose 13–15).

1.2 Queer Theory

Queer Studies is an interdisciplinary field of research that examines and describes issues related to gender per se and gender- and sexual identities. It emerged from Gender Studies and feminist movements in the 1990ies but is considerably more permissive to different gender identities than the original disciplines. The relationship between these distinct theories has been complex since feminists frequently regard queer identities, such as transgender, with suspicion. In stressing the suppression of women within phallocentric societies, they deny these gender minorities the right to claim the position of a suppressed group:

The ‘womanist’ perspective is that M-to-F [*abbr.* Male-to-Female] people, raised with male privilege, cannot ever be women, and F-to-M [*abbr.* Female-to-Male] people, seduced by the power of patriarchy, have been duped and have defected to the enemy. (McKenna and Kessler, *Transgendering* 349)

Eventually Feminist Studies has accepted Transgender Studies as a means to reveal the arbitrariness of the binary system and allows for liberation through transgressing boundaries (McKenna and Kessler, *Transgendering* 350).

However, queer scholars also express abundant criticism towards Gender Studies: In defining sexuality a practice that essentially serves as “a vehicle for regulating and controlling” society, and consequently maintains the “regime of knowledge and power”, the creation of distinct lesbian and gay communities implicitly affirms the heteronormative binary (Corber and Valocchi 4). Additionally, the fact that feminist and gender studies refuse to support non-normative gender identities further contributes to “maintaining the heterosexual/homosexual binary” (Corber and Valocchi 4).

Generally, Queer Studies’ opposition to established discourses is threefold; first, bodies of knowledge and practices are analyzed hermeneutically in order to evidence the weaknesses of these. Secondly, the movement seeks to reveal heteronormative mechanisms that are responsible for society’s binary categorization. Thirdly, different categories of gender identity are accentuated for the purpose of both unsettling essentialist interpretations of identity and establishing solidarity among members of the queer group (Degele 43–44).

1.3 Sex vs. Gender

In the course of history, heteronormativity has been persistently perpetuated by the interchangeable use of the terms *sex* and *gender*. However, Gender Studies provides for

an explicit and distinct definition of the concepts. West and Zimmerman, for instance, describe *sex* as:

[...] a determination made through the application of socially agreed upon biological criteria for classifying persons as females or males. The criteria for classification can be genitalia at birth or chromosomal typing before birth, and they do not necessarily agree with one another. (127)

Considering the Latin root of the term *gender*, however, the arbitrariness of the supposition that there is a natural relation between *sex* and *gender* becomes apparent. According to Shaw 'genus' denotes "'kind', 'sort' or 'class', to refer to social categorisations of persons, usually as women or men, boys or girls, in ways that encompass at least some distinct patterns of social and cultural differences [...]" (*Changing sex* 3). In other words, *gender* attributes typical features of the categories 'male' and 'female' and dictates common behavior patterns (Degele 20).

For the purpose of dissipating essentialist views on gender identity², the renowned researchers in Gender Studies, Kessler and McKenna further developed Garfinkel's idea that the conception of gender underlies a natural attitude. To put it differently, the gender binary is accepted as reality (Garfinkel qtd. in *Transgendering* 342-43). Gender attribution, however, is socially constructed, and based on the assumption of the existence of a symbolic phallus. In phallogentric societies, femininity and masculinity are therefore constituted by the absence or presence of a penis, respectively. The significance of male genitalia as a defining entity is also obvious considering society's preference for male gender reflected in, e.g. the predominant use of masculine pronouns in language (Kessler and McKenna, *Theory* 169-173).

Kessler and McKenna further elaborate on Garfinkle's theory of 'cultural genitals', i.e. the supposition that genitals constitute gender in maintaining that the cultural genital is, in fact, the male phallus, which is, however, independent from the actual existence of a physical penis (qtd. in Kessler and McKenna, *Theory* 173). We establish an assumption about the other's gender by interpreting cues, such as facial hair, body structure, hair length, etc. The attributed social gender is paramount for defining our lives since it not only dictates the respective gender appearance but also activities in daily routine. In order to adopt a cultural gender successfully, one must recognize and adopt appropriate behavior (Kessler and McKenna, *Theory* 173-74).

² See 2.1

Members of Western societies usually follow an 'attribution scheme' for recognizing the opposite's gender that again mirrors phallocentrism. The image of the attributed gender appears to be almost irreversible; in other words, when people assume to recognize someone's gender they will have fixed ideas in mind that can hardly be changed. Transgender people who wish to be viewed with their chosen gender, thus, need to identify with and adopt the respective cultural gender, as well as acknowledge that the social environment that was accustomed to the existing/absent genitals as a marker for gender, might refuse to change perspective. Kessler and McKenna emphasize, "[g]ender attributions are so impervious to change that the person will be seen as "crazy" long before she/he is seen as being the other gender" (*Theory* 176–77).

The existence of a "natural attitude about gender", as well as the dominant position of phallocentrism are reflected in society's opinion on transgender identities. Even though an eventual public change of mind is discernible, transgender individuals are regarded as 'mistakes', as 'freaks of nature' that need to be remedied. As has been pointed out before, gender and sexuality are social constructions that become distinct only within human discourse (McKenna and Kessler, *Transgendering* 343). Although anthropological research allows for a refutation of the common dichotomous categorization of sex, it is deeply rooted in not only a cultural but also in the scientific discourse. The social dichotomy impinges on research and further stabilizes the sexual binary (Shaw, *Changing sex* 3). In fact, the assumption that there are two genders is relatively new and was introduced during the Enlightenment. Prior to that, women were rather considered an alteration of the male body that lacks the phallus and is variable. Hence, only one sex was recognized, whereas different genders were important for determining social status and roles (Shaw, *Changing sex* 4). This historical perspective evidences that apparently stable facts are subject to paradigmatic shifts, which opens further opportunities for a change of perception of the contemporary gender system.

1.4 Heteronormativity

Modern societies are grounded on the assumption of the existence of only two genders, i.e. male or female, and hence, organize everyday life respecting a dichotomous order. This contemporary belief, however, originates from societal changes in the late 19th century induced by increasing industrialization, as well as an increasing awareness of national boundaries (Corber and Valocchi 2). Biology, natural sciences, and the existence of

genitals and bodily processes induced by hormones vindicate the theory of the binary order of human beings (Kessler and McKenna, *Theory* 178).

Queer Studies initially aimed at investigating different gender identities. With Butler's introduction of the concept of *performativity*, a reflection on society grounded on heteronormative rules became more significant. *Heteronormativity* denotes hegemonic discourses that seek to justify the rightfulness of heterosexuality as a dominant organizational entity. Forms of sexuality outside this matrix are marginalized and stigmatized. The mechanisms fostering heteronormativity while neglecting different sexual realities, are habitual and natural in Western societies, and therefore, difficult to reveal (Corber and Valocchi 4). Even though heterosexuality constitutes the basis for heteronormative thinking, the terms must not be regarded synonymously. While heterosexuality describes sexual attraction to and practices with individuals of the opposite sex, heteronormativity concerns the institutional body of knowledge that legitimizes the domination of heterosexuality. Heteronormativity operates on four levels in order to maintain this domination: first, the sexual/gender dichotomy is naturalized by presenting it as an indisputable natural fact according to which nature provided for heterosexuality with the purpose of maintaining humankind. Individuals then internalize heteronormativity, insofar as it enters their unconscious mind, whilst public institutions warrant heterosexuality, e.g. marriage laws and labor division of men and women. Finally, social discourse prescribes particular patterns of behavior appropriate to the respective sex and in this way reduces possibilities for more complex activities. As a result, heteronormative thinking deeply manifests itself in the collective minds and people react with bewilderment or feel even offended if the sex/gender of the opposite is inconclusive (Degele 88–90).

Throughout history, sexuality and sexual acts have been assigned explicit meanings that array society “according to a hierarchical system of sexual value”:

Married heterosexuals who have sex only for the purposes of procreation are at the top of the hierarchy; gays and lesbians, whether monogamous or promiscuous, are in the middle; and persons who engage in the most stigmatized forms of sexuality such as commercial sex or sadomasochism are at the bottom, whether heterosexual or homosexual. (Corber and Valocchi 8)

The heteronormative order of sexual orientation is also applicable to gender identities: cisgender individuals, i.e. their gender identification is in alignment with the biological sex assigned at birth (QMUNITY 2), are highly valued while people who perceive their

gender in discordance with the assigned sex, such as applies to transgender individuals, often entails exclusion from social participation. Common conceptions of sexuality and gender are mutable depending on social and historical context. Throughout history, formerly stigmatized sexual practices have eventually become socially accepted. This fact expands possibilities for Queer Studies, which successfully endeavors to refute causality assumptions of sex and gender by alluding to transgenderism, etc. In fact, Queer Studies highly appreciates transgender and intersex identities for providing proof of the regulative powers behind the maintenance of institutionalized normativity (Corber and Valocchi 8–9).

1.4.1 Deconstruction

Studies in the field of gender aim at destabilizing heteronormative structures by exposing their regulative powers. This endeavor entails raising awareness of the power discourse that maintains the social order, which can be accomplished by a breach of taboo or disappointment of expectations, for instance, by openly questioning factual conditions. These challenges would ideally enhance a denaturalization of norms towards the normalization of the previously unimaginable. With regard to institutionalized heteronormativity, educational settings, for instance, should recede from reinforcing stereotypical gender roles, e.g. in schoolbooks. Another important step is for the legislative powers not to force people in the binary gender system by indicating the sex in passports (Degele 92).

Judith Butler's interest in normative societal relations is constitutive for the deconstruction of sex and gender. Deconstruction is a constant hermeneutic reflection on bodies of knowledge and the creation of these. Recognition of the proper gender is, according to Butler, a performance effected by of the constant repetition of common discourse; children eventually acknowledge their assigned gender if it is presented to them with a factual attitude. Such discourses again facilitate the naturalness of the binary gender system (*Gender Trouble* qtd. in Degele 105–06).

1.4.2 Performativity

In her highly influential treatise *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler introduces the concept of *performativity*, and suggests that gender identity is the result of a constant repetition of institutionalized cultural signs and conventions. Hence, the display of gender is not remotely effected by natural or innate realities but it is rather a performance of “acts and

gestures which are learned and are repeated over time [and] create the illusion of an innate and stable (gender) core” (Sullivan 82). These performative acts are interpreted by others based on common knowledge on appropriate behavior that again provokes assumptions of the respective gender identity. These deeply imprinted performative patterns perpetuate “ontologies of gender”, i.e. ideas about gender principles that provide the basis for heteronormative thinking. Society punishes disregard of normative performances with stigmatization and exclusion (Sullivan 82–84).

Considering that the concept of gender is constantly challenged by displays of inconsistent behavior as “it is impossible for the reiteration of an action to occur in identical ways”, it is a rather unstable entity (Sullivan 85). Performative acts are, hence, imitations of prescribed standards that can be unsettled by slight deviations from the norm. To clarify her views, Butler outlines *performativity* referring to drag performances since they are a constant exposure of inconsistencies of gender. Drag performance is the parodistic visualization of an ideal, and succeeds in showing how gender identities can be simply adopted, or rather embodied (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* qtd. in Sullivan 86).

Gender performativity as outlined in *Gender Trouble*, was subject to a controversial debate since various critics have misinterpreted Butler’s reference to drag performance as a claim that gender identity can be chosen voluntarily (Sullivan 86–87). This, however, “would assume that the subject already exists and is capable of assuming and controlling its performances” (Corber and Valocchi 4). According to Butler, subjectivity is the result of performative processes within the discursive systems to which the individual is exposed. Performativity is, thus, not to be confused with performance: The drag artist performs a parodistic account performativity, or rather the discursive norms underlying performativity (Sullivan 89–90).

1.4.3 Doing Gender

Heteronormative societies not only categorize their members according to binary systems based on biological facts but also dictate gender-based masculine or feminine behavioral patterns. With a view to being accepted within the system, individuals have to incorporate these into their personality. Commonly, these gendered practices are internalized at a young age; studying transsexuals, however, allows for a disclosure of successfully passing as either male or female. Transsexuals have to study behavioral patterns of their desired gender carefully in order to fulfill public expectations. In the 1980s, West and Zimmerman (qtd. in Degele 80) coined the expression *doing gender*,

which describes gender as the result of the constant interaction between agents engaging in routine processes, and recipients who observe these. Through the process of sexualization, theoretically meaningless objects and behaviors are ascribed feminine or masculine characteristics; e.g., heels and skirts are ‘feminized’ objects that render a person wearing them feminine. Hence, gender, rather than being innate, is a constant display of gender attribution (Degele 79–81).

Unlike Butler’s *performativity*, West and Zimmerman’s concept of *doing gender* is characterized by constant social interaction. We display meaningful, conventionalized gender roles and features, only in communication with others. Garfinkle’s regularly cited case study (qtd. in West and Zimmerman 131) about the transsexual Agnes, aptly exemplifies the process of *doing gender*. In order to ‘pass’ as a woman, Agnes had to analyze carefully what accurate female behavior entails. The first step to adopting the female gender, was to adopt a feminine style by wearing particular clothing or applying make-up. However, Agnes had to be attentive not to “overdo gender”; femininity is constituted by simple actions, such as by allowing men to open her car door. *Doing gender* is thus accentuating the presumed difference between men and women, which as a result reinforces the alleged naturalness of the binary gender alignment. However, even if we were aware of the peculiarities of *doing gender*, it would be precarious to avoid it since consequently the individual’s membership in the society would be at risk. Social movements, such as feminism and LGBTIQ, however, seek to induce change, by sensitizing society to the mechanisms of *doing gender* (West and Zimmerman 131–47).

2 Identity

Identity in itself is a complex term that has been debated not only in scholarly discourse but is of highly sociocultural interest. Identifying a definition and explaining how identity is constructed has been endeavored for decades if not centuries. Nevertheless, the majority of academics agree that a thorough consideration of this term necessitates contemplating it in its cultural, personal and social entirety. Particularly social environment and cultural aspects such as stereotypes affect one’s formation of identity and can, thus, be comprehended as a tool for perpetuating the demand for being and acting “normal” in order to warrant society’s political and economic functioning (Lemke 18–19). In the following chapters, the most influential theoretical approaches concerned with identity, i.e. essentialism, social-constructivism and poststructuralism, will be outlined. Moreover,

concepts of gender identity, as well as gender identity development will be treated in more detail.

2.1 Essentialism

Traditional concepts of identity development assume that certain human traits, such as gender, culture and race are innate entities; they are essential to nature and are not subject to change. Throughout history patriarchal hegemonic structures rationalized the subordination of women by referring to essentialism and, thus, manifested the alleged inferiority of the 'weak sex' that is characterized by "nurturance, empathy, support, non-competiveness, and the like" (Grosz 47). This view draws heavily on *biologism* and *naturalism*, the former emphasizing differences in the biological structures of men and women, the latter identifying the gender binary on the grounds of philosophical reasoning (Grosz 48).

2.2 Social-Constructivism

Within a constructionist terminology, identity and gender identity are understood as the result of social conditioning and depend on cultural and environmental factors. Sexuality is thus to be considered within social and historical contexts since apprehension and appraisal of different sexual identities has changed considerably over time. As has been pointed out in chapter 1, the distinction between homosexuality and heterosexuality was constructed during the period of industrialization and nationalization, which divided people in numerous categories. Nevertheless, social-constructivism fails to acknowledge the reversibility of historically constructed entities, as argued by Corber and Valocchi:

Even as the studies showed that lesbian and gay identities were socially constructed, [social-constructionist historians] implied that those identities were stable and coherent as they took for granted that the boundaries between homosexuality and heterosexuality were fixed and impermeable. (Corber and Valocchi 2–3)

Although criticizing the sudden emergence of the sexual orientation categories, social-constructivism evokes a categorization of society within another binary. Rather than understanding sexual identities on a continuum, social-constructivism holds the view that hetero- and homosexuality are unalterable and fixed, omitting possibilities of bisexual, asexual, pansexual or even polysexual affiliations (Corber and Valocchi 2–3).

While essentialism is regularly reduced to its apparent conservative character, social-constructivist views are appraised for being progressive and enhancing social change. However, constructionist theories might be employed by, e.g. homophobic movements, as support for claiming that homosexuality is remediable (Jagose 22).

2.3 Poststructuralism

Gender Studies, Queer Theory, as well as Queer Studies primarily draw on poststructuralist views on gender identity development and conceive identity as temporary and contingent on environmental factors. It is in this regard that queer identities find appreciation and allow for a refutation of established essentialist and constructivist conceptions of identity. Identity development is a result of social interaction and the intrinsic identification with others (Jagose 101–03). Poststructuralism both rejects and adapts the preceding essentialist and social-constructionist models of identity and maintains that the essentialist belief, influenced by a humanistic worldview, of innate human traits is a means to sustain hegemonic power relations. Subjectivity and self-identification only result as a response to this perpetuation; “there is no true self that exists prior to its immersion in culture” (Sullivan 40–41).

Poststructuralism was established in the late 20th century and founded on theories by scholars of high renown, such as Althusser, Freud, Saussure, Lacan, and Derrida, each of whom aspired after challenging former theories of identity rather differently. Contrary to his theoretical predecessors, who argue that hegemonic power structures create and control discourse, Foucault proposes that power provides for productivity of discourse and even enhances opportunities for resistance. Accordingly, the increasing discourse on sexual perversion and homosexuality in the 19th and 20th century facilitated the emergence of a gay-counter movement that encouraged an increasing number of people to claim a non-normative identity (Jagose 102–06). However, the discursive structures and produced norms are deeply ingrained in the collective minds insofar as people self-regulate their behavior in order to conform to heteronormativity (Corber and Valocchi 11). Hence, poststructuralism considers identity an interplay between various factors. In claiming an identity, the individual reacts to society, whether consciously or unconsciously, and adapts it to either meet the demands or defy normativity.

2.4 Gender Identity³

As has been established previously in this chapter, identity cannot be described in simple terms. Identifying a definition for gender identity is even more intricate. Already in the 1960ies, Stoller identified the peculiarities of recognizing a proper gender identity:

Gender Identity starts with the knowledge and awareness, whether conscious or unconscious, that one belongs to one sex and not the other, though as one develops, gender identity becomes much more complicated, so that, for example, one may sense himself as not only a male but a masculine man or an effeminate man or even a man who fantasies being a woman. (56)

Or as Israel puts it: “[Gender Identity is the] maleness and femaleness a person feels on the inside [...]” (Israel 55, qtd. in Toomey et al. 1581). Particularly within adolescence, some individuals might experience an imbalance between the sex assigned at birth and the self-perceived gender identity, which in turn complicates an adequate display of a social gender role (Stoller 56). Society dictates a conforming to gender roles on the basis of the binary gender system that has remained unchallenged for centuries. As has been discussed in previous chapters⁴, Butler exposes in her seminal work on *performativity* that “[...] gender only exists in the service of heterosexism” (*Gender Trouble* 123). An obstinate adherence to the notions of male and female only contributes to the continuation of heteronormativity. She further argues that this constant perpetuation of *performativity*⁵ tarnishes the self-perceived identity and renders a reflection on “gender as a presupposition of humanness” difficult (Butler, *Doing justice* 184). Paramount for understanding gender as a tool for maintaining heteronormativity are five factors, as described by Egan and Perry: “membership knowledge, gender typicality, gender contentedness, pressure to conform, and intergroup bias” (Egan and Perry 459, qtd. in Toomey et al. 1581).

Especially in the discourse on the LGBTIQ movement, a need for changing traditional conceptions of sex and gender becomes evident. In previous decades, a sensitization for countering inequalities regarding men and women was already initiated. The emergence of queer theory (Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*; Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Sedgwick) encouraged a redefinition of the gender spectrum. However, society is still

³ Parts of this chapter are adapted from an assignment for *English for academic purposes* in the summer term 2016

⁴ See 1.4 and 1.4.2

⁵ See 1.4.2

reluctant to abandon the supposed natural dichotomy and expresses tolerance towards diverse genders only in acknowledging them as deviancies from the norm.

2.4.1 Gender Identity Development

Surprisingly, little research has been conducted on the development of gender identity in children, and adolescents. However, it is assumed that gender identity is the result of various factors reciprocally affecting each other, i.e., the social milieu, values and principles of rearing are decisive for the development of the individual identity until puberty. Such factors not only affect identity in terms of personality, values and worldview, but also influence one's understanding of gender. Research on infants has shown that children develop a sense of gender between 18 and 24 months and, simultaneously, display inclination to binary gender-specific behavior and items (Steensma et al. 290). While male infants seem to identify their gender more strongly than females, it is commonly believed that an intensification of gender identity occurs during puberty (Hill and Lynch; qtd. in Steensma et al. 290). However, Priess et al. have refuted this assumption in proving that adolescents' gender identity remains stable whereas gendered interests may intensify (Priess, Lindberg, and Hyde; qtd. in Steensma et al. 290).

Considering gender variant identity development, the assumption that the consolidation of gender happens already in early childhood is sustained. Children as young as two years, acknowledge their gender assigned at birth and express their personal attitude towards it. Children with variant gender identities, thus, utter, for instance, their disapproval of their biological sex characteristics. However, discomfort with the assigned gender might change during adolescence due to factors such as "1) physical puberty; 2) the changing environment and being more explicitly treated as one's natal sex [...] and 3) the discovery of sexuality" (Steensma et al. 290–91).

Identifying a reason for non-normative gender development has been endeavored by numerous academics. Nevertheless, the results remain rather ambiguous and hypothetical since each individual case is different. One hypothesis attributes greater responsibility to the parents: unconscious factors, such as the wish for a boy or a girl, etc., affect the child's internal sense of gender. Research on variants of intersex conditions has yielded insights on the effect of prenatal hormone influence on gender identity. However, the influence of hormones on gender development remains inconclusive. Still, post-mortem studies on transgender individuals suggest that biological factors are paramount for perceiving one's felt gender discordant to the assigned gender. Considering these hy-

potheses, it is obvious that gender variant identity development depends on various factors and describing reasons for transgender identities is unfeasible (Steensma et al. 290–95).

Tate, in this regard, proposes that inner-psychological processes that are independent of outward requirements trigger off the individual's personal perception of self and gender. She argues that the primary difference of cisgender⁶ and transgender categories are the inner processes that induce their formation (13–15). According to Tate, "[...] any individual's gender identity experience [...] appears to be the convergence or divergence of intra- and interpersonal perceptions" (13). While cisgender people perceive their gender in concordance with social binary assumptions, transgenders' gender affiliation diverges from the norm. The frequently cited case of a male infant John, whose genitals were removed after a circumcision accident and who was consequently reared as a girl (Joan), exemplifies Tate's view. The child's parents were recommended to raise John simply as Joan based on the assumption that gender was socially constructed and infants are born gender-neutral. Not only a vagina was constructed, but the child was also in endocrinologist treatment. John/Joan, however, had difficulty in adapting to the female gender role throughout childhood and in adolescence eventually refused to finalize sex reassignment. Even though John had not been aware of his early childhood destiny until puberty, he intuitively desired to be male, or as Butler puts it, "John experienced some deep-seated sense of gender, one linked to his original set of genitals, [...] that no amount of socialization could reverse" (*Doing justice* 184–186).

Self-identification is not a sudden realization, but in some cases a rather tedious process. Numerous scholars have attempted to outline this process by identifying particular steps. Cass, for example, distinguishes six phases of homosexual identity formation, namely *identity confusion*, *identity comparison*, *identity tolerance*, *identity acceptance*, *identity pride*, and *identity synthesis*. These phases are characterized by increasing awareness of a new identity, assessment of different identities, gradual acceptance by gathering further information, acceptance of the new identity, decrease of concerns about the public opinion, and shifting the focus of the search for identity (qtd. in Devor 43–45). Lewins (qtd. in Devor 45–46) proposes a model for identity development of MTF transsexuals similar to Casses', with only the fifth (*sex reassignment*) and the sixth phase (*invisibility*) applicable explicitly to transsexualism. Tully insists on transsexual

⁶ See 1.4

gender disclosure as a lifelong process that entails constant confusion that can only be relieved through a change of sex (qtd. in Devor 46–47).

2.4.2 Variant Gender Identities

Drawing on poststructuralist perspectives, more scholars emphasize the fluidity inherent to gender identity. Tate, for instance, assumes that gender is not a stable identity given that numerous queer identities not only accept their deviance from the norm, but even embrace it by refusing to adopt definite gender labels (14–15). In accordance with this final regard, Gagné and Tewskbury maintain that gender identity is subject to active and conscious decisions (86–90). While Butler (*Bodies that matter*) argues that this active involvement primarily serves to perpetuate heterosexual rules by assuming stereotypical female or male behavior, Gagné and Tewskbury maintain that transgender individuals consciously perform multiple gender identities (with respect to gender binary) in order to challenge heteronormativity.

However, they further contend that regularly, lack of courage to claim a non-binary gender identity prevents such individuals from openly disclosing the true identity even after having personally acknowledged the proper affiliation. In other words, according to Gagné and Tewskbury, at the moment of self-disclosure the individual becomes an active agent in charge of challenging society's bigotry. In failing to counteract the system, albeit out of anxiety to become an outcast, the individual indirectly surrenders to heteronormativity (90–100). Analogous to Gagné and Tewskbury, Diamond and Butterworth refer to the theory of intersectionality, i.e. identification with various groups, and further elaborate on the benefit of not tenaciously adopting only one sexual or gender identity for challenging dichotomous social norms and propose the manifold opportunities of gender fluidity (366–68). Nevertheless, Lemke remarks that hybrid identities, rather than being an opportunity for gaining personal freedom and respect, are a mere attempt to satisfy conflicting parties. Even though Lemke does not exclusively relate his argument to gender, it nonetheless applies to the discourse in question since the pursuit of disputing the system bears the danger of disregarding personal interests (Lemke 32–33). Halberstam even affirms that in postmodernism queer bodies represent the contemporary attitude of individual choice (*Queer Time* 18):

Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 2)

These accounts exemplify a magnitude of opportunities, not only for liberating the individual from social constraints, but also for inducing change in the social mindset that is coined by heteronormative thinking.

Schilt and Westbrook, on the other hand, consider the adoption of certain gendered patterns that conform to the binary highly valuable to some extent. They maintain that it is the engagement in ritualistic behavior that enables people who do not feel comfortable with their gender assigned at birth and either undergo sexual reassignment or simply engage in doing gender as they feel comfortable with to socially interact as accepted members of society. Still, Schilt and Westbrook do not consider adopting an identity according to one's true gender problematic for its reinforcement of heteronormativity, as has been discussed above; they rather emphasize the unlikelihood of being fully perceived as either woman or man (446–60).

2.4.3 Anthropological considerations

An anthropological consideration of gender further reveals the extent to which Western culture's alignment to masculinity as well as its focus on only two genders is arbitrary and socially imposed rather than natural. Examining indigenous communities facilitates the confutation of the Western binary gender system since various peoples recognize a variety of gender identities that are not necessarily stable in the course of time and regularly serve a particular function within the group. Despite acknowledging that the "transgender's" resulting position within the respective society is incongruous with conservative Western thinking, James stresses the significance of considering these identity forms for a refutation of the assumption that there is a natural relation between sex and gender. Corresponding to Butler's theory of gender performativity, James concludes that in the Western system children internalize how to behave with respect to the assigned gender. Yet, she raises the question why some children "decide" to act in a manner associated with the opposite sex if they should have learnt to behave differently (James 79–94).

An anthropological consideration is furthermore feasible in terms of intersex disorder. Shaw as well as Sutton and Whittaker discuss Western society's inability to even consider the possibility of more than two sexes, while other cultures accept gender ambiguity as simply another form of sex rather than a disorder and even provide proper terminology (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 22–33; Sutton and Whittaker 176–178). Furthermore, intersex disorder and gender identity are different from gender identity disorder in

transgender individuals, as Sutton and Whittaker argue, insofar as intersex people might not perceive the necessity to change the status of their gender or physical features as strongly. Although indirectly demanding to embrace gender hybridity and novel forms of identity, Sutton and Whittaker attribute families, particularly parents, freedom to decide on the child's fate albeit this entails assignment to either male or female gender since in Western society "it is as if gender assignment is directly equated with matters of immediate survival" (175). In order to ensure the intersexual child's mental health a paradigmatic shift towards normalization of and tolerance to deviation from the norm is therefore essential.

3 Queer and LGBTIQ identities

Queer and LGBTIQ (for the present thesis, a recourse to an extended version of the acronym LGBT is feasible due to its explicit inclusion of intersexual individuals) are frequently regarded synonymously. Although the meanings of the terms overlap to a great extent, acknowledging the slight distinctions is paramount for a consideration of various gender identities.

Queer has become a widely recognized term for a community of non-heterosexual and non-cisgender individuals. Due to its etymological development and common invective usage in popular culture⁷, identifying with and using the term is frequently refrained from. The acronym *LGBT* refers to lesbians, gays, bisexual and trans* (the asterisk is a reference to all non-binary and non-static gender identities). The addition of the letters *IQ* allows for greater appreciation of gender variances, such as *transsexuality*, *intersex* and *queer/questioning* (QMUNITY 9, 12, 14; NLGJA).

The first letters in the acronym LGBTIQ stand for *lesbian*, *gay* and *bisexual*, and hence, refer to manifestations of sexual orientation different to heterosexuality. *Transsexual*, *intersexual* and *queer* individuals, however, experience their gender in discordance with the norm while their sexual identity may even be heterosexual (American Psychological Organization [Online]). In the following chapter, the sexual and gender minorities within the LGBTIQ specter will be defined. Given the focus of the present thesis, i.e. non-normative gender identities, homosexuality and bisexuality will only be outlined briefly.

⁷ See 1

3.1 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual

Lesbians, gays and bisexuals experience their sexual identity different to the socially imposed heterosexuality, i.e. they feel attracted to members of the same sex or both sexes. Today, it is expected that sexual orientation “ranges along a continuum”, which means that the level of attraction to either sex varies (American Psychological Organization [Online]). A contemplation of different manifestations of lesbianism has proved that gender identity is even more complex than has been assumed. Female homosexuals, such as butches (i.e. role behavior and appearance associated with masculinity (QMUNITY 2)), may exceedingly identify with and emphasize their masculinity without feeling discomfort with their gender assigned at birth (Corber and Valocchi 8–9).

Homosexuals and bisexuals are victims of discrimination and stigmatization since it is still commonly believed that variant forms of sexual orientation are pathological, mental disorders. However, explanations for attraction to the same sex have not been found (American Psychological Organization [Online]).

3.2 Transgender

The letter T in the acronym LGBT usually denotes transgender while in the extended version LGBTIQ it refers to transsexualism. These two terms are frequently used interchangeably neglecting the slight differences in meaning. In the 1970ies, Virginia Prince introduced the term ‘transgender’ as denomination for transsexuals. She argued that it describes the ‘condition’ more adequately since the biological sex is invariable even if reassignment surgery is undertaken. Contemporary usages of the term, however, diverge considerably from its early proposition. Rather than maintaining binary attitudes to sex and gender, it intends to destabilize further the supposed naturalness of dichotomous orders (McKenna and Kessler *Transgendering*, 343–345).

Nevertheless, a clear distinction of the term ‘transgender’ was not found. In order to comprehend its significance, a consideration of the word’s etymology is feasible. The Greek prefix ‘trans’ denotes a shift of form, as in ‘transformation’. Transgender does not necessarily imply surgical reassignment of bodily features given that gender is a mere abstract entity; one can adopt gender identities different from that assigned at birth without desiring to change the body. ‘Trans’, in this sense is understood more fluidly as “mov[ing] across genders” (McKenna and Kessler *Transgendering* 346–347).

Frequently, the terms transgender and transsexual are used interchangeably. In the present paper, transgender will be understood as an umbrella term for individuals who experience their gender identity not necessarily in accordance with their sex assigned at birth (Czollek, Perko, and Weinbach 36), and/or whose “appearance, behavior, or identity [...] do not conform to socially constructed norms for women or men” (Alegria 176).

3.2.1 Transsexuality

The term transsexuality describes a condition in which an individual’s felt gender is not in alignment with the sex assigned at birth. With the emergence of the medical discipline of sexology in the late nineteenth century, transsexuality has been scientifically recognized. Scientists, such as Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, Ulrichs, Westphal, and Hirschfeld, identified various degrees of gender inversion using different terminology, which in principle denote the sexual and gender identities bisexuality, homosexuality, transsexuality and intersexuality (Sullivan 99–101). Still, however, men and women who cross-dressed and had an aversion towards their own body, while feeling attracted to members of the same sex, were considered gays and lesbians (Devor 29).

Hirschfeld, however, expanded his interest and coined the term *transvestism* to refer to people who are not attracted to members of the same sex irrespective of dressing and acting in the manner of the opposite sex. He further acknowledged that some even desired to change their bodies entirely long before the term transsexual was introduced by Cauldwell in 1949, albeit as a curable disease. In the 1960ies, Benjamin urged for a clear distinction between transvestism and transsexuality as crossdressing and the wish to remove or change the proper sex organs, respectively. In the first half of the twentieth century, a few physicians already experimented with sex reassignment surgery, most notably the Danish painter Lili Elbe (née Einar Wegener) who, however, died in an attempt to construct a vagina. In 1952, the first successful reassignment surgery was undertaken (Sullivan 101–03).

This abridged account of the historic development of research on transsexuality outlines a popularization of the condition, to a certain degree. The awareness of transsexuality as a condition that can be “remedied” was raised. According to Devor, this idea is a social phenomenon since it is context specific and

people using this concept must agree (1) that there is something called sex that distinguishes [...] people [...] on the basis of physical characteristics, (2) that there are only two legitimate sexes [...], and (3) that it is possible to make use of

various medical and social procedures to transform persons from one sex into another. (38)

In declaring transsexuality a mental disease, the heteronormative system paradoxically succeeded in maintaining the gender dichotomy (Devor 39). Despite LGBTIQ activists' protests, *Gender Identity Disorder* (divided in further subcategories) was pathologized and included in the DSM, i.e. the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, an anthology of characterized mental conditions (Vitelli 66–69). However, the latest version of the manual (DSM-5) acknowledges transsexuality as *Gender Dysphoria* clearly distinguishing it from a mental disease: “[...] gender nonconformity is not in itself a mental disorder. The critical element of gender dysphoria is the presence of clinically significant distress associated with the condition” (APA [Online]). The manual still contains a detailed description of transsexuals' psychological profile and the degree to which the patients perceive a discrepancy between gender identity and biological sex. While the APA withdrew the declaration of *Gender Dysphoria* as a mental illness, the WHO still categorizes it as such in the latest version of the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD) drawing criticism from activist movements but also international organizations (Vitelli 70–71).

The DSM-5 defines *Gender Dysphoria* as:

A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender of at least 6 months' duration as manifested by at least two of the following: 1. A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics [...]. 2. A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics [...]. 3. A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender. 4. A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender). 5. A strong desire to be treated as the other gender [...]. 6. A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender [...].

The condition is associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. (APA 452, qtd. in Vitelli 69)

Given that transsexuality frequently entails drastic measures, such as reassignment surgery, the inclusion in the DSM as a frame of reference to which physicians can refer, is reasonable. Still, the description of a diagnosis should be used critically since the severity of the condition varies considerably from individual to individual. While some transsexuals recount of gaining awareness of their transsexuality in infancy, others realize it in puberty. Another important factor for identification with and disclosure of a trans-identity is the social environment. Contemporary medical parlance distinguishes be-

tween *primary* and *secondary transsexualism*, i.e. manifestation of *Gender Dysphoria* in early childhood and later stages of development, respectively. Considering a majority of 60 per-cent of the secondary transsexuals are MTF transsexuals, the social regard for women becomes evident. Girls usually are allowed to display their masculinity without restriction whereas feminine behavior of boys is often suppressed (Rauchfleisch 19–21).

Despite the historic development and recognition of transsexuality, within Western societies, figures on the frequency of individuals' proclaiming a transsexual identity are mere estimates. According to the Amsterdam Gender Clinic, however, one in 1000 people discloses as transwoman and one in 2000 people as transman. Interestingly, only half of transsexuals consulting gender clinics seek sex reassignment surgery (Olyslager & Conway qtd. in Rauchfleisch 16). This is in accordance with the assumption that more individuals, rather than assimilating to the gender binary, decide to adopt more flexible gender identities.

In his article, Vitelli also poses the question if transsexuality is indeed a disorder and outlines various views on mental health and illnesses. He concludes that frequently transsexual individuals in fact should be treated psychologically. However, they require mental care not because of transsexuality as a condition itself but rather for the ramifications of a life-long stigmatization and exclusion from society (Vitelli 82–83). Depending on whether the diagnosed condition is primary or secondary, these individuals as well as families require guidance concerning opportunities for facilitating a positive development in childhood, or to support a resolution of inner conflicts after adolescence (Rauchfleisch 22).

Achieving acceptance of the immediate social environment is of crucial importance for maintaining the transsexual's mental health during the process of developing a gender identity. Support groups can provide adequate assistance if families and friends fail to encourage the transsexual individual. It should be added that members of such support groups commonly have experienced a similar development and are thus able to provide solidarity in addition to support (Rauchfleisch 93–94).

Since the early days of research in the field of transsexuality, physicians and psychologists have attempted to find reasons for the condition. The findings, however, are mere hypotheses. Psychodynamic explanations, for instance, attribute to the parents significant contribution to the development of transsexuality, e.g., if they desire a child of the other sex, they indirectly project their negative feelings on the child. Somatic specialists,

on the other hand, find an answer in hormonal influence on the fetus, or anomalies in certain areas of the brain, or even identify transsexuality as neurological intersexuality (Rauchfleisch 24). However, even if some attempts to explain transsexuality seem plausible and might contribute indirectly to the development of a trans-identity, they are still unproven and originate from the assumption of a binary gender system.

3.2.2 Intersexuality

Intersex conditions pose particular difficulties for parents and relatives of newborns since a clear assignment to a sex is equaled to immediate survival within Western societies. Intersexual children possess internal and external sex organs that are ambiguously determinable, i.e., a clear assignment to one of the binary sexes is difficult (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 21).

In common and medical parlance, intersexuality is referred to as condition, a term that is medicalized and denotes diseases or unfavorable human states. Members of the intersex community usually refute this terminology since it describes their existences as pathological and abnormal (Organisation Intersex International Australia Limited [Online]) In her seminal work, the biologist Fausto-Sterling, therefore, suggests departing from the common belief in the binary sex system and proposes the recognition of three additional sex categories. In addition to male and female, she distinguishes ‘true hermaphrodites’ or herms, who have both ovaries and testes, ‘male pseudohermaphrodites’ or merms, who in addition to testes show female genital features, while lacking an ovary, and ‘female pseudohermaphrodites’ or ferms, who possess female sex organs instead of testes, in spite of showing aspects of male genitalia. The degree of manifestation of one of the five sexes in an individual is variable and further depends on hormonal and bodily procedures (Fausto-Sterling, *The five sexes* 21). ‘True Hermaphrodites’ possess a combination of ovary and testis, the so-called ‘ovo-testis’. Frequently, one of the gonads is properly functioning, which renders the production of offspring possible for intersex individuals (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body* 51).

In the previous century, consensus prevailed among scholars and physicians that intersexual infants and children needed treatment in order to provide for a worthwhile life. However, in accordance with Queer Theory’s assumptions, Fausto-Sterling considers sex reassignment of children “a mode of disciplin[ing]” society. Intersexuality compromises the assumed normality by exposing the boundaries of the binary system. The demand to warrant regularity, yet, neglects the inner needs of the individual. Numerous intersexual

individuals that underwent sexual reassignment surgery in their infancy, therefore, experience psychological crises in adolescence (Fausto-Sterling, *The five sexes* 23–24). In the majority of cases, the physical modifications are irreversible and often entail a dysfunction of the remaining sex organs. In order to avoid physical as well as psychological mutilation, physicians and parties affected, i.e. parents and families, should recede from forcing a sex or gender on a perfectly healthy child (Fausto-Sterling, *revisited* 20–21).

Fausto-Sterling's definition of the sexes, however, should be regarded with caution as she herself concedes in the republication of her groundbreaking article. The prefix 'pseudo' in the term 'pseudohermaphrodite' connotes that *merms* and *ferms* are a mere variation of male and female, which would again perpetuate heteronormative assumptions of reality and indicate a required assignment to a binary gender. In fact, this biological regard of intersexuality again renders genital features a means for categorization and forces people into adopting a particular identity (Fausto-Sterling, *revisited* 22).

Intersexuality is usually not only manifested in the phenotype, but also in the genotype of a person's chromosomes. While the female and male sex are determined by the chromosomes XX or XY on the 23rd chromosome set, respectively, intersexuality is manifested by variations on the sex determining set:

Females who have only one X chromosome (Turner Syndrome, chromosomally XO) have undeveloped ovaries and a lack of secondary sexual characteristics, while males with an extra X chromosome (Klinefelter Syndrome, XXY) are often infertile and experience breast enlargement after puberty. Genetic causes also include mutations in a particular gene, or genes, within chromosomes. (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 22)

However, not only variation in the 23rd chromosomal set effects intersexuality. Genes that regulate hormonal production might be mutated causing atypical development especially after puberty (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 22).

3.2.2.1 Intersexuality and gender identity

As has been pointed out by various feminist critics, gender is a culturally constructed entity that does not necessarily correlate with biological characteristics. In the 20th century, it was argued that humans were born psychosexually neutral; their gender could, thus, be changed if need be. However, the case of a male infant whose genitalia had to be removed due to a circumcision accident proved differently. The parents raised their child as a girl after having been advised to conduct gender reassignment surgery; however, during adolescence the reared girl struggled in behaving accordingly. As an adult,

the individual decided to reverse the gender reassignment in order to live as a male. Cases alike suggest that humans are prenatally gendered instead of psychosexually neutral. However, other academics argue that gender identity can be constructed by rearing whereas the cultural gender and sexual orientation might be affected by biological characteristics. The argument within the academic field remains highly disputed and still, no consensus has been found (Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the body* 66-71).

In the last century, reassignment of an individual to a female gender was common practice since removing an enlarged clitoris is easier than constructing a phallus. However, as can be deduced from the case described above, such decisions often caused confusion and conditions as *gender dysphoria*. Nowadays, physicians recede from assigning sex based on convenience but seek to find the child's "true" gender by considering genetic material (Lang 112-13). However, this practice again is inconclusive for the Turner- and Klinefelter Syndrome⁸. In accordance with Fausto-Sterling's emphasis on the existence of five biological sexes, a growing group of academics as well as intersex individuals concerned demand a paradigmatic shift towards accepting healthy children with ambiguous genitals as such, as expresses Butler:

[...] try to imagine a world in which individuals with mixed or indeterminate genital attributes might be accepted and loved without having to undergo transformation into a more socially coherent or normative version of gender. (*Doing justice* 187)

In this way, the quality of living for intersexual individuals could be substantially enhanced as they would be relieved of the social pressure to conform to accepted norms even if the proper gender core is also perceived ambiguous (Lang 145).

3.2.2.2 Anthropological view on intersexuality

In comparison with other rare 'conditions' that constitute a variance from the norm, e.g. albinism, intersexuality is rather frequent with 1.7 per cent of infants in 100 births being intersexual. This figure is an average account of various populations and may vary considerably since in some peoples a gene favoring the development of intersexuality is more frequent than in others. Interestingly, Fausto-Sterling alludes to the potential increase of intersexuality caused by the ever-growing urge to influence natural conception with, e.g. in vitro fertilization, and genetic variations due to environmental issues such as pollution or detrimental rays (*Sexing the Body* 51-54).

⁸ See 3.2.2

In societies that do not recognize genders outside the binary system and favor male gender due to patriarchy, intersex children are prone to be raised as boys even though their genotype is XX. In Western cultures, physicians would recommend parents to raise their child according to the genetic code. The necessity to assign a child to one particular gender is generated by the assumption that in order to be able to participate in societal customs, e.g. in sports activities, individuals must fit the dichotomous norm otherwise societal order would be endangered. The common practice to adjust human features that do not correspond to the norm is therefore a mere attempt at creating a homogeneous mass (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 24–25).

3.2.3 Queer/Questioning

Queer, as has been described previously in the present thesis, refers to people who refrain from identifying with the imposed gender dichotomy. Within the LGBTIQ community, *queer* or *questioning* people occupy an even more “drastic” position to gender identity, as Halperin aptly delineates:

[...] queer identity need not be grounded in any positive truth, [such as, a specific sexual object-choice], or in any stable reality. As the very word implies, “queer” does not name some natural kind or refer to some determinate object; [...] Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers*. It is an identity without essence. (62)

Queer, in this sense, allows more freedom to explore the full gender spectrum. In fact, an increasing number of transsexuals and intersex people decide to disregard the binary sex/gender opposition by frequently changing identities (see Diamond and Butterworth). Moreover, queer includes identifications, such as *bi-gender* or *genderqueer*. The former refers to people who assume either a female or a male gender identity depending on the social context. *Genderqueer* individuals, on the other hand, might identify with neither female nor male, simultaneously with both binary genders, or even adopt an elusive gender variant (Alegria 176).

3.3 Gender/Sex Transformation

Within contemporary society, infants are assigned to male or female sex immediately after their birth. It is, therefore, still an accepted practice to modify an infant’s body surgically in case of ambiguous genitalia (Shaw, *Changing sex* 5). Reassignment surgery for intersex individuals has been a rather recent practice in the medical field. Prior to the second half of the 20th century, technical and medical capabilities were still restricted.

Additionally, hermaphroditism was regarded as less threatening even if not openly proclaimed. Nowadays, however, treatment of intersexuality initiates within the first few days after birth since legal documentation dictates recognition of a sex within neonatal days. The procedure not only includes hormonal treatment of the child, but also psychological care is necessary. In Western cultures, the decision on the child's sex is usually based on the chromosomal set (XX or XY). Cultural definitions of genitalia moreover prescribe measurements of phallus and clitoris; the ambiguous genitalia of the XX infant is reduced to a clitoris whereas it is lengthened for XY infants. If intersexuality is effected by 'Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia', i.e. genetic variations that cause the production of masculine hormones, the situation is more complicated; even if the chromosomal female child is treated hormonally from an early stage onwards, hormones might effect a masculinization in puberty (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 29–32).

Nevertheless, the call for a paradigmatic shift is apparent since unsuccessful cases of sexual reassignment surgery, i.e. if the individual does not identify with the assigned gender later in life, are rather common. Support movements of intersexual individuals demand a shift towards rearing children gender-neutral in order to concede them the possibility to decide on their fate (Shaw, *boy, or a girl?* 32).

Gender transformation, however, does not necessarily involve surgical or hormonal treatment. 'Cross-dressing' allows for adopting desired gendered behavior that is usually associated with the opposite sex. Due to women's inferiority in patriarchal societies, female cross-dressers, i.e. individuals with female biological characteristics who present themselves with masculine features and appearance, are socially accepted whereas biological males stand out negatively when adopting female appearance. Throughout history, women concealed their womanly features to be able to participate in adventures and activities that were restricted to men, such as expeditions, wars and academic studies (Shaw, *Changing sex* 6–9).

4 LGBTIQ within society

Transgender identities still pose a threat to the heteronormative order of Western societies that distinguish between male and female in numerous cultural spheres. The culturally accepted allocation to public bathrooms or changing rooms, for instance, is endangered by the existence of individuals who identify with different sexes or genders (McKenna and Kessler *Transgendering*, 350–351). Particularly the media contributes to

the perpetuation of prejudices against transpeople by portraying them “as illicit sex workers, deviant, or freakish” (Alegria 177). Such bias has become firmly established in the common mindset so that transgender individuals experience difficulty in being socially accepted (Alegria 177).

The appreciation of LGBTIQ individuals may vary considerably according to class. Limited resources in marginalized communities might impede a queer member of a particular class from displaying the true identity. An open display of such might even lead to further stigmatization within the marginalized society (Corber and Valocchi 9). Lombardi et al. introduce the term *gender fundamentalism* for denoting the dogmatic conviction of the heteronormative order that prohibits atypical gender varieties (Lombardi et al. 91). For that reason, various transgender people decide to conceal their identity by adjusting to socially accepted practices, for instance, by marrying and raising families, or by pretending to be homosexual (Alegria 177).

Throughout history, masculinity has been prioritized by patriarchy, which resulted in the oppression of women. The preference for male is still reflected in gender discourse considering experiences of male-to-female (MTF) transgender people in comparison with female-to-male (FTM) individuals, as Nagoshi et al. point out in their analysis of a study on transsexual as well as intersexual individuals. Interestingly, they reveal that experiences of growing up with a discomfort concerning assigned gender, diverged considerably depending on the biological sex. While FTM people regularly accounted of growing up displaying tomboyish behavior, which was socially accepted, MTF individuals mostly could not openly act as girls (45, 51-52).

4.1 Legal considerations

The majority of countries require an indication of either female or male gender in birth certificates as well as passports since “gender identity is considered so fundamental to personal identity that it is fixed and recorded by the government” (Weiss 131). Transgendered people, hence, are constantly forced to disclose an identity they do not affiliate with. In 2016, legal gender recognition is possible in 41 European countries, however, 24 of these precondition sterilization for adapting gender in official documents. Among European countries, Denmark occupies a progressive position with regard to gender recognition. Since 2014, it has allowed for legally adopting an unspecified gender identity (TGEU [Online]).

4.2 Stigma

Evaluation of LGBTIQ people is commonly based on moral and medical assumptions that effect a pathologization and, in addition, dehumanization of sexual minority groups. The individual is simply reduced to features and characteristics, i.e. stigma associated with their gender identity that are devalued by society. A stigma is “a mark of shame or discredit”, and “an identifying mark or characteristic” (*Merriam-Webster* [Online]). Onken explains that

[p]eople and societies construct a stigma-theory, a structural-cultural ideology to explain the inferiority of the people who are stigmatized and account for the danger they represent, sometimes rationalizing an animosity based on other differences. [...] Further, they may perceive their defensive responses as directly caused by the defects of the people who are stigmatized. (16)

Stigmas, hence, enhance discrimination and violence against minorities, which is ‘justified’ by the socio-cultural structure of society (Onken 16). In addition to being marginalized, stigmatized individuals and groups consequently suffer from psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety (Kelleher 376).

4.3 Harassment, violence and hate crimes

Violence unfortunately is a determining part of the majority of individuals who experience their gender identity in discordance with society’s binary understanding of it. Common forms of anti-transgender violence include social mistreatment, such as disregard in job applications, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and physical violence (Kidd and Witten 39). According to Van Soest and Bryant, violence happens on three different levels: an *individual*, an *institutional* and a *structural-cultural* one (550–51, qtd. in Onken 6–7). Society still reacts to transsexual and intersexual people with irritation based on moral and medical views that further provide the basis for heteronormative thinking. Prioritizing the gender binary while sanctioning deviations from the norm maintain the structural-cultural order. These beliefs not only constitute the basis for society’s bias towards transgender individuals, but also induce institutional authorities to discriminate against those who do not conform to the norm by denying them civil and human rights, e.g., marriage, bearing children, etc. Acknowledging their legal privileges, “normative” citizens feel entitled to expand harassment and violence on the individual level (Onken 6–8). Even if reactions are principally positive, trans-people often involuntarily become the center of attention, which might lead to further psychological harm. However, severe examples of discrimination and exclusion caused by negative irritation range

from offensive remarks or non-consideration in job applications to physical violence (Rauchfleisch 93). Anti-transgender violence, hence, affects the LGBTIQ individuals' daily lives and might even induce them to adhere to the binary gender norms due to anxiety triggered by violence (Kidd and Witten 49–50).

According to “Trans Murder Monitoring”, an international organization concerned with the collection and analysis of reports on murders of transsexual people, 265 transsexuals were killed in 2015 (TvT research project [Online]). Such incidents are either interpersonal, i.e. committed by individuals or small groups, or collective, i.e. organized by collectives such as mobs (van Soest and Bryant 553; qtd. in Onken 8). In the majority of cases, however, crimes against transgender people are committed by single individuals who are either acquainted with the victim or complete strangers, while harassment in groups is rather infrequent (Stotzer 46-47).

The murder of the FTM transsexual Brandon Teena in 1993 shocked not only the queer community, but the documentary “The Brandon Teena Story”, as well as the movie “Boys Don’t Cry” have generated common awareness of hate crimes against queer people. In a small town in the American Midwest, two male members of the lower class shot Brandon Teena and two friends. Prior to the execution, the transsexual victim was violated in a gang rape (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 22–25). This tragic event has become a paradigm for hate crimes against the transgender community that are induced by strong emotions such as hatred and the desire to “assert[] [power] and one’s own identity over the identity of another” (Kidd and Witten 32). Kidd and Witten even compare hate crimes against transgender with genocide since frequently, perpetrators feel “a desire to eradicate the transgender-identified individual in order to alleviate the perpetrator’s disgust”. As normative understandings of gender are challenged by the existence of non-normative individuals, offenders frequently consider their abusing LGBTIQ individuals vengeance for their heteronormative worldview and a “good deed” for society (Kidd and Witten 34).

Despite the hideous cruelty numerous transgender people are exposed to, individual cases as Teena’s permit further insights into queer life in subcommunities of society and how social factors, such as employment rate, educational standards, etc., affect public regard for non-normative identities (Halberstam, *Brandon Teena* 160). An intersectional reading of such cases is therefore feasible. Intersectionality refers to research on overlapping systems of discrimination, violence, domination, etc. With regard to Gender and

Queer Studies, intersectionality addresses, for instance, discriminating sexism based on gender identity, in connection with issues such as racism, antisemitism or class affiliation (Czollek, Perko, and Weinbach 40).

However, crimes against transgender individuals are not restricted to romanticized cases such as Teena's. In their study on transgenders' experiences with violence, Lombardi et al. find that 60 per cent of the participants have already been victim to violence or harassment. Fourteen per cent report of rape or attempted rape (95–99). Interestingly, children and adolescents with a non-normative gender identity are harassed and abandoned more frequently by mostly close relatives, such as their parents or peers (Kidd and Witten 38).

As has been pointed out in section 4, MTF individuals are more restricted in expressing their gender identity due to the preference of masculinity within modern societies. In her contemplation of hate crimes against transgender people in Los Angeles between 2002 and 2006, Stotzer reveals that in 49 incidents, 47 concerned MTF individuals. Hate crimes are frequently committed by men who base their justification for assaulting because of divergent gender identity on biases of homosexuality, and hence, the fear of being object to homosexual desire (46–47).

In addition to the humiliation, victims of anti-transgender violence frequently do not report incidents to neither authorities nor relatives and friends. Reasons for hesitation to report are possible retaliation of the perpetrator or even protection of them, and expected additional abuse by the public system, or the assumption that reporting would not induce legal action or change their condition. Furthermore, the obstacle of having to publicly disclose one's gender identity, prevents numerous victims from reporting the crime they have experienced (Kidd and Witten 43-44).

4.4 LGBTIQ adolescents

Previous chapters have already established that members of the LGBTIQ community are affected by social and cultural discrimination and marginalization, which causes minority stress and psychological distress in those concerned. In addition, the suicide rate among lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is rather high since even in modern day society, heteronormativity dictates gender conformity. Young people are particularly sensitive in this regard since experiences during adolescences are defining and they might receive considerable damage regarding physical health and mental as well as so-

cial life. Moreover, educational institutions present apt conditions for spreading stereotypes and stigma, which enhances the likelihood that LGBTIQ teenagers suffer from homophobic and transphobic bullying. Consequently, self-esteem decreases while mental illnesses increase. In order to avoid being discriminated against and rejected, adolescents concerned deploy coping strategies, e.g. denial of one's identity, which again causes substantial distress. This is aggravated by the possibility of the individual mirroring society's regard for non-conforming gender identities and thus, further sanctioning oneself (Kelleher 373–77). Furthermore, the sexual and gender minority's victimization by the heteronormative order, not only negatively affects the individual's mental health, but also directs physical abuse at them (Toomey et al. 1580).

Meyer's minority stress model suggests that psychological implications for stigmatized groups are the result of a continuum of external factors, e.g. harassment experienced in school, that influence the internal self-perception of the victim, which might result in, e.g., internalized homophobia (qtd. in Toomey et al. 1580–81). Negative reactions of peers to atypical gender expressions intensify in the course of childhood development since children eventually develop awareness of social categories that enable them to compare others. Displaying non-conformity to gender norms is considered odd by schoolmates, who then frequently verbally accuse, or even physically abuse the queer individual (Toomey et al. 1582).

Especially transgender youth are at risk of being victimized in school, as Sausa ascertains. Almost all of the transgender students interviewed in her study have been victim to verbal and physical abuse by peers in the educational context, which led to an increase in premature school leaving (Sausa 19). To conclude, young adults who do not conform to heteronormative gender identities are in particular targets of harassment and discrimination within the school context since it is an ideal breeding ground for stereotypes and prejudice. In order to provide support to affected teenagers, schools need to install counseling possibilities as well as provide further information on gender variances for students. The necessity for provision of support by institutions such as schools is of crucial importance since frequently families of LGBTIQ teenagers not only fail to provide adequate assistance in the process of identity development, but also encourage them to conformity by expressing negative remarks about queerness. Adolescents concerned, therefore, experience anxiety about possible rejection and abandonment. Peers in this respect, can be particularly helpful in providing moral support and the possibility

to share feelings. Still, in more conservative environments, finding open-minded individuals for confiding in is difficult (Higa et al. 676).

With regard to the discrimination of queer young adults, the power of religious institutions must not be neglected. While a few queer teenagers find support in religion, the majority is exposed to further stigmatization as sinners or abomination. Certainly, the perpetuation of those religious beliefs further coins the public's opinion on gender flexibility, and serves as justification for discrimination (Higa et al. 677–78).

However, queer identities can have beneficial impact on the youths' lives. In their interview-based study on LGBTQ teenagers, Higa et al. account of a perceived strengthened personality of queer individuals insofar as openly displaying gender non-conformity and flexibility requires an increased level of self-control, and indifference to others' opinions. For attaining such a state of content, applying coping strategies, e.g. the adoption of invectives to express pride in their being different, is substantial (Higa et al. 669–75). Nevertheless, the individual social context is paramount for the formation of a positive self-concept. In strongly heterocentric environments, LGBTIQ teenagers are at increased risk of sustaining permanent psychological damage whereas open-minded environments contribute to the individual's well-being (Higa et al. 679–80).

5 LGBTIQ Young Adult Literature

Young Adult Literature (YAL) is one of the fastest growing genres offering a multitude of possibilities for thematic divergence. The genre is denominated with various terms, e.g. “teen fiction, juvenile fiction, adolescent literature”, etc. (Hayn and Nolen 7). Given the wide age span of adolescence, the target audience of YAL comprehends youths between 10 and 19 years. Characteristics of the genre are the prevalence of adolescent protagonists and issues within their realm of experience. Since the topics appear to be more relevant to the target audience, the genre facilitates empathy with and comprehension of the texts (Glaus 408). However, the genre has been criticized for its limitations in addressing delicate topics, one argument being that YAL contributes to the perpetuation of the heteronormative hegemony by depicting almost exclusively white stereotypes (Garcia 4). Generally, the intentions behind YAL are mostly influenced by underlying societal ideologies and opinions. Writers intend to educate their audience to an ideal reality that is based on a particular worldview: “The forces behind the images in children's and adolescent literature operate within a political fantasy of creating a “better tomorrow” by

working to socialize or indoctrinate readers toward particular ways of thinking and behaving” (Crisp 335). It is therefore crucial not to comprehend YAL as the ideal tool for educating teenagers without critically reflecting upon certain issues. A careful and reasoned incorporation in the English language classroom however, can provide for developing the students’ critical literacy.

In June 1969, the Stonewall riots induced a reconsideration of the social standing of the homosexual community and their civil rights. Simultaneously, a change in thematic account of gay identities was perceivable: rather than implicitly referring to queerness through stereotypical allusions, within the 1970ies a growing number of authors addressed homosexuality explicitly. Ever since the first publication of a YA novel featuring a LGBTIQ character in 1969, 200 books on these topics have been published, which accounts for five books a year. The majority of the novels depict the protagonists (mostly male homosexuals), though having a non-normative gender identity, in an ideal way as white and socioeconomically well positioned (Cart and Jenkins, qtd. in Garcia 90). Queer identities beyond lesbians and gays, however, were still disregarded until the new millennium. David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy* (2003) and Julie Anne Peters’ *Luna: A Novel* (2004) represent the pioneering basis for LGBTIQ themed YAL featuring homosexual crossdressers and transsexuals, respectively. Furthermore, these publications promoted a paradigmatic shift: formerly, the quest for sexual and gender identity in literature necessitated resolution, nowadays, however, the quest frequently remains open, allowing for more fluid understandings of gender (Renzi, Letcher, and Miraglia 120–122). Generally, queer literature is characterized not only by the feature of a figure that experiences their gender in conflict with the norm, but also by the disruption of established ideologies. This endeavor is accomplished by a poststructural account of gender identities that appraises “multiplicity, variability, and fluidity”. The overall aim of the genre is to create awareness of the arbitrariness underlying sexual norms and heteronormativity, and guide the reader to realize the importance of the individual’s personality over sexual and biological traits (Blackburn, Clark, and Nemeth 41–42).

A close reading of accounts of transgender identities can offer teenagers the possibility to reframe their personal concepts of gender, gender role, love, identity, etc., which would broaden their conception, and in the long run, would contribute to the deconstruction of the heteronormative order.

5.1 Motifs in LGBTIQ literature

As has been discussed in section 4, the pursuit of (gender) identity and a place within heteronormative society is accompanied by constant struggle and conflict for numerous members of the LGBTIQ community. Common motifs in queer YA literature include absence of parents and other family members, fears of isolation, ostracism and abandonment (Wickens 151). These inner conflicts are frequently amplified by scenes of violence, or harassment, but also by romantic involvement that can manifest either positively or negatively. Very often, the motif of romance is impaired by internalized homophobia, which unfolds in violent acts. Clark and Blackburn identify in their analysis of violence in LGBTIQ YA novels, three types of violent manifestations: violence “provoked by transphobia and homophobia, those provoked by internalized homophobia, and those in which violence is a response to homophobic violence” (5). Transphobia and homophobia might trigger violent actions in romantic and sexual relationships or independent of any personal relation, be enacted publicly as a display of disgust. Internalized homophobia, i.e. if queer individuals eventually believe stigmas and bias perpetuated by society and reflect homophobia on themselves, can result in outward violence resulting from not self-disclosing the proper queer identity and reflecting negative feelings on others. Inward homophobia, on the other hand, at worst manifests in suicide. The latter type of violence occurs if a queer character stands up to oneself or someone else with active defense and attack (Clark and Blackburn 5–11).

Typical of YA literature, certainly, are themes revolving around love and sex, which Clark and Blackburn have identified in LGBTIQ themed novels. Rather than being primarily positive encounters, romantic action frequently generates feelings of isolation since conflicting feelings of homonegativity induce retreat from the lover. However, homo- and transphobia, which initially impede love relations with queer characters, might as well be defeated by exerting oneself in order to connect with the person they love. Love scenes, particularly, allow the reader to gain insights into the complexity of LGBTIQ identities, and if the characters eventually succeed in connecting despite feelings of transphobia, reveal that sympathy and affection are more decisive than sexual characteristics (Clark and Blackburn 11–16).

5.2 Deconstruction of Heteronormativity

LGBTIQ themed novels still account for only a small part of YAL, which adds to the reinforcement of heteronormativity: the assumed heterosexual audience is accustomed to the binary order. However, if queer identities are addressed, it is frequently a mere negative, pejorative comment that reflects biased realities. Garcia exemplifies this notion by referring to a quote from the YA novel *City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare. In a short account between two characters, the simple formulation of the question, “*You’re not gay, are you?*” implies a negative opinion on homosexuality, which is reinforced by the answer “*If I were, I would dress better*”, which is based on stereotypes (Clare 39, qtd. in Garcia 87). Homosexuality might not even be mentioned another time in the book but this short conversation poses the danger of the audience unconsciously absorbing the notion of queerness as not being normal. Since Western authors of YA literature, as well grew up in societies that regard heteronormative conventions, they depict realities that conform to certain societal standards. Hence, if not directly addressing non-normative variances of gender identities, literature tailored for a young audience anon consolidates conservatism and the dichotomous order (Garcia 88–93). Readings of passages similar to Clare’s, provide the opportunity to teach young adults critical reflection of heteronormative thinking, however, guidance is paramount for establishing this critical literacy.

The increasing number of LGBTIQ literature in the previous decade has provided for this genre to assimilate and become an integral part of texts for an adolescent readership. Paradoxically, this inclusion gave rise to integrating especially homosexuality in the heterosexual matrix (Crisp 334). This development bears the risk of establishing, in addition to heteronormativity, homonormativity that reflects heteronormative conventions and again neglects more flexible, non-normative identities.

5.3 LGBTIQ YAL in the classroom

As has been established in the previous sections, a need for deconstructing heteronormativity within educational contexts is apparent. In order to warrant a deconstruction of established norms with students, it is vital that teachers become aware of their personal self-concept and gender identity as well as possible assumptions of the students’ gender identities. An open exhibition of tolerance and open-mindedness establishes the ideal, positive setting to initiate the raising of consciousness in the students. This entails chal-

lenging clichés and norms by openly addressing them; silent acceptance of these would contribute to even further consolidation. In addition, within the positive classroom atmosphere, students should feel comfortable enough to voice the own opinions and thoughts without risking stigmatization and marginalization. The learners' horizon of experience and implicit knowledge on sex, gender and gender identity should be integrated in the discussion of gender within the classroom (Mörth 66–68).

The main objective of the integration of gender-associated topics in the classroom is to allow the students to understand gender as a social category that is contingent on historical and cultural change. As a result, patriarchal hegemony will be weakened by reconsideration of the stereotypical conception of gender. Eventually learners will realize the arbitrariness of the gender binary, and develop appreciation for alternative forms of gender identity (Mörth 67–68).

Particularly the literature and language classroom is apt for an endeavor alike. Ideally literature induces students to reflect on themselves and their immediate environment since “literature is a way to explore possibilities and help students find themselves, imagine others, value difference, and search for social justice” (Renzi, Letcher, and Miraglia 119). The English literature classroom has been criticized for perpetuating and stabilizing the gender binary by not reflecting on gender roles and accepting them unchallenged, particularly with a view to the literary canon. Since LGBTIQ problems are amply neglected in popular culture and media, an in-class discussion of those topics provides opportunities for teenagers who are in the process of finding a proper identity to present them with peers experiencing similar problems (Renzi, Letcher, and Miraglia 119).

III Textual Analysis of selected Young adult novels

In the following chapter, two fictitious YAL novels with a LGBTIQ subject matter will be presented and analyzed consecutively with reference to the theoretical background outlined in the first part of the present thesis. Before discussing specific aspects of the protagonists' queer identity development, the plots as well as main characters will be delineated. Afterwards, the implications and inner conflicts underlying acknowledging a gender identity variant from normative assumptions are elaborated on in more detail. Additionally, instances of heteronormativity within the novels and general social regard for LGBTIQ individuals in the respective environments are subject to critical scrutiny.

1 “*Golden Boy*” by Abigail Tarttelin (2013)

Golden Boy is a Young Adult Novel focusing on the intersex protagonist Max Walker. The novel was written by the English author Abigail Tarttelin and published by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in London. For constructing the story, Tarttelin uses various first-person narrators and, in doing so, provides the reader with insights into the action from different points of view. Furthermore, the narration is divided into three main parts.

1.1 Plot

The story is set in Hemingway, a fictitious town near Oxford, and centers on the Walkers' life from late September 2012 until June 2013. The family consists of Steve and Karen Walker, who are both successful barristers in Oxford, and their children, fifteen-year-old Max as well as ten-year-old Daniel. Outwardly, the Walkers seem impeccable with Steve striving for a high political position while Karen succeeds in both pursuing her own career and caring for her children. Moreover, Max represents the ideal teenager for he is athletic, charismatic and simultaneously, successful in school. However, the family hides Max's intersexuality in order to maintain appearances.

On a Sunday night in late September, Karen and Steve are hosting a party for their friends Leah and Edward while Max and Daniel are in their rooms. Hunter, the guests' son and Max's closest childhood friend, comes to the Walkers to collect his parents. Before going home, however, he wishes to greet Max. Hunter and his parents belong to the small group of confidants who know about Max's intersexuality. When Hunter enters Max's room, the intersex teenager is masturbating, which triggers Hunter's curiosity. After a brief conversation, Hunter confesses to being romantically attracted to Max, and

starts to kiss and touch Max inappropriately ignoring his protest. Finally, Hunter commits rape on his childhood friend.

The following day, Max leaves school earlier in order to see the general practitioner Archie Verma for emergency contraceptive pills. In addition to treating Max's wounded genital area and prescribing the medicine, Archie talks to her young patient about the intersex condition and is surprised about how little Max knows about it. Subsequent to meeting the physician, Max is nauseous.

In the course of autumn, Max is increasingly unstably tempered and troubled. In addition, his physical health does not improve since he is frequently sick. Still, Max falls in love with his schoolmate Sylvie. Waking in his girlfriend's bed, Max realizes the reason for his sickness which he confirms with a pregnancy test. The first part of the novel ends with Max disclosing the pregnancy to Karen although not admitting to having been assaulted by Hunter. Steve, Karen and Max see Archie to decide on a procedure to terminate the pregnancy as well as to discuss possibilities for gender reassignment surgery. Despite Steve's campaigning for Member of Parliament, the family faces additional stress concerning Max's intersexuality. Since Karen and Steve, thus far have not discussed Max's gender identity with him, he strives for more knowledge on his condition. Eventually, the reader learns that it was Steve who opposed the intersex specialists' opinion who recommended reassigning Max to the female gender. Karen, on the other hand, was overwhelmed with the condition after Max's birth. She in fact even regrets not having opted for sex reassignment surgery at an earlier stage in her child's development. Max, however, increasingly questions his identity realizing that the current pregnancy might be his only chance to have children since he lacks testes. When he finally is courageous enough to confide in his girlfriend, his emotional state becomes even more unsettled. Although Sylvie reacts positively to Max's intersexuality, she is deeply shocked by his pregnancy. Max considers her panic response refusal of and disgust for his identity and retreats from her.

The imminent termination of the pregnancy as well as sex reassignment surgery further bothers Max. However, not until he has already been anesthetized before the abortion, does he find the courage to tell his mother to stop the abortion. Nevertheless, Karen does not respect her son's wish. His mother's failure to stop the procedure not only induces Max to reject her but he also falls into a deep depression. One evening, after hav-

ing coincidentally met Hunter, the young intersex takes painkillers at home and almost dies of an overdose.

Three weeks after Max's accidental overdose, Karen learns about the actual reason for Max's impregnation. Steve himself executes the arrest of Hunter for rape of a minor.

Five months later, Max solemnizes the actual birthday of his aborted child and finally, comes to terms with his gender identity.

1.2 Main characters

1.2.1 Max Walker

Max Walker was born in 1996 to Karen and Steve Walker with intersexuality. The manifestation of his condition is particularly rare since the genetic karyotype is 46,XX/46,XY, which is referred to as 'true hermaphroditism'⁹ (Tarttelin 226). During his infancy, specialists and doctors were indecisive whether to assign the child to a male or female gender. Initially, Max's parents were advised to opt for sex reassignment surgery to a girl since the phallus appeared rather underdeveloped. However, the Walkers refused to adjust the baby's sex surgically, as it was not an immediate matter of survival. In order to permit Max to choose an appropriate gender, Steve and Karen decided to raise him gender neutral 'Max' being a possible name for both male and female. Eventually, the child seemed to develop affiliation to male gendered behavior and therefore, specialists suggested to reassign it to the male sex. Still, the parents, decided to leave Max free to decide on his gender (184-185).

At the age of 15, his social environment considers Max a boy and due to hormonal injections before puberty, he developed a muscular physique, which further allows him to be athletically successful. As captain of the school's soccer team, he enjoys great popularity. Despite his intersex condition, Max feels attracted to the female sex and due to his tender traits and good looks, he is admired by his peers. In school, Max achieves good grades, which further promises an auspicious future for him. On the whole, Max appears to be leading the ideal life of an adolescent having a wide range of possibilities.

After having been violated, however, Max increasingly displays behavioral problems, which is partly explainable by hormonal changes induced by the pregnancy. Nevertheless, Max begins to question his personal identity and becomes aware of the implications of his intersexuality for his future. The growing frustration and identity confusion finally

⁹ See part A section 3.2.2

lead to psychological despair and depression. Max's character experiences a fundamental change of self-perception and identity and he finally realizes to what extent he suppressed his personal wishes and desires in order to fulfill society's expectations.

1.2.2 Karen Walker

Karen Walker is married to Steven Walker, with whom she has two children, namely Max and Daniel. She successfully practices law in Oxford but is primarily responsible for rearing the children and managing the household. She leads an ideal life with a loving husband who aspires for a highly prestigious office, two seemingly perfect sons, and in addition, manages to be a successful career woman. Hence, she meets society's expectations of women in the 21st century. However, she feels restricted to some extent as being the mother of an intersex child entails blending in with a restricting society in order to protect the family and the family's good reputation.

In the course of Max's pregnancy, the reader learns about Karen's insecurities and fears regarding her child's intersexuality as well as her concerns for maintaining outward appearances. Eventually, her double standards destabilize the cohesion within the family, which leads to a temporary termination of contact with her son Max as well as a separation from her husband. Karen's accounts give useful insights into the mechanisms and conventions of the heteronormative order, and the impact of parents on the intersex's psychological development.

1.2.3 Steve Walker

Karen's husband Steve works as Chief Crown Prosecutor in Oxford and runs for the public office of "MP for Oxford West, Hemingway & Abingdon" (33). Since his job is time-consuming, his relationship with his sons is rather distant albeit affectionate. Max, for instance, is rather surprised when he learns that his father is considerably open-minded concerning his gender: "I always thought he was uncomfortable with me. We don't spend a lot of time together. [...] He's so busy all the time, and he often seems distant" (276). In the course of the novel, Steve manifests himself the antagonist to his wife, who against specialists' opinions advocates for Max to remain gender ambiguous. Interestingly, only two chapters revolve around Steve's point of view. The chapters' location in the final part of the novel further symbolizes his changing role: initially, Steve is primarily focused on his career while in the end, he resigns from his political position in order to care for his family.

1.2.4 Daniel Walker

Compared to his older brother Max, ten-year-old Daniel is more difficult since he frequently has tantrums in school or at home. His environment perceives him as odd: “[Karen:] He is awkward with everyone; he grew up too fast having a much older brother; he talks like a mini-politician because of his father; and he is quick to temper, which he gets from me. Max inherited all our best attributes, and Daniel all our worst” (72). Generally, Daniel worships his older brother with whom he shares profound conversations while playing computer games. Talking to Daniel, Max gains valuable insights into his personal opinion on topics such as gender, intersexuality and family bonds since the necessity to rephrase difficult issues appropriate for a child entails deeper reflection. Moreover, within the ideality of his family, Daniel is the odd one out and hence, represents the possibility of not fully corresponding to society’s expectations.

1.2.5 Sylvie

Max’s girlfriend Sylvie as well constitutes a variation from the normative teenage girl. She is aware of her deviation and assimilates to her school colleagues to a certain extent in order not to become bored but still refuses to adopt typical expected female behavior. Furthermore, Sylvie continues her relationship with Max despite his final decision of remaining intersex. Her open-mindedness and tolerance are a paradigm for society’s potential of embracing variance such as found in gender-nonconforming individuals.

1.3 Identity development Max

1.3.1 Initial point of identity development

In the course of the novel *Golden Boy*, Max’s self-perception changes considerably. Already the title is an indicator for the complexity of his character since, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*, the idiomatic expression *golden boy* denotes “a person who is very successful and is much admired, although often only temporarily” ([Online]). From the beginning, the reader realizes that Max is considered the ideal teenager since he combines features such as good looks, athletic skills, kindness, ambition as well as intelligence. This impression is primarily constituted by accounts of Max’s mother and brother. Although Daniel is exceedingly fond of his older brother and admires him, he clearly suffers from being in Max’s shadow:

[Max] is like the perfect one of the two of us. Whenever my family is in the paper, they show pictures of my brother. Mostly they cut me out. [...] Mum says he looks like an angel [...] My brother has proper muscles and can run really fast and wins

all the races at school sports days. He is also doing an entrance exam for the big school that goes after secondary school so Mum and Dad don't have to pay any money for him to go, and he is probably going to get that, Mum says, because he works very hard and is naturally bright". (3)

As is apparent from Daniel's account, Max is highly regarded by his mother, who speaks of him in high terms. The protagonist, moreover, tries to please his family, friends and teachers, which again increases his popularity ([Karen:] "Max is always the first, and sometimes the only one, to forgive, ever the peacemaker" (8)). His circle of friends is large and he does not refrain from talking to peers who do not share his renown. For instance, when Sylvie approaches him, Max does not mind talking to her even if she seems odd compared to other girls in Max's school (47). However, Max's motivation for his good behavior is to meet others' expectations about him (e.g., "[Dad and Mum] need me to keep out of trouble; to be good" (10)). As the son of an aspiring politician, Max is required to fulfill not only his personal and family's requirements but also societal demands. Particularly with a view to his intersexuality, it is essential to maintain a low-profile in order to protect Steve's prestige as well as Max's secret condition.

Presumably, Max's ambition to perfection is also induced by experiences in his early childhood ([Karen:] "[Max] must have lived in an atmosphere of constant panic for the first five years of his life. It was because of his *problem* [emphasis added]" (29)). Karen was overwhelmed with the shock of having a baby that did not conform to the sexual binary and, hence, was not considered 'normal': "I feel like that mother who couldn't even give birth to a normal, functioning baby, as much as I know that's illogical" (157). Especially, during Max's first year Karen was incapable of coping with the situation since she suffered from a postnatal trauma, and therefore, left paramount decisions to Steve. Having been aware that her sentiments were absurd and irrational, she accumulated feelings of guilt that eventually precipitated a sudden act of panic, i.e. the temporary abandonment of her family while she was pregnant with Daniel. It is highly probable that Max sensed his mother's confusion and desperation, and therefore learnt to behave and adjust without complaining in order to secure Karen's staying. The reader as well as Max learn about this episode during an argument between Karen and Steve after the abortion: "Since then he's just gone along with everyone else, done whatever he felt he had to to please you, to make you not leave again, [...] You've made our son a pushover. He doesn't stand up for himself" (334). Witnessing such conversations as well as Max's

thorough reflecting, gradually allow the intersex teenager to assert his ambiguously gendered identity.

1.3.2 Violation as decisive turning point

Until the night of Hunter's visit, Max is a satisfied fifteen-year-old teenager who does not question his existence as an intersex individual. With the rape committed by Hunter, Max begins to reflect on his past development as well as his future prospects. He decides to withhold the truth about the rape since he feels ashamed and responsible for having attracted Hunter:

I feel like it's my fault. I know it's not, but that doesn't stop me feeling like it is. (36)

If Mum and Dad found out about the other night, not only would I be their intersex kid, then I'd be the kid that everytime [sic] they looked at him, they would think of my crotch and Hunter doing that to me and how I didn't fight back. (95)

The teenager blames himself for having endured the violation without attempting to defend himself. Self-blame is a common coping strategy of rape victims. According to the support organization *Pandora's Project*, ascribing the responsibility for having been raped to oneself, helps victims to cope with such traumatic experiences: "It's much easier to believe we had a role in our attack(s) than to accept we had absolutely no control over what happened" (Pandora's Project [Online]). However, during the rape, Max felt incapable of fighting back feeling paralyzed and already reflecting on his inability to resist Hunter's demands: "I'm so used to letting Hunter have his way that for a moment I don't react" (Tarttelin 15). Furthermore, he continuously apologizes to Hunter. This is attributable to Max's automatized urge to please especially people who he is closely acquainted with:

'Oh. OK. Sorry.' (*Why did I say sorry?* I think.)

Hunter looks around my room with the proprietary air he has always had regarding my life and possessions. He's always been the leader and, sometimes, the bully. He's tall and muscular and masculine. I feel small next to him, [...]. (12)

The offender takes advantage of the habitual subordination of his childhood friend and exerts psychological and physical power over Max:

'Do you really want your mum and dad to hear you?' he whispers. 'Do you want them to come in your room and see your little he-she dick?' [...]

'You're not a guy. You're ... you're not anything.' [...] 'You're a freak,' [...] I have never been spoken to like this. (19)

Max is bewildered by the insults Hunter uses to justify his personal confusion and act. He refers to Max's non-normativity as a trigger for his sexual desire and hence, assigns the guilt for being a temptation for Hunter to Max, who internalizes this suggestion:

I felt like it was his right.

[...] I've always done everything he wanted. But it was more that I was shocked, because of what he said. So few people know.

[...] All the way through, I just felt like apologizing. [...] For being disgusting, having messed-up junk, moving in the wrong way and not knowing what to do. (43)

The quotation above moreover alludes to the profound disappointment Max experiences during and after the rape. With committing the crime, Hunter betrays Max's confidence since he belongs to a small group of people who share the knowledge about the adolescent's intersexuality. Prior to the incident, Max has never experienced being reduced to his gender or it even being the determining factor of his life.

1.3.3 Implications of intersexuality

After the sexual assault by Hunter, Max begins to reflect on how he as a sexual being appears and appeals to other people:

[...] I briefly thought about how people who knew about my condition might see me. Hunter's one of the only ones who does, and he couldn't stop himself from doing that to me. It's weird to think of yourself as this seductive thing, with no thought to you, how you are. It's as if my sexuality doesn't belong to or have anything to do with me, just Hunter, or the other people who look at me, and how they see me. [...] It made me wonder if I was the kind of person who turned perverts on. (137)

Generally, he has been aware that in the course of adolescence his physique might remain androgynous while his male peers would develop more masculine features. This issue has always been an imminent problem albeit approaching it was postponed to a later stage. Through reflecting on his physical features and attempting to understand what provoked Hunter's action, he eventually realizes the immediacy of these changes:

My slim frame has been ameliorated by football and weights and a short course of hormones when I was thirteen.

[...] My chest is a good size. Not large but not small. Well-developed compared to other boys in my year, [...].

I'm an OK height for my age, and I think I'm still growing.

[...] My face is soft-jawed for a boy, but not too much, not remarkably. [...] There is no facial hair there, not even sprouting. [...] but there's really no reason, right now, for anyone to suspect that I'm anything other than a teenage boy.

But wait until my facial hair doesn't grow. Wait until I don't look any manlier. Wait until all the other guys in my year become men, and I stay smooth-chinned, under-developed, androgynous. Wait a year.

I never think about these things, but now I am thinking about them, [...].

[...] I mean, I know there's a clock ticking. I don't know what will happen after I reach eighteen, but we didn't know what would happen after puberty, after thirteen, and we got through that. (39-40)

Moreover, when talking to Daniel, Max says: "Girls want to do things that ... I can't do or ... they wouldn't want to do with me if they knew ... stuff. I don't know. It's only this year everyone has started to pair up. It's weird. I guess I always knew it would happen" (107). Max begins to realize that he and his peers have reached a point in development that finally fully establishes the categorization according to the gender binary, which he is denied due to his intermediate state between male and female. The first time Max's intersexuality affected his progression with girls, was when he was in a relationship with Lee, who wanted to become intimate with him:

I wouldn't let her touch me, find out what was down there, find out what was missing. I had no way to explain it really, no terminology. At that point I had never even thought about how it would affect life with girls. All I knew was that I was intersex, but I didn't know what that meant. *I still don't, really, [...]*".

[...] *Lee, if you knew what was down there, you would never have gone for it. It would gross you out.* (145)

Thus, the rape incident merely constitutes the tragic initial point of Max attending to his personal identity. Particularly having consulted the general practitioner Archie Verma the day after the assault, induces Max to reconsider issues related to intersexuality since she rather than regarding Max's case with scientific curiosity¹⁰, displays honest sympathy and empathy.

1.3.4 Pregnancy

The protagonist eventually becomes melancholic and seems to be in conflict between identities, which is indicated by internal conversations and arguments implying that not only his body is not-assignable to a gender but also that his personality is split:

You said you weren't going to think about it.

I'm not thinking about it.

Yes, you are.

God, SHUT UP! Just shut up.

You are shouting to your own head. Retard.

I know. Urgh. Why would he do that?

[...]. (97)

Simultaneous to his acknowledging a change in his emotional state, he perceives an alteration of his physical health; he, e.g., is regularly nauseous and experiences severe mood swings: "I've been getting these moods, on and off. Just occasionally dipping down

¹⁰ See part A section 1.5.4

into hate and depression, thinking of Hunter and being intersex and everything” (124), or “I’m still getting in bad moods, though. Sometimes I just don’t want to get out of bed. I feel exhausted. I don’t think it is all because of the Hunter thing” (131). Even though these symptoms are commonly known as early indicators of pregnancy, he does not take such a possibility into account since he took emergency contraception after the night he was raped. Only when he wakes at his girlfriend Sylvie’s house, again feeling nauseous, he realizes that the medicine’s effect might have been impacted negatively due to his vomiting on the following day. He immediately buys a pregnancy test, which confirms his apprehension (153-55).

Max’s first instinct is to confide in Karen and disclose his pregnancy to her, still concealing the reason for the conception. Karen herself, however, is incapable of coping adequately with the situation and in spite of providing emotional support for finding his identity, she urges for an abortion. In the course of the pregnancy, Max learns considerably much about his condition as well as his parents’ decisions during his childhood. The extent to which Steve and Karen’s opinions on intersexuality and gender diverge becomes increasingly apparent. While Karen demands to perform an abortion and the hysterectomy, i.e. the surgical removal of the uterus, simultaneously, Steven questions, “Why does he have to decide on a gender?” (175). Despite his public profession as well as his reputation at risk, Steven seeks to allow his child to decide on his gender identity, whether this entails surgical alterations or entirely abolishing common concepts of gender. Nevertheless, Steve fails to convey his opinion to Max since his focus at that time is the election campaign for becoming Member of Parliament.

Karen, on the other hand, is excessively concerned with Max’s sexual orientation as for her, his pregnancy is proof of his latent homosexuality. Therefore, she makes an effort at supporting him in resolving potential inner conflicts regarding sexual identity:

Mum is in my room when I get up there, sat on my bed with a book that, upon closer scrutiny, appears to be entitled: *Parenting Practices: Gender and Sexuality*.
[Karen:] [...] ‘I thought you might want to discuss some things.’
[...] ‘I’m just suggesting we discuss whether ...’ [...] ‘You might have been sexed wrong as a baby.’ [...]
‘Honey, I just thought you might want to think about if you do want to be, you know, not a boy-’
[Max:] ‘Like I have a choice what I am?’
[Karen:] ‘Many intersex children reject their assigned gender later in life-’ [...].
(210-11)

Max, however, is offended by his mother's intention to discuss his sexual orientation since she erroneously interprets the situation:

[Max:] 'I don't like boys! I'm not dating them! GOD! Haven't you been here my whole life? Do I have to spell it out for you? D'you think my whole existence is a lie? That I'm, like, covering up a secret obsession with dolls and hairstyles and Justin Bieber by working my arse off getting onto the first eleven and playing video games and watching *Hanna* with Saoirse Ronan like ten times?'

[Karen:] [...] 'I'm just saying you don't have to accept a male gender identity if you don't want to'. (211)

In this conversation, it becomes apparent that Karen confuses the concepts of *gender identity* and *sexual identity*. Being a modern woman, she clearly accepts homosexuality as an expression of identity and sexual affiliation while still abiding to the binary gender system. She attempts to convince Max to choose either a male or a female gender identity in order to maintain normality in their life. Karen urges her son to make a decision while still withholding valuable information on his condition which Max requires in order to comprehend his entire existence. Nevertheless, Karen denies him further knowledge as can be seen in the extract of the conversation at Archie's office after Max's announcing the pregnancy:

[Max:] 'What type am I?'

[Karen:] 'Not now, Max, let's not get into that.' Mum shakes her head.

[Max:] 'Wait, but ... am I like a normal type?' (178)

Max is increasingly unsure about his true gender identity. While definitely excluding a desire to be female, Max is neither certain of a male gender identity. When Daniel, for instance, asks Max whether he would like to be a girl, he hesitates and says, "'No. I don't want to be a girl'". Nevertheless, he does not answer Daniel's follow-up question: "'You want to be a boy?'" (218-19). A contributing factor to this uncertainty is the growing sympathy he feels for the fetus: "*It*. A sexless, blank thing that is neither he nor she. I guess me and my child have that in common. Wow. My child. Shit" (178). He realizes that this pregnancy might be his only chance to become a parent since his male genitals are sterile. Furthermore, due to internalized homophobia, he feels that his ambiguous gender would repulse potential lovers.

Eventually, Max cannot endure the uncertainty about his gender identity anymore and individually approaches Archie to obtain more information on his type of intersexuality.

He learns about him being a 'true hermaphrodite', i.e. presenting the karyotype 46,XX/46,XY¹¹:

[*Archie*:] 'I can't tell you why you are what you are, but you are what is known as a true hermaphrodite, born with both ovarian and testicular tissue.'

[...] 'My personal opinion is that your parents held out on surgery, not because they couldn't decide whether you should be a boy or a girl, but because they knew you didn't have to choose either'.

[...] 'You don't have to make choices, you don't have to have surgery, you can just be you'. (226-27)

The teenager, however, does not regard these new perspectives useful since he feels obliged to decide on either male or female gender and he has anticipated a definite, biological solution for his gender confusion:

[*Max*:] 'I don't want to be me'.

[...] 'I was just so fucking sure I'd come in and you'd tell me yes, I was a boy, and everything else was just a mistake that I could ignore and get rid of. I want to get rid of it. [...] I want to get rid of everything that makes me a complete freak'. (227)

This revelation considerably reinforces Max's identity crisis and he eventually experiences a mental overload, which is indicated by his annoyance at Karen for not having asserted her opinion on sex reassignment surgery leaving the choice to Max:

[*Max*:] 'I didn't know that really I don't have a choice, that I'm both and neither, and could never be one or the other. I never knew exactly what I was, that I could never have kids as a boy, that my gender is just constructed by how you treated me'.

[*Karen*:] 'I wanted you to have surgery so you'd be like everyone else!'

[*Max*:] 'You should have made the decision and not left it up to me!'. (234)

Max seems to have lost the slightest sense of self, ("I don't feel like a girl. [...] I feel like I don't know who I am anymore" (235)) and still feels unable to determine his gender identity definitely. When Karen asks: "Do you want to do the operations to be a boy?" (235), Max again hesitates to answer. Although Karen leaves the choice of sex to Max's discretion, she solely implies male or female as possibilities, again indirectly forcing him into the sexual binary (235-236). Karen suggests phrasing, which should induce Max to admit that he has always been more affiliated to a male gender identity:

[*Karen*:] 'Just wait until you've had the operation.'

[*Max*:] 'I'll still be intersex afterwards'.

[*Karen*:] 'Not after gender reassignment surgery'.

[*Max*:] 'Well ... I'll still be intersex inside.'

[*Karen*] frowns. 'But what does that matter if you look and feel like a boy?'

'Um,' I mumble.

¹¹ See part A section 3.2.2

'You've always felt like a boy, haven't you?'
I shrug.
[Karen:] 'Haven't you?' (254)

In this moment, Max realizes that in fact he has never been conscious of his gender identity: "To be honest, though, I've never really thought about it. I've just been Max. And Max is a little different. Not quite a boy" (255). Hence, Max eventually reconciles with his fate of being intersex and accepts his not conforming to societal norms regarding gender, which in turn enables him to confide in Sylvie about his intersexuality. Sylvie's reaction is surprisingly positive and during their talk, she gradually becomes accustomed to Max being intersex. She displays interest in the topic and together the teenage couple researches the condition on the internet. Sylvie even poses the question, "[...] why do we have two sexes if we aren't actually all part of the two sexes?" (291). Throughout the novel, the reader learns that Sylvie herself does not entirely conform to normative assumptions of female teenagers, which is indicated by her preference for men who attend college (27) and her extraordinary outward appearance. Moreover, her surprising reaction to Max's revelation proves that she is mature and open-minded. After some time it is obvious that despite Max's intersexuality, Sylvie wants to continue their relationship: "[...] you're not a freak. And no girl who was really cool would think you were" (293).

Encouraged by Sylvie's positivity, Max decides to disclose to her the sexual assault as well as the consequent pregnancy. Despite her response to Max's gender identity, Sylvie struggles with coping with that information and panics: "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I get these panic attacks. I get scared I'll lose things. [...] I just want things back to normal" (296). Suddenly, Max's mood changes. He feels deeply offended by Sylvie's using the word 'normal': "If there's one thing I'll never be, Sylvie, [...] [i]t's normal. [...] You think I'm disgusting. Well, I hope you like being alone on your high horse" (296). Max ignores Sylvie's pleas for allowing her respite: "You think it's too much for you? How about *me*? You think I like dealing with this, asking myself these awful fucking questions all the time, having to make choices that *no one* else has to make, having *no one* to talk to?" (297). Even though Max's negative reaction is rather excessive since Sylvie's spontaneous choice of wording was due to rising panic, it is the first time he affirms himself, acknowledging his deviation as an essential part of his personality.

1.3.5 Fear of isolation

Throughout the pregnancy, Max's sympathy for *his* unborn child grows considerably. Initially, a subtle sign of affection are gestures such as his touching his abdomen, e.g.

“[Archie:] Max lifts himself off the chair slowly, then touches his stomach gently” (171), or “[Max:] Suddenly I realise I have my hand on my stomach” (253). At a later stage, he even demands the picture of the fetus taken at the ultrasound examination prior to the abortion (264). Max regrets that his being intersexual limits possibilities regarding whether to keep the child or terminate the pregnancy. He feels that “[i]f I was a girl, this wouldn’t be an issue. I’m just not normal. I’m natural. I’ve not had any operations. This pregnancy is natural. But not ‘normal’. So it has to be terminated. It’s a weird thought” (247). Even though Max does not preclude an abortion, he believes that giving birth to the child should at least be taken under consideration: “I think about how the potential for an entire life, the dream of it, is inside me right now, and that terminating it not only gets rid of a problem, it gets rid of that potential” (253).

Eventually he learns that Steve’s main motivation for refusing to do sex reassignment surgery during Max’s infancy was to grant him the possibility to have children one day:

[Karen:] ‘He was the one who said you couldn’t have operations until you could decide for yourself. He said it was mutilation. No one was going to cut up his perfectly functioning baby.’

[...] ‘He wanted you to be able to have children if you wanted to’. (256)

This knowledge encourages him in allowing himself to reflect on keeping the baby since his family would not abandon him if he decided accordingly.

In addition, Max is increasingly concerned about prospective solitude and isolation. These fears are induced by internalized homophobia and the belief that his condition would repulse people:

Even without them taking everything out, I’ll never get knocked up again because ... well, because I like girls, but also because who the fuck would go down there? (273)

[...] Am I going to end up lonely Uncle Max to Danny’s kids, the uncle who is old and alone and doesn’t have anyone coming to visit him at the nursing home, [...]. (274)

Max is aware of the social and societal consequences a continuation of the pregnancy would entail. His environment’s intolerance to the unusual and unknown might impede him from pursuing his athletic career as well as simply participating in everyday life: “[...] how would I even survive the pregnancy? People would see me around town. I can’t just stay in my house for six months. And how would the baby survive it, being the child of a he/she?” (274). However, the fear of a prospective lifetime of loneliness eventually outweighs the concern over the social stigma he would have to expect:

[...] *Is this it? Is this my only chance?* And this bit I can't believe I'm thinking about because I'm sixteen, I was basically forced into it, Hunter would know it was his baby, I would get kicked off the team, no friends, no more girl prospects ever, [...] but ... is this my only chance to have a child? Do I care? Because I think I might. I think I might care about that. (277)

Owing to the divergent opinions of Max's parents and his own inner conflict, he is confused by the numerous different views and the options he has to consider:

Which opinion is truly mine? Who am I? Does the fact that I don't have a gender even matter? Or does it mean I'm absolutely alone? Will anyone ever understand me just wanting to be me, or will they all think I'm a freak, forever? (303)

The quote subsumes internal centers of conflict: he feels he has lost responsibility over his own personality and opinion but still does not know which course to take. He has to outweigh his options carefully in order to avoid lifelong loneliness as well as social stigmatization.

1.3.6 Abortion and familial alienation

Max's distress about his identity becomes evermore unbearable as the date of the abortion and the hysterectomy is approaching rapidly. His sexuality has become his defining feature, which, growing up, he and his parents tried to avoid:

I feel like I've lost my life over the past few weeks. [...] I feel that my intersexuality is the main part of me, which is exactly what I never wanted growing up. I never wanted to be seen and judged on my inbetweenness alone. But that's what I am now. A product of my body, what it does, what it was made for. (316)

When Max is already prepared for the abortion, his internal conflict reaches a climax and he realizes that he is not ready to give up his chance of having children. However, only shortly before being fully anaesthetized, he manages to communicate to his mother that he does not want the termination to be undertaken (320-25). Karen, however, does not respect his wish and rather than effecting a delay of both abortion and hysterectomy, only induces a postponement of the latter. When Max wakes up, he is furious with his mother for having disregarded his demand. Again Max is overly bothered by the use of the word 'normal':

[Karen:] 'Now everything can go back to normal, and we can forget all about-'
[Max:] 'I'm not normal! I'll never be fucking normal! Can't you get that into your thick head? Give me up now if you want something normal, because I'll never be right for you!' (331)

Thereupon, Max breaks off contact with his mother, who moves out of their house. Moreover, the relationship of Steve and Karen is deeply shaken by the incident since they have never been in agreement regarding Max's gender and Steve feels betrayed by

her disregard of Max's wish. While Karen has been concerned about assigning Max to either female or male gender, Steve has realized that an assignment to the arbitrary binary system is not essential: "We didn't assign him a gender; he decided who he wanted to be. He always has, up until this point" (332).

The weeks following the abortion, Max is deeply depressed and he even refuses to maintain his personal hygiene or meet his friends. As outlined above, before the termination of the pregnancy, Max has almost become reconciled with his variant gender, having eventually acknowledged his deviating from the binary norm. However, due to the growing depressive mood, he less than ever before is conscious of his personal identity: "I look rough, and dirty, and ambiguous. Not quite androgynous. It's not quite the right word. The right word is ambiguous" (346).

One eventful evening, Max reflects on the problems he had to negotiate in the previous weeks and increasingly dissociates from his initial identity. He realizes that he aspired after perfection due to reasons of which he has never been conscious. Yet, he finally desires being ordinary rather than exceptional:

I wanted other things too. I did want to stand out, be smart, be nice, but I tried so hard for those things that it wasn't really like I was asking anyone for them. Really what I wanted was to be something more than the sum of my male and female parts. (351)

[...] I realise that I am going to be intersex my whole life. Years and years and decades, maybe for seventy years, I'll be like this. And, unless I find someone who doesn't mind having sex with me, I'm going to be alone all that time. (354)

I used to feel like I wanted to be somebody special. Now I just wish I could go back, and aim to be boring, uninteresting, normal. (364)

Max's internal monologue reveals to what extents he and his family are victims of society's conviction to fulfill a normative standard that prescribes not only behavior but also appearance:

I'm starting to understand that attempting to be perfect has been the goal of my life. Our lives. Attempting to be this fault-free, smiling person in this loving, happy family that fits so perfectly in this pretty, inoffensive little town. [...] Only that I couldn't do it. That I let everybody down. [...] But it was my fault, how I've reacted to my diagnosis, how I've dealt with it. Who I've become. (365)

Max collapses under the excessive demand of his desperate situation and tries to numb his anguish with painkillers. Since, previously that evening, Max was consuming both alcohol and marijuana, he overdoses and is found unconscious by Daniel. Fortunately, the teenager survives the incident. With the help of psychological therapy afterwards, he ultimately accepts his identity as an intersex teenager who feels attracted to women:

But I do know that I'm so, so glad I didn't have the other surgery in the end. I really don't think I could have come back from that. I just wouldn't have felt like me. It would have felt like not only do I not make my own choices, but this body isn't mine either. My whole body would be a reminder, every day, that I wasn't brave enough just to be myself. (403)

Essentially, already at the beginning of the novel, he knew that integral to achieving perfection is to accept body and personality as a whole that does not require alterations of any kind. Talking to Daniel, who dreams of becoming a robot engineer that adds bionic features to Max, he declared: "I told my brother what I wanted to be, and he said that it was cool but unfortunately he wouldn't let me add extensions to him, because he wanted to be who he was and see how that played out" (5).

1.3.7 Résumé

Max's identity quest is classifiable within the poststructuralist approach since initially he uncritically accepts his personality that is considerably shaped by both cultural conventions and demands indirectly posed by his family. The assault he endures, however, initiates in him a process of reflecting his own personality and gender identity. Due to the secrecy around his intersexuality, he avoids addressing the issue prior to the incident. The teenager is assailed by doubts triggered by blaming himself for both attracting assaulters such as Hunter and probably repelling society that is accustomed to the binary gender system. Furthermore, he is conflicted by the expectation to decide on a definite binary gender identity although he does not entirely feel neither male nor female. Gradually, Max becomes aware of the third possibility of remaining intersex, which, however, would entail societal marginalization. The involuntary abortion of his child constitutes a major crisis for Max since Karen's decision not to stop the termination represents a violation of his freedom of choice concerning his body. After the accidental overdose of painkillers, Max obtains psychological support that eventually allows him to accept his intersex gender identity.

1.4 Hunter Fulsom

A consideration of Max's assaulter Hunter Fulsom is particularly feasible for understanding the peculiarities of violence against intersex people on the individual level. The behavior and utterances of Hunter suggest that he himself doubts his own sexual and gender identity although he would not admit it to himself. The reader only learns about his character through descriptions by Karen, Max and Sylvie, as well as direct discourse. Already at the beginning of the novel, Hunter is represented as being overly assertive:

“Despite Hunter’s bossiness, [...]” (8). Moreover, he is eventually becoming delinquent: “Leah told my mum that Hunter’s grades have dropped off and he was cautioned by the police for egging someone’s house over the summer” (10).

Growing up, Max and Hunter were best friends, the latter being privy to the Walkers’ secret about Max’s intersexuality. However, they have been out of touch since an odd conversation on New Year’s Eve:

We haven’t spoken in months, not since a drunken conversation about sex at New Year, when we were staying with our families on a skiing holiday in Switzerland and where, for no obvious reason, Hunter had become angry and subdued and told me to ‘fuck off, pretty-boy’.

‘How many people have you slept with?’ was the last thing I remembered saying to him. I was smiling conspiratorially, [...].

‘People?’ he asked suspiciously, then stood up and lurched for the door of the cabin that led outside. (11)

Hunter seemed to have been offended by Max’s question that was triggered by juvenile curiosity. Particularly Hunter’s repetition of the word ‘people’ might be an indication for his confusion about his own sexuality and his feelings for and attraction to Max. When Hunter enters Max’s room, Max is masturbating, which surprises the older teenager and at the same time, arouses his curiosity:

[Hunter:] ‘I saw you.’ [...] He wets his lips. ‘Can you?’

‘[...] it’s more a boy thing to do, isn’t it?’

He smirks. ‘Can I see?’

[...] ‘Forget it,’ he laughs. ‘I don’t really want to. I just ... `cause I saw you touching it.’

[...] ‘I’m just surprised. I just didn’t think you would touch yourself.’ (12)

Eventually, Hunter ventures to kiss Max who after briefly hesitating out of shock manages to push him away:

[Hunter:] ‘You’re supposed to like me.’

[Max:] ‘I’m *supposed* to like you?’ I say.

[Hunter:] ‘You’re more girl than boy,’ [...]. (15)

[Max:] ‘I’m not gay. I’m sorry,’ I say. [...] ‘It’s not a bad thing to be, it’s just ... I’m not.’

[Hunter:] ‘You don’t have to be,’ he says, matter of factly.

[Max:] [...] ‘Um,’ I eventually say. ‘But ... you are.’

[Hunter:] ‘No I’m not,’ he says. ‘I don’t like boys. Or girls. Just you.’ (15).

Hunter is deeply confused by his attraction to his childhood friend and applies ‘projection’ as a defense mechanism; i.e. negative, unconscious impulses are denied and simultaneously attributed to another person (*Encyclopædia Britannica*. [Online]):

[Hunter:] 'I'm not the freak,' he growls. 'There's nothing wrong with me. There's something wrong with you and you're making me feel this way.'
 [...] 'You've always made me feel this way,' he says. 'You're a little cocktease. You're the freak. I'm not ... I'm not ...'
 [Max:] 'Gay?' I murmur.
 [Hunter:] 'No, I'm not that, because you're not even ... because you're ...'. (Tart-telin 16)

Constantly insulting his victim with homophobic offenses, Hunter further demoralizes Max and justifies his own wrongdoing. In addition, by admonishing Max to discretion since, according to Hunter, Max and Daniel already represent a burden to their parents, he further forces Max to submission:

[Hunter:] 'Don't tell and I won't tell about you. Don't tell your mum either. She's got enough problems with you and your spacker brother to begin with.'
 For some reason, I shake my head and whisper, calmly: 'I won't.' (23)

When Max informs his violator about the terminated pregnancy, Hunter realizes his mistake and finally acknowledges his feelings for Max to him and by playing on Max's fear of isolation, offers to initiate a romantic relationship. Max, however, finally manages not to comply with Hunter anymore and pushes him to the ground: "[Hunter:] 'Look, if you can get over this ... you don't have to be alone. We were so good together. I've always been in love with you, [...] [y]ou don't want to be lonely, Max. It's horrible'" (361).

Ultimately, Hunter is arrested for the rape of Max. Steve accompanies the police officer in order to ensure the arrest of his son's violator, whose final utterances are: "'Mr Walker, I really ...' [...] 'I really care about him. And ... the baby,' [...]" (394). Certainly, the open disclosure of his feelings does not justify his crime but explains the psychological conflicts that induced his rash action. The violence he commits against Max originates from internalized homophobia for he is clearly in love with Max. He refuses to admit, however, that he is homosexual and tries to explain his feelings by emphasizing Max's intersexuality.

1.5 Societal attitudes towards intersexuality

1.5.1 Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is apparent in numerous instances throughout *Golden Boy*. Especially, Max's mother Karen Walker is considerably opinionated and strives for complete conformity, as has been pointed out in section 1.2.2. She is aware of the mother's demeanor that the heteronormative order demands in order to satisfy social expectations:

I suspect I am aiming for the perfect wardrobe for my roles in life, to make up for the fact that I am never quite sure what these roles require of me. On the left-hand side rail in the built-in wardrobe are the Good-Barrister work suits; on the right, there are the Good-Mother casual clothes, mostly slim-fitting trousers with plain blouses or T-shirts or casual but expensive white shirts with blazers to go over them. I wear the Good-Mother outfits to PTA meetings, cake sales, football matches, play dates. I am a Good Parent, and you can tell by my Good-Parent suit. [...] People can see you keep yourself healthy, you keep your kids healthy, you set a good example. [...] Your outfit has to say: *I took a while deciding on this because my house was clean and my kids were fed and mentally stimulated, so I had plenty of time to pamper myself.* [...] No bulk that says you have gained weight. (30-31)

This account of the various roles of the contemporary woman exemplifies the mechanisms of *doing gender*¹². Meaning is ascribed to objects, in this case, outfits signifying different aspects of femininity. Interestingly, Karen is consciously adopting these roles for the purpose of blending in as can be deduced from the sentence “I suspect I am aiming for the perfect wardrobe for my roles in life, to make up for the fact that I am never quite sure what these roles require of me” (30). Similar to her intersexual child, Karen has not succeeded in finding her proper identity since Max’s intersex condition entailed certain precautionary measures. Steve and Karen, for instance, decided to relocate their family home from urban Oxford to the suburbs: “The move [to Hemingway] was unexpected, but suddenly Oxford was too claustrophobic [sic]. Our friends would drop by at all times, without calling ahead, and above all we wanted privacy” (7). It is less the urge to have more space to the family’s disposal that induced the change of location, but the necessity to hide their child’s intersexuality from public sight. The anonymity Steve and Karen find in Hemingway provides for being able to *pass* as a ‘normal’, ‘almost perfect’ family. However, until the period under consideration, primarily Karen is concerned with keeping up appearances:

[Karen:] ‘Steve you know what I’m saying makes sense. If you run for election, we’ll need to protect Max and Daniel.’ [...] ‘From prying eyes, Steve. We need to protect them from journalists and other people and-’

[Steve:] [...] ‘Let them plague us. There’s nothing wrong with our kids.’

[Karen:] [...] ‘People will want to know about him, Steve.’ I paused, sighed and added quietly, ‘Can you imagine what would happen if it got out?’ (35)

Steve is less worried about the public opinion regarding Max’s sexuality and his ‘endangered’ reputation since he unconditionally accepts the possibility of his offspring conforming to neither male nor female gender. In the abortion clinic, he nonetheless ap-

¹² See part A section 1.4.3

pears in disguise (“I am in the recovery room, wearing sweat pants and a hooded jumper, trying to look not like myself” (326)) in order to secure Max’s privacy.

Generally, the town Hemingway does not allow for great variation and strictly complies with the heteronormative order of society. According to Sylvie who grew up elsewhere:

[...] here it is weird for boys to hang out with girls. In Hemingway, the boys hang out with the boys (‘boy’ = footballer who plays video games, drinks beer, wears blue, listens to rock music, likes tits, and will likely one day become a politician/work in finance and have a mild coke habit) and the girls hang out with the girls (‘girl’ = would-be accountant/footballer’s wife/housewife who dyes her hair blonde, drinks wine, wears pink clothes and orange make-up, dances to light RnB, likes pretty-boys and will likely one day have a mild coke habit). (86)

The ritualistic acts outlined further elucidate Butler’s concept of *performativity*¹³: Sylvie grew up in a presumably less heteronormative environment and is thus less accustomed to perform these “acts and gestures which are learned and [...] repeated over time [and] create the illusion of an innate and stable (gender) core” (Sullivan 82). However, she consciously identifies these acts. Despite being intersex and hence having an ambiguous biological sex, Max does not deliberately perform these cultural signs and conventions. His parents tried to raise him gender-neutral and Max naturally developed a preference for behavior and acts that are typically associated with masculinity ([*Archie*:] “‘You were relating to boys, acting like a boy and, crucially, you weren’t growing like a girl [...]” (Tarttelin 225)).

The accidental pregnancy, however, would constitute a disruption of Hemingway’s adherence to the heteronormative order since not only Max’s ambiguous gender invalidates the adherence to the binary gender systems but the oddness of an accompanied pregnancy would also disturb common biological assumptions: “[*Max*:] Max Walker, cute teen son of the eminent Stephen Walker, a knocked-up he-she. *Lock up your sons and daughters, Oxfordshire, this kid is freaky, indiscriminate and, apparently, virile*” (177).

As has been pointed out previously, the conversations between Max and his younger brother Daniel reveal realizations that induce further reflection upon certain topics in Max. Without explicitly addressing the topic, Max and Daniel discuss ambiguous gender identities such as in intersexuality and transsexuality:

[*Daniel*:] ‘So why do they have to choose?’ [...]
[*Max*:] ‘They just do,’ [...].
‘That’s just the way things are.’ [...]

¹³ See part A section 1.4.2

‘Like how when you fill out a form it says male or female, or when there are changing rooms and they are male and female, or toilets, or clothes, or like on your driver’s license and passport, or when they do school uniform, or when you play a game and it’s boys versus girls. Or when you get married and you have to be a boy or a girl because same-sex marriage is not recognised by some countries.’ [...]

‘It’s just weird and people don’t know how to treat you if you’re hallway in-between. They think you’re going to fuck with their head and corrupt their children and ... stuff like that...’ (218).

When Daniel with his naïve curiosity asks Max for the reason why people who do not correspond to the male female binary opposition have to choose one option, Max fails to provide an adequate answer at first. After some consideration, Max explains that the binary gender system is solely grounded on cultural conventions and performative acts rather than on biological features.

1.5.2 The intersex’s family

As has been discussed in previous sections, Karen is to some extent responsible for unconsciously forcing Max to comply with conservative standards. These originate from her having been reared by a distant, dissatisfied mother. Karen’s parents were unapproachable, her father himself having been a lawyer, who could only spare little time for his family. Interestingly, her husband’s character bears resemblance to her father’s since she perceives both as “ha[ving] a gentle, mild temperament” (6), and their common political ambition. Her mother, in contrast, is described as “a beautiful, sad woman; dark, small and quick to anger, [who] would mutter about sacrifice and everything she had given up for us” (6). Karen indirectly assumed her parents’ roles that highly accord with the heteronormative ideal. She is the perfect wife in the shadow of her successful husband, who in order to care for her family, neglects her personal desires. Indication of this is her account of her closest friend Leah and her sister Cheryl, whose interpretations of the female role are opposite: the former married at an early age and became a housewife in the suburbs while the latter gathered valuable experiences by travelling instead of studying at university. Karen represents a female figure in between her friend Leah and her sister Cheryl. She pursues her own dreams only as far as the management of her family allows it:

I know it sounds irrational, but sometimes I feel jealous of all the freedom and solitude [Cheryl] has experienced. As a barrister for the court and a mother of two, my own free time is precious. I spend it with my family, and when I get the chance I see Cheryl or Leah, [...] (7).

Her devotion for her children is induced by her feelings of remorse due to her inability to cope with Max's intersexuality at his birth. The intersex condition is additionally contradicting her essentialist worldview that dictate the invariability of people as well as the importance of binary oppositions. This can be deduced from her description of Daniel in section 1.2.4. However, Karen was overwhelmed not only by her baby's condition but also by the associated responsibility that compelled her to compromise personal needs and desires in order to care for the children:

I'll admit that I wasn't ready. Being a parent meant having to make definite choices, rather than meander around possible options. It means having to live the way you wanted to live but could never be bothered to, prioritising things you never used to consider [...]. It means living in a school catchment area and saving for university. [...] It means feeling responsible for the every move of two autonomous beings that I cannot control. (29)

Becoming a mother, for Karen entailed abandoning personal freedom to a certain extent and adhering to generally accepted social norms of behavior and demeanor. Such requirements particularly apply for women in contemporary societies since they bear children and hence, are responsible for a family's well-being. On that account, Karen felt immediately guilty for her son not conforming to normative assumptions of gender: "It reminds me of the conviction I had when we first found out Max was different from other babies – that I had failed as a mother, that I wasn't cut out for the job, [...]" (72).

Karen never fully reconciled with Max's intersexuality and the fact that such a condition signifies being even more restricted in one's self-fulfillment. During Daniel's pregnancy, she left the family for various months and in doing so, endangered Max's personality development. The child was scared to lose his mother again if he misbehaved. When Karen and Steve explained to the six-year-old Max that he was intersex, Max was rather worried about upsetting his mother than reflecting on what he had been told: "[...]. He took it at face value. [...] being intersex didn't mean anything to him. He shrugged and said, 'OK, Mummy, it's alright', because I was obviously upset, [...]" (187). Hence, Karen is indirectly accountable for Max's urge to please other people as well as his desire to strive for perfection under the weight of which he eventually collapses.

In her internal monologues, Karen continuously refers to her wish of her family and children to be happy. However, she does not realize that her desire, which is based on a stereotypical image, indirectly forces her family members to conform to a role that does not necessarily correspond to their real personalities. Before Christmas, she demands a picture for Christmas cards in order to "[...] capture something, a moment in the life of

our family when everything is perfect; some example of happiness we could all aspire to achieve every day [...]" (132). Max's increasing identity crisis as well as pregnancy endanger her 'perfect world'. For this reason, she insists on the abortion and the hysterectomy. Nevertheless, she does not admit her anxiety to herself and conceals it with being concerned for Max. When he, for instance, assures Karen that he was not homosexual and the sexual intercourse with a man was non-recurrent, she thinks "*Thank god, [...]. He's different already. I don't want him to be any more different*" (235).

Certainly, Karen's motivation could be driven by affection for her eldest son. However, in comparison with her counterpart Steve, the extent to which Karen's view on Max's gender identity is constituted by binary assumptions becomes evident. Steve emphasizes that medical procedures to treat intersexuality and gender assignment surgery would convey the idea to Max that he was odd and abnormal:

[Steve:] 'What are we doing to him? What are we telling him with these injections? This isn't right! It isn't fair'. (188)

[Steve:] '[...] he doesn't have to choose gender or change gender because of this. He's fine as he is, as long as you leave him alone!'

[...] 'He's not going to change sex just because of an accident'. (212).

As can be deduced from such text passages, Steve is considerably more mature and solidified in his opinion and refuses to adhere strictly to the gender binary. Nevertheless, in order for Karen to be able to cope with her child's intersexuality more adequately, she should have been provided with psychological assistance and guidance since, as Archie realizes, "Because intersexuality is rare, parents can often feel isolated and confuse themselves, [...]" (226). According to Fausto-Sterling, providing early psychological support for the parents is in fact of crucial importance since they unconsciously convey a positive or negative attitude towards intersexuality to the child. Physicians, therefore, need to address the topic particularly sensitively in parent discourse (*Sexing the Body* 63–64). After Max's birth, Karen clearly suffers a "birth trauma", which is characterized by her lethargic incapability to deal with the situation. Since medical staff failed to recognize the psychological urgency of Karen's trauma, she has never been able to surmount her postnatal depression. Her unresolved inner conflict disturbs her mental health throughout Max's childhood until the period under consideration, and she unconsciously inflicts these inherent negative feelings on Max, who aspires to conform in order to satisfy his mother.

1.5.3 (Internalized) Homophobia

Max's fear of isolation and solitude is directly linked to his internalized homophobia, i.e. his belief that the prejudices about LGBTIQ people are true in consequence of their constant recurrence (Clark and Blackburn 7). As has been pointed out in section 1.3.5, Max believes that his intersexuality would prevent him from having romantic relationships since it is regarded 'abnormal' and 'disgusting'. Regularly in his internal monologues, Max insults himself and hence, consolidates his negative self-perception:

If [Sylvie] knew what you are, says my brain, she would freak out. She would tell people. She would tell her next boyfriend, the one after you.

[...] Max, you're disgusting.

[...] If she knew what I was, she wouldn't want to go out with me. If this gets out – if it blows up- everyone will talk about her too. She'll be the person who went out with the knocked-up hermaphrodite. (Tarttelin 197-98)

These negative beliefs contribute considerably to the depth of Max's depression after the abortion. He considers him responsible for the tragic events in his life in the previous month, i.e. the assault by Hunter, the pregnancy and identity crisis, the abortion, as well as the separation from Sylvie: "The real problem is me, anyway. Not her. I'm just tired of being in people's lives. I make everyone hate everyone else. Everyone thinks I'm disgusting. I am disgusting. I'm a catalyst for hate and confusion" (341).

In Max's case, conventionalized mockery of homosexuality nourishes the internalized homophobia. Especially male teenagers use terms such as 'gay' as playful insults for friends. Usually, Max is accustomed to conforming to these ritualized heteronormative insults and besides not regarding them as such, knows how to reply adequately. However, shortly after having been raped, such kind of comment deeply hurts Max:

[Marc and Carl] gave me my present from them, which was FIFA Soccer 12 (!!!) and a pack of condoms and some lubricant.

'For gay sex,' said Marc. 'Because you are gay.'

He was just joking, but I almost cried. Instead I grabbed him and buried my face in his shoulder and pretended I was expressing my undying love for him and said, 'Only for you, Marc. Only for you.' (95)

Since he is aware of the stereotypical contempt for members of different sexual and gender minorities, Max is rather pessimistic about publicly disclosing his intersexuality. Moreover, he is cynical about society's inability to change towards accepting those minorities in the immediate future:

Gay people get ridiculed in school, transvestites get ridiculed, boys who wear tight tops and girls that do sports are ridiculed. What would they do to me? (146)

It would be another sexuality/gender thing that would give people the creeps, and it's no use asking why questions of sexuality and gender give people the creeps, and it's no use blaming it on society and saying it should change, because nothing is going to change about high school, and bitches who gossip, and guys who get freaked out and think people like Samuel want to get off with the entire football team. Nothing is going to change my high school in the next year and make it OK for people to know the truth about me. (147)

1.5.4 Medicine

Intersexual rights movements frequently criticize medical discourse for attending to these cases too impersonally with medical objectivity that neglects the individual's feelings and mental needs. Medical practitioners traditionally regard treatment and adjustment of 'intersexual deformities' imperative for preventing the intersex individual from psychological problems as well as social discrimination (Lang 117). Max's specialists vehemently advocated assigning the intersex child to either gender, however, changing their opinion regularly in the course of time as it is outlined by Karen:

[...] they thought he should be operated on to become a girl, because he had a small phallus, and internal sex organs. But we thought he looked enough like a boy. Steve baulked at them cutting him up. Then they wanted to give him hormones. [...] Later, they thought he should be a boy, because he seemed to identify that way. Above everything, they wanted us to choose. They said he would be mal-adjusted, sexually confused, or suffer from gender dysphoria. They said it was better to have the operations while he was young, that children were more resilient, that it was better we confirm his gender as soon as possible. I agreed with them, in part. Who would want their child to have to go through that? Shouldn't it be us that bore this burden for him? But Steve wouldn't hear it. (Tartelin 185)

As has been outlined previously, Karen has not been treated psychologically, which solidifies her insecurity of accepting an ambiguous gender identity for her child. Owing to Steve, a wrong assignment has been prevented.

In addition, medical experts regularly approach intersexual conditions with professional curiosity rather than treating individuals concerned with sympathy. Karen, for instance, had the impression that a specialist regarded Max as a research object due to the manner he referred to Max: "[The doctor] kept saying 'baby', like it was this thing, this monster, this anomaly that didn't have a soul, a sex, a definition" (186). For Max, the general practitioner Dr Archie Verma is the first physician who treats his intersexuality without conveying the impression of him being a scientific object. When she examines Max's genital area after the rape, she is surprised by Max's habitual indifference to such an examination:

[Max] must be used to having doctors looking at his genitals. An intersex diagnosis is not only something that must be studied for prognosis; to many doctors it's interesting. We see so few cases. My own curiosity is piqued, but I don't let on. (64)

In contrast to the specialists in Oxford, Archie as the GP in Hemingway is accustomed to attending people more sensitively especially regarding sexuality and gender issues. Max remembers appointments with the specialists in Oxford exclusively negatively:

[The specialists] always spoke over me, to Mum or Dad or to other doctors. They rarely asked me stuff, even when I could have just told them the answer. Dad said we had to be careful how much we told them. So I kept my mouth shut, while they pried around me, poking me with their stubby, plastic-gloved fingers. I was an interesting case study for them, an experiment. (67)

Max has grown weary of the constant patronizing he had to endure during his childhood and is reminiscent of such encounters: "I always wanted to ask this, but if Max did have a child, would it be likely to inherit his intersex condition?" my dad asks, out of the blue. [...] I'd forgotten how shitty it was to be in a doctor's office with people talking about me" (177). The teenager becomes increasingly annoyed at being treated as an infantile object without any personal opinion. Although he is repulsed by the specialist and his brusqueness, Max still does not manage to contradict or even formulate his own opinion: "He scratches his dirty white moustache, then literally points to my stomach with his index finger, like, 'Counsellor: Exhibit A'. He does this without looking over at me. Dr Flint addresses everything to Mum" (245).

Finally, the specialist Dr Flint arrogantly tries to inflict a guilty conscience in Karen for not having enforced sex reassignment during Max's infancy. By analyzing Max's physique as well as facial features, he concludes the initial diagnosis of adjusting Max to become female would have been the correct procedure. His claim distinctly demonstrates his disregard of Max's personality:

'This tragedy could have been avoided.' He waves in the general direction of my stomach, not having looked at my face since I came in, when he eyed me once and muttered, 'High cheekbones.' [...] '[...] the intersex child [...] would have an androgynous air, which is very attractive to young people, [...], because it is less threatening [...] and therefore he or she may well be more sexually active in this middle period of adolescence. Hopefully this will tail off towards the end of adolescence when his or her peers start to develop tastes more towards the ends of the spectrum of masculine and feminine. [...] If it had been done earlier, then Max would have been female and this would be a simple case of teenage pregnancy'. (247)

This pathologizing analysis of Max's physique and prospective social development is highly insensitive and further contributes to demoralizing Max, who already suffers from fear of isolation and solitude.

1.5.5 Intersexuality as a taboo

Even though *Golden Boy* is about a teenage intersex who experiences a search for identity, the condition is first referred to explicitly on page 43 ("I think about how every one of us is different, how every intersex person is different from the other, [...]"). Throughout the novel, it seems that even members of the in-group, i.e. those who are informed about Max's condition, refrain from addressing it, rather using terms such as, 'problem' or 'issue', or the pronoun 'it', or an expletive adjunct for hedging. When Steve and Karen, e.g., argue about their children, Karen says "Max isn't how he is because he's ... you know" (101). Steve, in contrast to her, is not reluctant to use the term 'intersex' ("Max ... he doesn't want us to think of him as intersex" (101)), to which Karen responds: "Don't say that word, it's horrible. That's not it, anyway. He's just a good kid. Don't take that away from him because of his illness" (101). The reference to intersexuality as an illness further indicates that Karen is convinced of the legitimacy of the sexual binary.

The concealment of intersexuality, which is regularly deemed necessary by physicians as well as parents, contributes to establishing the condition abnormal in the eyes of the public. In avoiding to address the issue, the parents convey the impression to children that something is wrong with their body (Lang 300–01). A taboo signifies both prohibition of practices that endanger a group and prohibition of talking about certain topics in order to suppress their existence. According to Lang, such taboos regularly endanger a family's harmony since the hesitation to address intersexuality directly leads to estrangement of family members (321). Such an estrangement is also observable in *Golden Boy*. When a girl from school publishes an online blog revealing that Max bought a pregnancy test, the family's reputation is highly at risk since Steve is still running for Member of Parliament. Moreover, Daniel feels betrayed by Max's and his parents' secrecy and demands to be enlightened. The conversations between Daniel and Max reveal Max's inner feelings and psychological state. Daniel is curious and his older brother has to explain issues more indirectly and metaphorically. The secret of his intersexuality gradually destroys Max's and his family's life since Steve and Karen increasingly argue and harmony is disrupted. This becomes apparent in Max's metaphorical account of secrets as brain-eating zombies:

[...] they eat the air around you. They make it all thin, so you can't breathe. Then they eat the other people around you. They eat ... they eat Mum and Dad. [...] It eats bits of their souls and worries around ... like, goes around their brains, nibbling at their brain cells. So they get mean and snappy, because that's what happens when your soul gets eaten. [...] it eats at love, and empathy, so the things that bind you to other people get gnawed away at, until they're thin and easily breakable. (307-08)

After Max's overdose, the family overcomes the estrangement only to a certain extent. While the children live with Steve, who has terminated his campaign to have more time for the family, Max only gradually reapproaches Karen, who herself uses her novel freedom to come to terms with her past.

2 *The Art of Being Normal* by Lisa Williamson (2015)

The Art of Being Normal is a Young Adult Novel focusing on the transsexual teenagers David Piper and Leo Denton. The novel is written by the English author Lisa Williamson and published by David Fickling Books in Oxford. The story revolves around the perspectives of David and Leo, which allows the reader to gain valuable insights into their identity development. The use of gendered personal pronouns in the present analysis is consistent with Williamson's novel. For this reason, the MTF transsexual David is referred to using masculine pronouns.

2.1 Plot

It is the beginning of a new school year and Eden Park School welcomes a new student: Leo Denton from a socially deprived district on the other side of the city, who supposedly was expelled from Cloverdale School for having chopped a teacher's finger. Furthermore, Leo is a FTM-transsexual in transition. David Piper, who has not yet openly disclosed his transsexual gender identity, feels immediately drawn to this new mysterious student but does not realize the reason for his fascination. When the fourteen-year-old teenager is publicly humiliated during lunch time by Harry Beaumont, a bully in David's year, Leo intervenes by punching Harry. After this incident, David and Leo eventually make friends. However, they do not disclose their transsexuality to each other, Leo assuming David is homosexual.

During detention, Leo starts tutoring David in mathematics, which provides the opportunity for them to connect more deeply. Leo, who usually prefers to be undisturbed and solitary during breaks, eventually even spends time with David and his friends Essie and Felix. Leo surprisingly becomes popular and falls in love with Alicia Baker, who also is in year eleven. Alicia increasingly urges her boyfriend to become sexually intimate, which Leo refuses, but having disclosed their mutual love, he eventually decides to confide in her about his transsexuality. Thereupon, Alicia retreats from Leo and refuses to have contact with him.

When Leo does not come to school and omits the private tutoring lessons with David, the latter, out of worry, decides to visit his friend in Cloverdale, where he finds him at an abandoned public swimming pool. However, Leo refuses to discuss his problems with David, who suddenly desires to disclose his transsexuality to Leo. After a brief moment of bafflement, Leo undresses in order to show David his breast binder, which indicates

his FTM transsexuality. The teenagers finally comprehend their arbitrary attraction to each other and Leo tells David the real reason for his leaving his former school: numerous schoolmates ambushed him and after having violently vanquished him, attempted to assault Leo sexually. Fortunately, the group of assaulters was followed by the principal who could avert their action.

The following day, David convinces Leo to return to school since Alicia promised not to reveal his secret. However, Alicia's friend Becky learns about Leo's secret by contacting a Cloverdale student and divulges it among Eden Park students. The prospective humiliation induces Leo to run away and begin a new life with his long-lost father, whom he locates in Tipton-on-Sea. For the journey, however, he attempts to borrow money from David, who gives it to him only on condition that he is allowed to accompany him.

They carefully plan their trip and develop a convincing excuse for David's absence from home for an entire weekend. Moreover, David takes the opportunity to gain 'real-life experience' as a girl and passes the time in *her* true identity, Kate. The teenagers decide to visit Leo's father on Saturday morning. Friday night, however, Leo and David play bingo and spend their prize money on alcohol, which makes them substantially inebriated. The following morning, they oversleep, which enrages Leo since his intention of meeting his father in the morning is confounded. When Mr. Denton finally comes home, he rejects his son by pretending not to know him or his mother.

David decides to disclose his transsexuality to his parents, who assure him of their support on his pursuing a female identity. In school, the interest in Leo's biological sex eventually decreases, and he seems to be accepted as a male.

Ultimately, David's friends Essie, Felix and Leo, as well as his parents enable David to experience a school ball as Kate by arranging an alternative ball at the swimming pool in Cloverdale. The ball constitutes the commencement of his gradual transitioning from male to female.

2.2 Main Characters

2.2.1 David Piper

David Piper is a fourteen-year-old biological male, who secretly desires to become female. Already on the first page, the reader learns that David had been aware of his transsexuality in primary school, albeit not terming it as such. He individually acquired knowledge on the condition and with puberty being imminent, he painstakingly docu-

ments physical changes such as in height, or size of genitals in a scrapbook. However, he refrains from disclosing his true identity to his parents since he expects them supportive towards him being homosexual while his deviant gender identity would unsettle them. Even though David's parents are caring and sympathetic, he postpones the revelation of his transsexuality having already written a letter in which he reveals his inner conflict. The only people who know about David's secret are his two best friends Essie and Felix, who also do not conform to normative assumptions of the average teenager. Essie displays odd behavior, does not comply with standards of conduct and her appearance is flamboyant, while Felix is considered a nerd who participates in mathematics competitions. The friends call themselves "the Non-Conformists" since they "don't fit into any particular group" (Williamson 29). Ever since Essie and Felix have been a couple, David feels increasingly lonely.

David's nuclear family consists of his parents, who allow him to pursue his interests in typically female recreational activities, and Livvy, David's younger sister, who is embarrassed by her elder brother's girlish demeanor.

2.2.2 Leo Denton

The sixteen-year-old Leo was born a biological girl named Megan. As long as he can remember, he felt affiliated with the male gender and with the help of his mother, he was able to initiate his transition from female to male at an early age.

Leo's family belongs to the working class living in a socially deprived area of the city. After the harassment incident at Cloverdale High School, Leo has to change schools, which he simultaneously considers his chance to escape from the unpromising future a remaining in Cloverdale would entail. Leo is exceptionally talented in mathematics and is thus accepted to Eden Park High School. However, due to his social background, he is carefully observed by the principal. In order not to endanger his remaining at the school, Leo strives for anonymity partly because he previously had bad experiences with trusting schoolmates.

Leo's family is the opposite of David's, his mother being a working single-mother of three. Leo's and his twin sister Amber's father left before their birth, however, the transsexual teenager is convinced that his first childhood memories are of his father, Jimmy Denton. He blames his mother for having driven his father away. In fact, Leo's mother struggles with caring for her family, for instance, leaving alone at home her seven-year-old daughter Tia without providing food while going out (14). Moreover, Leo despises

his mother's boyfriend Spike, who genuinely wants to bond with Leo and his sisters. The idealized image of his father eventually induces Leo to locate him.

2.3 Identity Development David

As has already been pointed out, David wanted to become a girl already at an early age. In school, he and his schoolmates were supposed to give accounts of their dream jobs, David, however, misunderstood the task and accidentally exposed his true gender identity:

One afternoon, when I was eight years old, my class was told to write about what we wanted to be when we grew up. Miss Box went round the class, asking each one of us to stand up and share what we had written. Zachary Olsen wanted to play in the Premier League. [...] But I didn't want to be any of these things.

This is what I wrote:

I want to be a girl. (1)

Since that time, David has been subject to harassment and ridicule by his peers, who deprecate his non-conforming to heteronormative standards. Harry Beaumont, for instance, has called David a "Freak Show" since primary school (26). Due to the moral support provided by his closest friends Essie and Felix, David was able to develop his transsexual identity further without despairing.

2.3.1 Aversion to masculine features

The transsexual teenager David is conscious of the imminent physiological changes of his body as part of puberty and is aware that the ideal moment for initiating a transition to the female sex has arrived. With regard to his male body, David detests his masculine features and is anxious of developing more like his father while he admires his mother's femininity:

As usual, I start by pressing my palms against my chest. I will it to be soft and spongy, but the muscle beneath my skin feels hard like stone. I take the tape measure and warp it around my hips. No change. I go straight up and down, like a human ruler. I am the opposite of Mum who is all fleshy curves – hips and bum and boobs. (11)

Next, I stand against the doorframe and measure my height. One hundred and sixty-eight centimetres. Again, no change. I allow myself a tiny sigh of relief. (11)

Apparently Dad was always one of the shortest kids in class until, in the space of less than a year, he had this crazy growth spurt aged fifteen, and shot up to one metre, ninety centimetres pretty much overnight. This is fine if you're a guy. If you're a girl, it's a disaster. (133-34)

David is especially annoyed at his male genitals; he even nourishes hatred against his phallus:

I move downwards to my penis, which I hate with a passion. I hate everything about it: its size, its colour, the way I can always feel it just *hanging* there, the way it has a complete mind of its own. I discover it has grown an entire two millimetres since last week. I check it twice, but the tape measure doesn't lie. I frown and write it down. [...]. (11)

As has been pointed out in section 3.2.1, according to the DSM-5 a diagnosis of *Gender Dysphoria* entails “[...] A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics [...]” (APA 452, qtd. in Vitelli 69). Still, it is not intrinsically the penis as anatomical part of the body by which David feels repulsed, but rather its significance as a cultural genital that constrains him to the male gender¹⁴. Through his online research, he not only learns more particular techniques and procedures of sex-reassignment but he also realizes the arbitrariness inherent to the assumption of only two sexes:

[...] I'm lying on my bed watching YouTube videos on my laptop. The one I'm watching right now is about a boy who lives in America. He has a gravelly voice and stubble on his chin and you'd never guess in a million years that he used to be a girl until he pulls up his T-shirt and shows you something called a chest binder that looks like a thick white crop top and flattens down his breasts. He's waiting to have chest surgery when he turns eighteen. It's frustrating to think that beneath the binder he has exactly what I want, and that all the things I hate about my body, he'd swap in a heartbeat. If only we could. (Williamson 158)

However, already at fourteen, some physical male features imply a calamity for David. With regard to clothing, for instance, the adolescent struggles in finding female shoes in his size. Even though Leo also wears an untypically small shoe size for a male, David's large feet, which seem odd for a girl, are more difficult to hide:

'My sister's got some [Ugg boots],' Leo says after a moment, [...].
'They're the only things I could get that fit,' I admit.
'What size are you?' Leo asks.
'Nine,' I sigh, 'and growing. You?'
'Six,' Leo replies in a low voice.
'Swap?' (258)

The thorough documentation of physical changes in his scrapbook, hence, additionally symbolizes the urgency of his disclosing his gender identity to his parents since after puberty changes of height and bone structure are irrevocable. However, the psychological female is reluctant to address the topic openly and rather tries to suggest it subliminally to his parents. David, for instance, carefully watches his father read the newspaper when it features an article on a transsexual teenager in America (56).

¹⁴ See Kessler and McKenna in part A section 1.3

Simultaneously, when David's little sister Livvy first begins to menstruate, he becomes increasingly frustrated since in Western societies, menstruation is a symbolic initiation ritual from girl to woman. David is aggrieved since he will always be denied such experiences reserved for biologically female individuals:

I shut my bedroom door and sit down on the edge of the bed, wondering how many more moments like this I am going to have to witness; private, female moments from which older brothers are automatically excluded. [...] That night I can't sleep. All I can think about is how I'll never experience what Livvy's experiencing tonight. It's a biological impossibility so unfair it makes my entire body throb. (160)

2.3.2 Cross-dressing and real-life experience

In order to compensate for not being able to display his true gender identity openly, David enjoys dressing up as a girl whenever possible, e.g. when his family is out of the house. For these rare occasions, David disposes of female clothes provided by Essie as well as different wigs and make-up products. For the transsexual teenager, the metamorphosis from David to Kate, i.e. the name he chooses for his true identity (273), equates to a ritual which he cherishes with his entire senses:

Tonight I select a dress that belonged to Essie's mother when she was going through her hippie stage back in the mid-nineties, [...]. I take off my boy clothes, discarding them in a pile on the floor, before slipping it on over my head. I lift up the skirt to my nose and inhale deeply. It still smells of incense, sort of warm, like gingerbread, mixed with stale perfume and sea salt. (138-39)

Nevertheless, rather than performing an act, David prefers doing ordinary tasks and habits on such occasions: "I don't have that many chances to dress up undisturbed at home and when I do it's the normal everyday stuff I like doing best – loading the dishwasher, making toast, watching TV" (140). Within his accustomed environment, however, he still hesitates to encounter, e.g., the pizza deliverer: "For a moment I consider answering the door as I am, as a girl. The thought fills me with excitement and fear" (139-40).

The trip to Tipton-on-Sea with Leo constitutes the ideal opportunity to gather 'real-life experience' as a girl since the chance to encounter acquaintances is rather low. Furthermore, David knows that such proof of being able to accomplish everyday life in the desired gender, is regularly a requirement for implementing sex reassignment procedures:

[Leo:] 'What the hell have you got in [the backpack]? A dead body?' [...]
[David:] 'It's girl stuff,' I whisper.

'Girl stuff?' he repeats, [...].

'You don't mind, do you? It's just that I thought this might be an ideal opportunity, seeing as there's pretty much zero chance of me bumping into anyone I know.'

'Opportunity for what exactly?'

'Some real-life experience,' I say.

I've been reading all about 'real-life experience' on the internet. Sometimes the specialist doctors won't let you start taking medication until you can prove you're able to live in the world in your chosen gender. (252)

Leo's brusque reaction is due to his fear of overly attracting attention on their trip to his father. He expects David to dress up as a drag queen and hence, displays a biased attitude towards his transsexual friend despite being transsexual himself. However, Leo is surprised at how natural and comfortable David seems as Kate:

I can't help but get a shock every time I look at him. Not that he looks bad, because he doesn't, but it's hard to get my head round him being here, dressed like, well, like that. But the weirdest thing is that it's not actually that weird, because the clothes he's wearing suit him, way better than anything else I've seen him wear. He seems less awkward in them, less self-conscious about what his body is doing. I even start to feel a bit guilty about continuing to think of him as a 'he' at all. (262)

Due to Leo's reserved manner, he initially fails to convey positive approval to David, who is disappointed at Leo's odd reaction to his female self:

As he speaks his eye-line hovers somewhere above my eyebrows, as if he can't quite bring himself to look straight at me. I guess I didn't give him much warning about coming dressed in girl's clothes, but I still can't help but feel a little disappointed by his reaction. (256)

Eventually, David's self-confidence is affirmed when meeting strangers. Even though their reactions are grounded on heteronormative assumptions of femininity, David finally feels acknowledged as a female: "'No problem, love,' he smiles, [...]. *Love*. That man, a complete stranger, called me 'Love'" (255). He gradually *passes* as a girl and successfully employs female habits and behavior he has studied over the years. Leo even implicitly encourages him to exploit the conventions of *performativity*¹⁵:

[Leo:] 'You've got a better chance of getting served.'

[David:] 'How come?'

[Leo:] 'Everyone knows it's easier to get served if you're a girl.'

A massive beaming grin spreads across David's face.

[Leo:] 'What? Why are you smiling?'

'You just called me a girl,' [David] says, his cheeks all pink and pleased. (269)

David, however, is more concerned with his friend ultimately acknowledging his femininity and eventually asks:

¹⁵ See part A section 1.4.2

[David:] '[...] Do I, you know, pass?'

'Pass?' I [Leo] ask.

[David:] 'You know what I mean! As in, do I pass as female?'

[Leo:] '[...] 'What I mean is, it's hard because I know you as a boy. But I reckon if I was a stranger and saw you on the street, I would assume you were a girl.' (271)

Leo's approval is paramount for encouraging David to disclose his gender identity to his parents. Even though the recognition of strangers is beneficial for acquiring positive self-esteem, David needs to be assured that people close to him would accept him with a different gender.

2.3.3 Fear of isolation

David is on the verge of puberty, which not only entails bodily alterations but also societal changes. For his peers, romantic relationships have already become reality and David's best friends Essie and Felix being romantically involved, eventually spend more time as a couple rather than in three with David. He realizes that his current state impedes him from attracting another person. On the one hand, since society is more accustomed to accepting homosexuality than non-normative gender identities, the majority of people anticipate David to be homosexual due to his feminine behavior and interests. David is aware that his parents as well as Leo assume him to be gay: "But she and Dad have got the signals all wrong, just like Leo got it wrong in the canteen the other day. Because I'm not gay. I'm just a straight girl stuck in a boy's body" (136). On the other hand, without transitioning, David supposes he would hardly attract somebody whom he desires. In fact, he has admired his schoolmate Zachary Olsen since Primary School ("And there he is. Zachary Olsen. Otherwise known as the love of my life" (33)). Zachary is highly popular and therefore, seems always to have girlfriends. On their trip to Tipton-on-Sea, Leo and David talk about the secret admiration for Zachary and David contends:

'Do you really think someone as popular and amazing as Zachary would fancy someone like me? That's what's so frustrating sometimes. Being like this. It shuts down all these possibilities.' [...]

'It has already. God, I long to be normal sometimes, and to be able to do normal teenage stuff.' (275-76)

David strives for 'normality' since his deviating from the norm denies him not only felicity in terms of romance but also impedes him from accommodating to the heteronormative order. As has been pointed out in chapter 2.4.2, adhering to heteronormative conduct is highly valuable for transsexual individuals since they seek to be accepted as their desired gender and hence, need to comply with conventions of *doing gender* and *per-*

*formativity*¹⁶ (Schilt and Westbrook 440–60). Since Leo generally prefers being on his own unregarded by others, he does not understand David's urge:

'But normal is such a stupid word,' I say, anger suddenly rising in my belly. 'What does it even mean?'

'It means fitting in,' David replies simply.

'And that's what you really want? To fit in?'

'Not all the time perhaps. But a lot of the time, yes, I think it would be a lot easier to just blend into the crowd. [...]' (276)

David grows increasingly aware of his loneliness, which induces feelings of dismal. Although he consoles himself with cross-dressing, he realizes that these occasions are a mere attempt at self-deception:

Usually I enjoy catching sight of my reflection in the toaster or kettle, feeling the swish of material around my legs, but tonight, for some reason I feel flat. [...] Tonight I feel strange, like everything is off-kilter, like I'm a big fat fraud. [...]

What's wrong with you? I ask myself angrily. Then it hits me, I'm lonely. I'm so lonely it physically hurts. The realization makes me feel even worse. Like I've been tricking myself into putting on a brave face this entire time. (140-41)

As already mentioned, his despair aggravates even further, when Livvy begins to menstruate while he is trapped in an unwelcome manifestation of a body: "'[...]. I'm a disgusting mutant who is only going to get more disgusting and more mutant-like. Did you know I'm a size nine shoe now?'" (161).

2.3.4 Family

David's family considerably contributes to his finally acknowledging and disclosing his female gender identity even though his little sister Livvy initially seems to regard him with contempt: "I don't want people to know we're related" (23). Their parents however, are willing to offer David support in finding his identity, albeit assuming him to be homosexual. David is conscious of their erroneous assumption and hence, is reluctant to confide in them. His mother, for instance, attempts to elicit his secret on a shopping spree:

'Everything is all right at the moment, isn't it darling?' she asks slowly.

[...] 'You would tell me, wouldn't you, if something wasn't OK, or if there was something you wanted to get off your chest. Because your dad and I would understand, you know.'

I swallow. Because here it is; my opportunity to come out with it. Six little words: I. Want. To. Be. A. Girl. But they don't come out. [...] Because the thing Mum is trying to get me to tell her isn't what she's been preparing herself for. Because Mum is expecting me to tell her I am gay. (136)

¹⁶ See part A sections 1.4.2 and 1.4.3

The young transsexual lacks courage to tell his parents about his gender identity in spite of knowing his reason to be principally unfounded. David realizes his fortunate position of having parents who offer support without having to demand it not until the friends David and Leo meet Jimmy Denton, Leo's unsupportive father (300). Having met Mrs. Piper and having listened to stories about Mr. Piper, Leo does not understand David's reservation with regard to gender identity disclosure:

'Why are you so scared of telling them if they're so cool?' Leo asks, [...].

[David:] 'Because I'm pretty sure they have no idea this is coming. It's going to knock them sideways and I have no idea how they're going to react. I mean, they're hardly going to be letting off party poppers and unfurling banners, are they?'

[Leo:] 'They'll be OK, I know it. Even if they're shocked at first. they'll come round eventually, I bet.' (301)

David decides to divulge the secret of his transsexuality as soon as he comes home from the trip to Tipton-on-Sea. Still lacking courage to phrase his thoughts openly, he wordlessly presents his parents with the disclosure letter as well as his secret scrapbook: "I don't say anything. I simply walk over, put my scrapbook down on the table, and walk out again, shutting the kitchen door behind me. I go upstairs, curl up on my bed and wait" (314).

After they have studied the journal, David's parents assure him support carefully phrasing their thoughts so as not to convey an image of disapproval rather than genuine surprise:

'David,' [Dad] says, 'before we say anything more, we want you to know one important thing. And that's that your mum and I love you very much. We always have and we always will. But we also need a bit of time to digest this, OK?' [...]

'Now, are you certain this is what you want, David?' Mum asks, edging forward. 'You're not confused?'

'No, I'm sure, Mum. I've been sure for ages now.' [...]

'Why didn't you tell us earlier?' [Mum] says, [...].

[...] 'I was scared I think. I was worried you would disown me or something.'

Mum starts crying properly then. (314-15)

Afterwards, the three of them take various hours on that Sunday afternoon for discussing the issue of David's gender and possibilities to resolve his misery. Although their talk is rather sentimental, the reaction of his parents gives David the assurance not only of their being aware of prospective implications for their own lives but also signals their willingness to realize their child's desire:

'I'm sorry,' [...] 'For not being normal. I know it would be easier for everyone if I was.' [...]

'I'm not going to lie to you,' [Mum] says. 'Of course I'd prefer it if things were more straightforward. I love you and I don't want to have to see you have a hard time unnecessarily. And the road ahead, if this is what you really want to do ...'
 'It is,' I say firmly.
 'Well then, the road ahead is going to be tough. It's going to be long and painful and frustrating and you're going to encounter people who don't understand it. I'm not even sure I understand it right now.'
 [...] 'What I'm trying to articulate, David,' she says, 'is that we love you and we're going to support you.'
 'Besides,' Dad says, 'who wants to be normal anyway? [...]' (317)

2.3.5 Dawn of a new era

After the disclosure to his parents, David gradually initiates his transformation to become female. Essie, Felix and Leo arrange an alternative to the school Christmas ball in the old Cloverdale swimming pool for giving David the opportunity to attend such an event as a girl. With the help of David's mother, he dresses up and is exceedingly content with the result of his transformation: "[...] I want this moment to last a few seconds longer. Just me and the mirror. And me finally liking what I see in the reflection, even if it also makes me feel like I might faint or vomit or both at any second" (329).

The friends are surprised at the number of students accepting the opportunity to attend the alternative ball: "There are a couple of girls from my textiles class, some emo kids from Year 11, a lesbian couple from Year 9 holding hands, a large group of goths, from Year 7 kids up to sixth formers" (334). David's description of these people indicates that the majority of attendants do not conform to society's conventions. His schoolmates scrutinize him critically and after some time, he is insulted on the dance floor. His friends, however, verbally intervene and comfort him by reassuring their support and friendship (338-39). Leo further elaborates on the necessity of accepting others' initial intolerance in order for society to accustom to the new circumstances eventually:

[David:] 'Is it always going to be like this?'
 [Leo:] 'For a while, yeah. But it'll get better, I promise, it already has for me. And this comes from someone with a bit of experience'. (339)

Ultimately, David is approached by a diffident schoolmate who clumsily expresses his admiration for the transsexual's bravery to acknowledge his true gender openly: "'Look, I, er, just wanted to say, I think you've got proper balls.' [...]' 'Oh my God, sorry, bad choice of words,' he stammers. 'What I mean is, I think you're really, really brave.'" (339-40). This account is a symbol for David to become an inspiring example for others. He realizes acknowledging the personal identity is essential to achieve content even if this

entails various obstacles, such as negative social regard. Such obstacles, however, can be overcome with the help of family and friends.

2.4 Identity Development Leo

As pointed out previously, Leo Denton has already initiated the transitioning process from female to male taking hormone suppressors that inhibit puberty at that moment. The following year he would further proceed with hormonal injections (201). Already in early infancy, Leo displayed behavior that is more masculine and insisted on him being male:

It was just always the way I was, from birth, practically. [Mam] was all dismissive at first, when I kept telling her they'd made some big mistake at the hospital. She would tell me to shut up and stuff, but eventually she must have got sick of me begging because she took me to the doctor. And when they took it seriously, and referred me to a specialist, she started taking it seriously too. (212)

Hence, unlike David's development in the novel to ultimately finding the courage to disclose his female gender identity, Leo's quest for identity is more distinguished by a necessity to resolve inner conflicts regarding his family and trust issues that are due to the absence of the father and the violence he experienced in his former school.

2.4.1 Trust issues

The problematic social situation in Leo's environment as well as the assault he endured by his former schoolmates contributes to the teenager's reluctance to engage with other students at his new school. He attempts not to befriend other students so as not to arouse attention and become the target of harassment again. However, already on the first day at Eden Park, he meets Alicia Baker, to whom he feels immediately drawn to. Still, his instincts admonish him to be cautious since before the harassment incident, a girl who he was attracted to, ambushed him. Nevertheless, Leo struggles to remain distant from Alicia: "I'm not here to meet girls. Girls let you down. They trick you, manipulate you. Girls can't be trusted. Fact. But at the same time I can't ignore this strange feeling in my belly, [...]" (41). Eventually, Leo and Alicia fall in love and he feels unprecedentedly happy:

Alicia likes me. As in, *really* likes me. My entire body is buzzing. I feel epic, alive, like all my nerve endings are on fire. The little voice tries to interrupt, to remind me about how huge this is, how dangerous, of all the things that could go wrong. But for tonight I'm gonna ignore it, drown it out with thoughts of Alicia. (157)

Leo becomes romantically involved despite his secret transsexuality yet is not prepared to confess his biological sex to Alicia. Therefore, he avoids becoming physically intimate by rejecting her attempts:

‘You’re proper ripped, Leo, you’ve got like a full-on six pack!’ she whispers, excitement in her breath, her hands warm against my stomach. [...] I try to enjoy her reaction, but I can’t ignore the familiar anxiety building in my belly. I try to block it out but the anxiety pushes through, like a sprinter accelerating to win the race, and my entire body tenses up. I pull away. (155)

Gradually, Alicia becomes annoyed at Leo constantly rejecting her since she interprets his action as aversion to her, which complicates his conflicted feelings. On the one hand, he feels deeply attracted to her and hence, wants to take their relationship to the next level. On the other hand, he is afraid that Alicia would abandon him if he disclosed his transsexual identity to her:

‘Then what is it? Because every time I touch you, you go totally weird. You claim you fancy me loads, but every time things get heavy, you push me away.’
‘I do fancy you. Shit, Alicia, I think I might even love you.’
‘And I think I might love you too. So what’s the problem?’
The enormity of what she’s just said makes my head hurt. I love Alicia. Alicia loves me. I should be walking on air right now. But I’m not. Because I know I’m on the edge of wrecking everything. (177)

Alicia’s reassuring her love encourages Leo to disclose his secret to her: “‘Ok, the reason I’ve been acting so weird is because I’m not who you think I am.’ [...] ‘I wasn’t born Leo,’ [...] ‘I was born a girl.’ I keep my eyes closed as Alicia’s hand shoots from mine” (179). Leo is hurt by being rejected on the basis of his transsexuality and believes that Alicia’s disgust for him would induce her to reveal his secret. Therefore, he refuses to attend Eden Park School further.

2.4.2 Revelation of Leo’s gender identity

The tragic events Leo experienced in his past still plague him considerably when he remembers brief excerpts of the day in February. Initially, the harmful event is only inconclusively broached leaving the reader ignorant: “My eyes fall shut and all of a sudden I’m back in the woods, the cold on my body, tears pouring down my face, puke in my mouth. I open my eyes. My breathing is fast and raggedy” (94-95). The transsexual teenager attempts to repress memories, which constitutes a form of self-protection. However, Amber continually urges her brother to socialize with his new schoolmates in order not to despair of loneliness. Yet, Leo insists on his not conforming to normative assumptions of teenagers for reasoning the futility of such an attempt:

'Why is everyone so bloody obsessed with me making friends?'

'Because. It's normal,' Amber says.

I look up at her. 'Normal? And since when have I been normal, Amber?'

Because 'normal' kids don't have six files' worth of notes on them. 'Normal' kids don't see therapists. 'Normal' kids don't have mothers like mine, who tell you life isn't fair with messed-up glee, like the unfairness of life is pretty much the only thing they know for sure. I've spent my whole life being told I'm the complete opposite of 'normal'. (93-94)

Nevertheless, Leo does not manage to remain unregarded and he immediately intrigues the fellow students' interests. On the first day of school, speculations on his persona are prompted by rumors according to which "[...] he went mental in a DT lesson [in Cloverdale] and chopped off the teacher's index finger with a junior hacksaw" (28-29). Leo himself intensifies these assumptions coming to David's rescue when he is publicly harassed during lunchbreak (68). Additionally, the image of his emotional instability ("'Psycho!' [Harry's] little blonde girlfriend spits" (122)) is further maintained as he is sighted at an appointment at his psychotherapist's:

'But isn't he meant to be insane or psychotic or something?' the redhead points out. 'Clare Boulter reckons she saw him coming out of the Sunrise Centre last week.'

The Sunrise Centre is on the outskirts of the city centre. It's for teenagers with mental health issues.

[...] 'Plus he's kind of short, don't you think?' (128)

The last phrase indicates that his fellow students have gradually become aware of Leo's untypical physical features for a male. The conversation above also triggers David's curiosity, whose online research on Leo only yielded results about a girl from Cloverdale named Megan: "I google his name but the closest I can find is a load of stuff about some Cloverdale girl called Megan Denton who won a load of swimming trophies once" (129). Yet, not until David finds his friend at the Cloverdale Pool, does he realize why he was not able to find information on Leo. Fortunately, Leo learns from David that his former girlfriend did not reveal his secret:

[David:] 'Is it something to do with Alicia Baker?'

He turns sharply to face me.

[Leo:] 'Why? What's she said?'

[David:] 'Nothing really. Ruby Webber and Becky Somerville were doing all the talking for her.'

[Leo:] 'And what did they say?' he demands.

[David:] 'They didn't say much either,' I admit. 'They reckon Alicia's too heartbroken to tell them what happened.' (192-93)

Leo is relieved that Alicia has not told the secret as is further ascertained by David explicitly asking her if she intends to conceal it, although Leo perceives her promise proof of her embarrassment:

[David:] 'When I asked her, she said she hadn't told anyone and had no plans to.' [...]
'It's because she's ashamed,' I say flatly. 'That's the only reason she's gonna keep it secret.' (219)

Encouraged by David, Leo returns to school the following day unaware that "Becky Somerville tracked down a kid from Cloverdale School on Facebook,' Essie says. '[...], and they told Becky exactly why Leo left.' (225). Being on an excursion, Leo realizes he is the center of interest perceiving whispers of his natal name 'Megan' as well as insults such as 'Freak' and 'Tranny':

The delivery drips with venom and even though I don't know for certain, I'm pretty damn sure it's directed at me. I try to remain calm and fight the urge to turn round, find out who the voice belongs to and make them pay for it. [...]
All the time panic is rising inside me. Because all this can only mean one thing – Alicia told and my secret is out. (230)

In a panic reaction, Leo leaves the school trip earlier. At home, his mother is waiting for him since she has been informed about his unexcused leaving. Finally, their argument results in Leo's mother slapping her son:

There's a beat before I burst into tears.
I think they shock me more than they do Mam. I'm not a crier, even as a kid I hardly ever cried. I'd get angry, scream, throw stuff, but I wouldn't cry. And these days I'm Leo Denton, master of the poker face. But right now I'm powerless to stop the tears from flowing and all I can do is stand there as they rock my body. (236)

Eventually, Leo is not able to maintain the pretense of his inner strength and he collapses under the burden of the events in his past, his father's absence, as well as the current revelation of his transsexuality in school. He decides to run away. Searching for money in his mother's bedroom, he finds his birth certificate indicating his father's real name. This novel information induces him to locate Jimmy (238).

2.4.3 Absent father and family

Leo's family belongs to a lower social class. During his childhood, his mother was not able to care for her children adequately, which entailed not only a scarcity of toys but also of food. The relationship between Leo and his mother, Samantha Binley, is distanced since he attributes all responsibility for the unpleasant course of his young life to

his mother. She moreover fails to express her benevolence for her son and even belittles his opportunity of being successful educationally: “‘Just don’t go getting ideas above your station,’ Mam says. ‘Just because you’re wearing a fancy blazer it don’t mean you’re above us.’” (37). Furthermore, Leo blames his mother for having motivated his father to abandon his family with her inappropriate behavior. In fact, Leo excessively idealizes his unknown father and is convinced of having early memories of him:

My first memory is of my dad changing my nappy. Amber reckons you can’t remember stuff that far back, but she’s wrong. In the memory I’m lying on the living room floor and the telly is on behind Dad’s shoulder, and he’s singing. It’s not a proper song, just something made up and silly. He has a nice voice. It’s only a short memory, just a few seconds, but it’s as real as anything. (18)

Eventually, Leo learns that his father’s nickname ‘Jimmy’ stands for ‘Jonathan’ rather than ‘James’ and he manages to locate him in Tipton-on-Sea. He expects to initiate a new life with his father and forget his past problems. However, Jimmy, who has a new family with an expecting wife and an infant son, pretends to be ignorant about his paternity and sends Leo away. The father displays rude behavior offending Leo and David: “[...] You two little freaks are going to walk out this door and never come back. Got me?” [...] Freaks. He practically spits the word” (289). The disappointment of meeting his father, allows Leo to realize that the idealized image might not have been true, which is later confirmed by his aunt Kerry, who recounts that his father left the family before the twins’ birth. The man in his memories was Kerry’s boyfriend at that time (310-11).

Furthermore, during Leo’s absence, his family is overly worried about him since he did not inform anybody about the trip. When he comes home, his mother and sister, as well as Spike, Samantha’s life partner, are out in order to find him. Leo eventually realizes that his mother, in fact, deeply cares for him, but fails to act accordingly due to her own unresolved inner conflicts induced by having been abandoned (311-12).

2.5 Friendship against all odds

As has already been pointed out, David is immediately strangely fascinated by Leo and seeks to establish contact with him, which initially irritates Leo, who longs for remaining unregarded. During detention, which both teenagers have to attend after the harassment incident with Harry Beaumont, the teenagers commence associating with each other.

Leo’s absence from school after his disclosure to Alicia worries David and he decides to see him in Cloverdale. Again, Leo is annoyed at his friend’s attempt to discuss his prob-

lems and urges him to leave. David, however, instinctively feels a necessity to support Leo morally:

'You hardly know me, David,' [Leo] says.
But he's wrong. I do know him. And I want to know him more. I have no idea why. I only know that I'm drawn to him in ways I can't quite explain, and that I can't shift the sneaking suspicion that beneath it all, he gets me, that he's drawn to me too. (194)

Surprisingly, David realizes a sudden compulsion to disclose his gender identity to Leo even though he does not anticipate his counterpart to be transsexual, too.

'Leo,' [...] 'If I tell you something, a secret, something only Essie and Felix know about me, do you promise not to tell anyone?' [...]
'No. This is something I *want* to tell you. You don't have to tell me anything in return, honestly.' And I mean it. Suddenly I want him to know. I want to open myself up to him, be vulnerable, with no expectations. [...] (194-95)

After David's account of him having always desired to become a girl, Leo expresses the mutuality of their situations by revealing his chest binder:

[Leo:] 'What I mean is, I get it.'
[David:] 'That's kind, but you don't get it, Leo, you can't.'
[...] But then I realise, [...] he's taking off his hoodie.
[...] Instead of skin, his chest is covered by what might look to anyone else like a tight white crop top. But not to me. I know exactly what Leo is wearing. And Leo knows I know. And it's like the jigsawpuzzle pieces that have been floating around in my head for the last couple of months have suddenly slotted together to form a picture. (198-99)

Especially David is relieved to have finally found someone who truly understands his perceiving his gender identity in discordance with the sex assigned at birth. Moreover, he has the opportunity to learn more about treatment of transsexuality, coping strategies as well as prospective implications of transitioning to the desired gender, and hence, encourages Leo to share his knowledge. The usually taciturn teenager suddenly decides to tell David about the incident at Cloverdale:

And I don't quite know whether it's because I've said so much already I figure I've got nothing to lose, or because the clouds have moved across the moon, plunging the baths into darkness, or what. But for some reason, I start to speak. (204)

On their trip to Tipton-on-Sea, the transsexual teenagers further bond with each other. The reciprocal support exceedingly helps Leo overcome the trauma he suffered in Cloverdale even though he is still reluctant to admit it verbally and diverts the topic:

[Leo:] [...] 'My therapist always goes on at me to go to support groups and stuff, but it's not my bag.' [...] 'I'm stuck in this body, for now anyway, so what's moaning about it to a roomful of people going to do to help? Nothing.'

'Don't you find [talking to me] helps though?' David asks. (272)

Going out with David, Leo is gradually able to unclench and enjoy the evening having fun and drinking alcohol. David reminds him of those feelings after the disappointing encounter with Jimmy: "You were having fun, Leo. It was a really good night. Actually, scratch that, it was a great night, it was one of the best I've ever had." (285). In fact, considering Leo's usual demeanor and mood, his rather fast regaining composure is attributable to the constant support David provides. The genuine encouragement allows Leo to cope with his past and look forward to the future: "I think you're the bravest person I've ever met, you know,' I say. [...] 'And your dad is mad for not wanting to know you, bonkers. Cos you're amazing.' [...] 'He isn't half the man you already are'" (299). Moreover, their embracing each other before returning home signifies their intense bond: "I turn to go and David grabs hold of my hand and pulls me into a hug. I find myself returning it" (304).

2.5.1 Résumé

Finally, it is worth considering the abandoned swimming pool as a metaphor for both David's and Leo's development and friendship. The bath represents a sanctuary for Leo that he seeks to calm down by reminiscing about happy times in his childhood since he was successful at swimming competitively. As the bath is dark and cold and symbolizes the current state of his life (51). In order to arrive at the pool, David has to walk an arduous path (189). This further signifies both David's struggle to inspire confidence in Leo, who withdraws from social contact and the difficulties David will face in the process of openly acknowledging his female gender identity. Ultimately, Essie, Felix and Leo transform the abandoned, dark pool into a location full of hope for the alternative ball: a place that embraces various identities and allows for fully expressing one's personality. It indicates the prosperous opportunities of David's prospective path of becoming female. For Leo, however, the transformation is a resolution of his inner conflicts and coming to terms with his proper identity. Leo tells David that the bath will be taken down, which he accepts calmly for he is also ready to come to terms with the past and approach to new directions:

'Is it weird?' I [*David*] ask after a few seconds. 'Having your special place invaded like this?'

I can hardly believe this is the same space Leo and I spent that freezing cold evening, sitting on what is now a dance floor teeming with kids.

'A bit,' Leo admits. 'Not that it's going to be mine for much longer. They're bulldozing it in the New Year.' (341)

Generally, both David's and Leo's quests for identity are classifiable within the post-structuralist approach. David still struggles to conform to normative assumptions by pretending to be male. Leo has already fully acknowledged his variant gender but is still deeply psychologically conflicted due to negative experiences in his past. Especially David succeeds in overcoming the urge to behave in discordance with his perceived gender identity and hence becomes active agent of disrupting common assumptions of gender identity. Leo's temper is substantially characterized by his having been reared under complex circumstances and the negative experience of violence and assault. Eventually, he accepts support by his friends and family. Thus, with which he is able to overcome his past.

2.6 Societal attitudes towards transsexuality

2.6.1 Heteronormativity

Instances of heteronormativity as power regulating social conduct are highly perceptible throughout *The Art of Being Normal*. Particularly accounts from David's perspective reveal the mechanisms of *doing gender*¹⁷ as well as Butler's concept of *performativity* for he has not publicly disclosed his female gender identity, he has to be exceedingly attentive not to transgress social rules. As described in chapter 2.3.2, David enjoys wearing clothes associated with the female gender when he is alone. However, in case he is sighted in female clothes, he is able to provide reasonably plausible explanations, as for instance when his mother catches him in her nightgown:

[Mum:] 'David are you wearing my nightie?' [...]
 'I thought it might keep me cool,' I [David] say quickly. 'You know, like those long white dress things Arab men wear.'
 [...] I keep the nightie on for dinner, figuring it'll be less suspicious that way.
 'You look like such a weirdo,' Livvy says, her eyes narrowing with vague disgust.
 (8)

Although David's family is genuinely supportive and accepts his general preference for female leisure interests, such as in the series *Gossip Girl* (5) or the television show *America's Next Top Model* (6), David has to renounce certain desires to some extent in order not to raise suspicion: "My bedroom is my sanctuary. Last year, for my thirteenth birthday, Mum and Dad let me paint it any colour I liked. The shade I really wanted was a gorgeous hot pink, but I was too afraid to ask for it" (56). As can be deduced from his 'being afraid to ask for it', David is more concerned with his parents' regard for socially

¹⁷ See part A sections 1.4.3 and 1.4.2

anticipated norms regarding gendered objects. He has already established and acknowledged his self-perceived gender identity but refuses to reveal it in order to satisfy societal expectations.

However, for David *doing gender* is also dictated on an institutional level since despite his willingness to display femininity by growing his hair over summer, he has to conform to arbitrary conventions for male students: “But school rules dictate boys’ hair can be no longer than collar length, so last week Mum took me to the hairdresser’s” (9). The transsexual teenager unconsciously acknowledges certain heteronormative conventions even if he is unobserved, as for instance at the abandoned pool in Cloverdale: “I come to the changing rooms – ladies on the left, gents on the right. Out of habit I go into the gents, figuring this will lead me to the pool, and hopefully to Leo” (189).

Regularly, David reflects on the arbitrariness of gendered conventions, which are grounded on biological features, for instance, observing babies that are dressed in colors typically associated with their respective sex:

I inspect the babies. The girl is asleep. She is all in pink. The boy is awake and chewing on a soggy rice cake. He wears denim dungarees with a tractor embroidered on the pocket and his fee fist clutching a toy car. He eyes me wearily. I bet already his parents assume he’s going to be a typical boy; that his favourite colour will be blue or black or red, that he’ll play football and like cars and trucks, that one day he’ll get married and have babies. And even if he’s not typical, even if he likes ballet or baking cakes or kissing boys instead of girls, they’ll still imagine that their little boy will grow up to be a man. Because why wouldn’t you? (134)

The final rhetorical question indicates David’s cynicism concerning the ‘naturalness’ with which society assumes a natural relation between biological sex and cultural gender that impedes individuals such as him to develop and express their preferences unconditionally.

2.6.2 Violence against transsexuals

Transsexual teenagers regularly experience social stigmatization and marginalization at school. As pertains to David, who due to his more feminine behavior, is perceived odd and hence is target of constant harassment. As outlined in chapter 4.4, transgender individuals are particularly at risk of sustaining permanent psychological damage due to discrimination whether on an individual, institutional or socio-cultural level. A supportive peer group, however, can contribute greatly to preventing the individual affected from despair (Higa et al. 676). Essie and Felix provide this support to David, they themselves not conforming to the societal order: “Essie, Felix and I don’t fit into any particu-

lar group. Essie reckons this is a good thing. It was Essie who came up with our name – the Non-Conformists (or the NCs for short), not that anyone ever calls us that” (Williamson 29). In constituting their group as ‘Non-Conformists’, the friends seize their unpopularity and attribute a positive connotation to it, albeit solely for themselves. Generally, LGBTIQ individuals regularly employ invectives and create of distinctive groups as a coping strategy, and to develop disregard for negative social opinions (Higa et al. 680).

Unfortunately, the school Leo and David attend does not provide for measures for clarifying issues such as implications of perceiving psychological gender and biological sex in discordance. Therefore, their schoolmates misconstrue Leo’s identity and blame him for having practiced deceit:

‘So, Alicia?’ [...] ‘How was it batting for the other side?’
[...] ‘She doesn’t bat for the other side, you moron,’ Ruby says angrily. ‘It’s not her fault – Leo, or should I say Megan, totally tricked her.’
[...] ‘Alicia is the victim here.’ (231)

Moreover, they fail to distinguish the concepts of sexual and gender identity since the peers immediately assume Alicia to have had a homosexual experience with Leo.

Still, even though the fellow students initially react scornfully to Leo’s involuntary disclosure, they rather rapidly accustom themselves to the novelty and again disregard the FTM teenager, as is indicated in Leo’s account of his returning to school:

The moment I step through the school gates, kids are staring at me, their mouths hanging open like goldfish.
[...]
On Wednesday I eat lunch with David, Essie and Felix in the canteen. Harry comes over to our table and calls us ‘the mutant, the geek, and the two super freaks’ and asks us whether we’ve thought about opening our own travelling carnival.
[...]
On Thursday Becky keeps calling me Megan during form room.
[...]
On Friday I make it down the corridor without anyone saying anything nasty. It’s only a small triumph but one I’m prepared to take. (319-20)

This fast development shows society’s faculty to adjust to uncommon manifestations of gender and overcome the initial shock of learning about deviations from the norm, to which they react with scorn.

2.6.3 Harassment

His fellow student Harry Beaumont, whom he has known since kindergarten, constantly harasses David on grounds of his not conforming to the perceptions of the common fourteen-year-old male teenager. Harry verbally insults the transsexual adolescent with de-

faming expressions such as 'Freak Show', or refers to Livvy for expressing his astonishment of their relation further degrading David: "'Was that your little sister I saw you arrive with this morning?' he asks. [...] 'It's just that she looked, well, almost normal.'" (26). However, Harry not only deploys verbal offenses but also applies physical strategies for humiliating his peer, as, for instance, spitting:

Bam! The spitball strikes me hard on the back of my neck. I twist round in my seat. Harry is pretending to tie his shoelaces. [...]
'Hey, Freak Show!' he calls.
I pretend not to hear him.
'Aw, c'mon, Freak Show,' he says, coaxingly. 'That's not very polite is it? I'm making an effort to have a nice conversation with you and you've got your back turned to me.' (26)

Usually, David tries to cope with such insults by ignoring them, since he hopes that his bully will eventually grow weary of tormenting him: "'I know it sounds really pathetic, but it's honestly just easier to try and ignore Harry. You never know, he might get bored eventually. [...]"' (86). However, when he responds to his public humiliation in the dining hall ("'Easy,' Lexi replies. 'I'd snog Mr. Stacey, cos at least you'd know he'd be into it, I'd marry Mr Wilton, cos he might die soon and I'd get all his money in the will, and I'd throw Freak Show off the cliff.'" (63)), the situation escalates. He calls Harry's girlfriend Lexi 'Bubble Brain', which further enrages the bully. He urges David to apologize to her by whispering in his ear. David, then unintentionally injures Harry with a reflex movement: "I jerk my shoulder upwards, the bone connecting with Harry's jaw with a loud crack. I spin round. Harry has both hands clasped over his mouth, his eyes bulging with shock" (64). Thereafter, the dispute becomes more physical and David loses his backpack containing the scrapbook:

He straightens up and pushes me again, harder this time, his eyes flashing angrily. The force of the push sends me flying into the kids behind me. My backpack drops from my shoulder and falls to the floor. I bend down to pick it up, but Tom gets there first, [...].
My inspection notebook is in there. (65)

Intrigued by his victim's entreating to hand back the backpack ("'Give it back, please! I say, urgency creeping in to my voice" (65)), Harry eventually takes a closer look at the content of the notebook:

'Does Freak Show keep a diary? Dear Diary, why am I such a loser?' he recites in a high voice. (66)
He opens the notebook at random. His eyes dart down the page, widening with excitement, like he can't quite believe his luck" (67).

'Pubic hair – coarser, more wiry!' Harry continues to crow. 'Bloody hell, listen to this! Penis length – six and a half centimetres!'. (67)

Being violently held back by Harry's friends, David has to endure the public reading of his most private thoughts and observations until Leo finally intervenes:

The punch shuts us all up.

[...] Harry is on the floor, blood gushing from his nose, his eyes wide with shock. At first I think maybe I've had some kind of out of body experience and I'm the one responsible. [...] Standing over [Harry] is Leo, the kid from Cloverdale School, staring at his fist like it doesn't belong to him. (68)

Fortunately, after the incident David's fellow students do not understand the reason for his recording his physical changes and 'merely' refer to the size of his penis as insult:

It takes me a few seconds to work out they're indicating roughly six and a half centimetres between their thumbs and index fingers. And even though I'm not exactly thrilled by this, I'm mainly just grateful no one has worked out why I was writing all this stuff down in the first place. (82)

The incidents described above all happen in the school's dining hall. Although various older students request Harry to stop his humiliating (e.g., "'Beaumont, don't be such a child,' a Year 11 girl says" (65)), he is able to proceed unimpededly. Furthermore, the lunch break seems to be unsupervised: "I look around for a teacher or dinner lady, but I can't see anything over the heads of the small crowd that circles us" (66). This violation of supervisory duties is exemplary for the institutional inability to cope adequately with not only bullying but also embracing variance in students. Authorities furthermore fail to realize the situation when Leo's gender identity is revealed. Since the change of schools was effected after Leo had been assaulted because of his transsexuality, it is highly likely that the headmaster as well as the teachers were informed about his gender identity. On the school excursion, however, Leo's fellow students are able to insult him on the grounds of his gender identity:

'Tranny.'

[...] 'What did you call me?' I demand, squaring up against her.

'Tranny,' she replies innocently. 'I'm so pleased you answered to it.'

She smiles sweetly as she clocks my clenched fists.

'You're not going to hit a girl are you? Wait, silly me, I'm forgetting it's a fair match. [...].'

[...] Alicia reaches out and pulls Becky back. Becky turns and scowls at her.

'What? She deserves it, after what she did to you,' Becky says, putting extra emphasis on 'she'. 'She's nothing but a dirty lying pervert.' (230-31)

Becky's offenses are based on a stereotypical image of transgender individuals which is closely linked to common stigmata of LGBTIQ people. She is alluding to the common

perception that transsexuals deliberately purport to be a member of the other sex in order to please the proper sexual desire, which is indicated by her calling Leo a 'dirty lying pervert'. According to Onken, stigmatizing social groups and people that represent a variance to the norm allows for justifying their exclusion and degradation since they pose a threat to the social order (16). Especially schools attended by queer individuals therefore need to realize their capacity to induce change and gradually overcome stigmata and prejudices.

2.6.4 Violence and assault

Crucially contributing to the development of Leo's identity is the violent act he had to endure at his former school. Not until Leo recounts the incident to David, does the reader realize the implications of various innuendos throughout the novel. Leo, for instance, regularly reminds himself not to trust girls: "I'm not here to meet girls. Girls let you down. They trick you, manipulate you. Girls can't be trusted" (Williamson 41). His resentment towards women is a reaction to having been allured to the woods by Hannah Brennan, the girlfriend of his violator Alex Bonner. However, the incident is also referred to more directly albeit still implicitly, Leo re-experiencing his feelings and fears at that moment: "My eyes fall shut and all of a sudden I'm back in the woods, the cold on my body, tears pouring down my face, puke in my mouth. I open my eyes. My breathing is fast and raggedy" (94-95).

Furthermore, Hannah's having pretended to take interest in the young transsexual over a longer period, indicates that the violation might have been carefully planned in advance: "*She's been giving me these looks for weeks*" (205). Waiting in the ambush, Leo quickly feels strange and intuitively realizes he has been allured on false pretenses:

I realise my heart is beating crazy-fast. At first I assume it's because I'm nervous about Hannah, but then I realise it's not nerves, it's fear. Because all of a sudden something doesn't feel right. the sound coming towards me is too loud, too heavy to be just one girl.

That's when I start to run.

'She's on the move!' someone yells. (207)

Leo notices a group of more than eight male teenagers is chasing him and when they capture him, the leader Alex Bonner declares:

'If you hadn't turned up today, we'd have left you alone,' he says. 'But you pushed your luck. You thought you could get your dirty tranny paws on my girlfriend, and for that you're going to have to pay.'

'Girlfriend?' I stammer.

'Wait a second, you didn't think Hannah was actually interested in you, did you? Sorry to disappoint you, mate, but she's into real men.' (208)

Again, the harassment of Leo is based on stigmata that constitute intersexuality a threat for the heteronormative order. Alex believes "in the superiority and privilege of heterosexuality" (Onken 10), which suffices as justification for his action.

Eventually, Leo comprehends that Alex and his friends intend to commit rape on him: "*But beating me up would be boring*" (Williamson 211). Alex slowly undresses Leo by cutting through his clothes with a knife. Fortunately, he is stopped before creating further damage. With violating the transsexual body, the perpetrators attempt to substantiate further their heterosexist power and remind Leo, who transgresses gender boundaries, of his gender imposed at birth.

Generally, the crime committed against Leo bears resemblance to the case of the hate crime against Brandon Teena in the 1990ies¹⁸. As with Teena, Leo as well as his perpetrators belong to a lower esteemed social class. Their everyday life is characterized by displays of violence or themselves experiencing violence, which renders them accustomed to it as a solution to problems. An intersectional consideration of Leo's case therefore suggests that the social milieu in Cloverdale is especially dangerous for transsexual individuals. Moreover, Leo's mother's responding action to her son's assault further exemplifies to what extent violence is habitual in their environment: "'[...] Your mam went to have it out with Alex but he wasn't in. His mam was though, giving a load of lip.'" (307). Comparing the situations in Eden Park and Cloverdale, it is improbable that incidents such as happened to Leo would occur at Eden Park School since the students belong to higher middle class families and hence, would refrain from deploying measures even more violent than verbal or light physical abuse.

Certainly, both degrading situations, the harassment in Eden Park and the assault in Cloverdale are inexcusable and should be avoided by employing enlightening precautions on an educational as well as an institutional level.

¹⁸ See part A section 4.3

IV Conclusion

In this concluding chapter of my thesis, I will summarize the results of my textual analysis particularly with regard to my research questions introduced by way of introduction. First, the inner conflicts and events that induce the queer protagonists Max, David and Leo to (re)consider their gender identities as well as their personalities will be reviewed to establish a distinct link to the theoretical concepts elucidated in the first part of the thesis. Following, the respective social environments of non-normative identities will be taken under scrutiny in order to clarify instances of heteronormativity. Finally, possible implications of the thesis will be discussed.

The intersexual Max in *Golden Boy* as well as the transsexual teenagers David and Leo in *The Art of Being Normal* each experience their development of gender identity differently. With regard to the scope of the present thesis, Leo's psychological development is addressed separately since he has already acknowledged his transsexual gender identity in his childhood and hence, measures to reassign his sex are adopted before the commencement of puberty.

David's female identity is well established from the beginning of the novel, for he displays certain aspects of femininity rather freely, which, however, is misinterpreted as a sign of homosexuality. Even though he is certain of his female gender identity, he is reluctant to acknowledge his self-perceived gender publicly. Therefore, David's quest is distinguished by a search for courage to reveal his desire to become a girl. Max, on the other hand, experiences a considerably more complex period of realizing his intersex gender identity. Before his childhood friend assaulted him, Max was a content, popular teenager who was only peripherally aware of the implications of his intersex conditions. The rape as well as the consequential pregnancy induce him to reconsider his identity and eventually, he realizes to what extent he has performed an act, i.e. the role of a perfect son in a perfect family, in order to meet the high demands of his mother. Karen, in fact, is highly attentive to comply with society's expectations and unconsciously conveys this attitude to her sons.

Common to Max's as well as David's development is an increasing awareness of their own bodies and side-effects of the imminent puberty which in both cases is unsettling. While David is anxious about growing too fast, which would entail irrevocable changes in size, Max is aware that his feminine features eventually evidence his difference to oth-

er male teenagers. As the problem becomes more exigent for both teenagers, their inner unrest increases. In association with their physical changes, their fear of isolation and prospective solitude grows considerably. Max as well as David believe that their non-normative manifestations of body and self will restrain them from becoming the object of anyone's desire. However, while David is feeling merely sad and lonely, Max experiences the anxiety of remaining alone more severely: combined with internalized homophobia, he falls into a deep depression. Max is conflicted by various opinions on his condition and realizes that until his pregnancy, he has not been in charge of deciding on his personal identity. Eventually, Max becomes agent of his path and accepts his intersexual gender identity. His realization entails abandoning his mother and temporarily his girlfriend. However, the accidental overdose constitutes the initiation of being able to acknowledge his intersexuality as an essential part of his personality. David's process of openly disclosing, in comparison, is less dramatic since the positive experiences on the trip to Tipton-on-Sea induce him to stand up for his self-perceived gender. Of paramount importance for both teenagers, are the conversations with others: in talking with Daniel and Leo, they more properly comprehend issues such as the arbitrariness of the binary gender oppositions.

Although, within *The Art of Being Normal* Leo does not experience inner conflicts that induce him to acknowledge his identity, the reader substantially learns about the implications on a transsexual child's life as well as conflicts after having initiated the transitioning process. Particularly, the assault in Cloverdale contributes to increasing his preference to remain unregarded and his reluctance to trust others. Through interacting with David, Leo deal with his anxieties and understands that in order to become satisfied he needs to overcome his past.

In both *Golden Boy* and *The Art of Being Normal*, normality appears as a recurring motif. While Max and Leo are agitated by the use of the word 'normal' in itself, David yearns for complying with normality. The former two perceive normality rather negatively since for them it entails conforming to society's expectations and assimilating to it. Eventually, all three protagonists succeed in establishing their own normality by acknowledging their variant gender identities.

Generally, the identity development of all three protagonists can be aligned within the poststructuralist context since they emancipate from the heteronormative societal order. Max and David accomplish to abandon their gender identity imposed by society and

hence, become active in challenging binary assumptions of sexuality. Leo, on the other hand, is suppressed by society owing to his transsexuality, which indirectly induces him to assume a defensive attitude. However, he gradually manages to overcome the intimidation and by disregarding societal opinions, he is finally accepted as a transsexual individual.

Instances of heteronormativity are highly perceptible in both *Golden Boy* and *The Art of Being Normal*. Particularly accounts of Max's mother Karen Walker reveal mechanisms of *doing gender* as well as *performativity*. She is overly concerned about meeting society's expectations and demands her family to comply with the heteronormative standards, too. After Max's unwanted pregnancy, her ideal world is endangered and she pressures her son into deciding on a binary gender, and abort his baby. Max, however, is overwhelmed by the situation and suffers a nervous breakdown. Still, Karen cannot be blamed solely for her inappropriate reaction to the situation since she has been mentally unstable for several years and she would have required mental guidance after having conceived an intersex child. Eventually, Max becomes aware of the arbitrariness of the binary oppositions of male and female and grows rather cynical about it. David in *The Art of Being Normal* shares the cynicism concerning predetermined conventions of *doing gender*, which he has to apply continually in order not to arouse suspicion.

With a view to the social regard of the LGBTIQ individuals under consideration, each novel reveals different aspects of the perception of queer identities within the respective social environment. In *Golden Boy* for instance, we learn little about the environment's opinion on intersexuality since Max is not publicly disclosed. Solely, his hypothesizing about possible stigmatization and marginalization because of his condition, allow for gaining an idea of the public's negative view that is based on homophobia. Generally, intersexuality is pathologized and within the medical field, regarded as an abnormality that needs to be remedied. This view, which is confirmed by specialists, contributes to render intersexuality a taboo within society, which consolidates the stigmatization of intersex individuals.

Violence and harassment are unfortunately a determining part of David and Leo's lives. David has suffered from harassment since primary school, when peers, who perceive him odd, and assume him to be homosexual. He, however, manages not to despair due to the support provided by Essie and Felix. Moreover, when Eden Park students learn about Leo's transsexuality, he is harassed on the basis of bias and stigmata. Such stigma-

ta furthermore induce Leo's violators to commit the assault with which they further attempt to affirm their heterosexist power. The transsexual teenager suffers a trauma from which he only gradually recovers.

Overall, both Tarttelin and Williamson give useful insights into the lives of queer teenagers that allow a young adult audience to comprehend the ramifications of perceiving their gender in discordance with the binary oppositions male and female in greater detail. However, I would argue that particularly *Golden Boy* succeeds in explaining the complexities underlying queer identities since the story revolves around various points of view and hence, not only inner conflicts of the LGBTIQ individual are elucidated. Through considering the perspectives of Max's family and friends, the reader gains a deeper understanding of the dominant heteronormative order that regulates social conduct. A thorough reflection of such allows for eventually dissipating heteronormative beliefs of sex and gender. With a view to challenging heteronormativity within an educational setting, particularly *Golden Boy* is apt for increasing awareness of non-normative identities as well as society's inclination to regarding the binary gender system, in the target audience.

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VI German Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit mit dem Titel „Heteronormativität in Frage stellen. Queere Identitäten in zeitgenössischer Jugendliteratur“ beschäftigt sich mit queeren Identitäten in ausgewählten, englischsprachigen Jugendromanen. Durch eine genaue Lektüre zweier Romane für ein jugendliches Publikum, wird versucht folgende Forschungsfragen zu beantworten: Welche inneren Konflikte und Probleme bewegen die Protagonisten dazu ihre von der Norm abweichende Geschlechtsidentität anzuerkennen? Wie wird die queere Identität vom jeweiligen sozialen Milieu aufgenommen und anerkannt?

Im ersten Teil der Arbeit wird der theoretische Hintergrund dargelegt. Zuerst werden Konzepte der *Queer Studies* wie Heteronormativität, Doing Gender, sowie Performativität genau beschrieben, um anschließend näher auf Identitätsentwicklung einzugehen. Zudem wird das Akronym LGBTIQ aufgeschlüsselt, um anschließend genauer auf die Geschlechtsidentitäten Transsexualität und Intersexualität einzugehen. Außerdem wird beschrieben wie solche Identitäten von der heutigen Gesellschaft aufgenommen werden und welchen Problemen (Belästigung, Ausgrenzung, Gewalt) queere Individuen ausgesetzt sind. Im letzten Teil der begrifflichen Auseinandersetzung wird erklärt welchen Status die LGBTIQ Thematik in zeitgenössischer Jugendliteratur hat und welche Möglichkeiten diese bietet.

Den Hauptteil der Arbeit bildet die Analyse der Jugendromane *Golden Boy* von Abigail Tarttlin und *The Art of Being Normal* von Lisa Williamson. Ersterer handelt vom intersexuellen Jugendlichen Max Walker der als Junge erzogen wurde. Durch die Vergewaltigung durch einen Bekannten, die eine Schwangerschaft zur Folge hat, beginnt der Protagonist über seine Geschlechtsidentität zu reflektieren und erkennt, dass die heteronormative Haltung seiner Mutter, grundlegend dazu beigetragen hat, eine definitive, binäre Identität auszubilden. In Williamsons Roman hingegen treffen die transsexuellen Teenager David und Leo schicksalhaft aufeinander. Im Gegensatz zu Leo, hat David jedoch seine weibliche Geschlechtsidentität noch nicht offen zugegeben. Gemeinsam schaffen es die Jugendlichen schließlich zu sich und ihren Identitäten zu stehen. Zudem zeigt Williamson auf, wie deviante Ausprägungen von Geschlecht von der Gesellschaft angenommen werden: während David im schulischen Milieu ständig von Ausgrenzung und Stigmatisierung betroffen ist, wurde Leo an seiner alten Schule beinahe vergewaltigt. Seine Täter wollten ihre heterosexistische Macht behaupten.

VII Abstract

With the rise of Queer Studies in the 1990ies, the importance of acknowledging sexual and gender identities that do not conform to the traditional heterosexual norm has become evident. Still, members of contemporary society perceive identities that do not conform to the heteronormative standard odd. Particularly YA literature featuring LGBTIQ protagonists provides the opportunity to counteract heteronormativity in order to allow 'deviant' individuals to be accepted within society. Through a thorough reading with regard to a theoretical framework on *Queer Studies* and *Gender Identity*, problems and implications of acknowledging a non-normative gender identity for the queer protagonists in Tarttelin's *Golden Boy* and Williamson's *The Art of Being Normal* will be outlined. Moreover, instances of heteronormativity within the novels' environment will be illuminated. Adopting LGBTIQ Young Adult literature for an educational context, will eventually facilitate a dissipation of arbitrary heteronormative standards.