DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

Homosexuality in Young Adult Novels: Tracing Identity and Socio-Cultural Contexts

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Magister der Philosophie (Mag. phil)

Wien, 2017 / Vienna, 2017

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1. Introduction

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a time of constant change and emotional turmoil. Young adults face an identity formation process that is accompanied by confusion and insecurity. To withstand these difficulties and to arrive safely at a mature and positive identity they require positive role models and safe havens. These can be provided by literature. I fully support Michael Cart in his belief that literature has the power to save lives. He expands on T.S. Eliot's three reasons for reading; entertainment, the enjoyment of art, and acquisition of knowledge, by adding two more: firstly, the importance of the realisation that one is not alone and, secondly, the hope of acceptance and happiness. These aspects are relevant for all young adults but, even more so, for LGBTQ teenagers. They face additional pressure and anxiety. Providing them with safe havens, information and an optimistic prospect for their future is of the utmost importance and facilitates a positive identity formation. Luckily, young adult LGBTQ literature with positive messages and role models has increased in the past decades (Cart *Honoring their stories*). Furthermore, LGBTQ young adult literature wields personal and educational merit not exclusively for LGBTQ teenagers but for 'straight' teenagers as well. A well written book can spark a sense of realisation and empathy for the feelings of others. Being able to experience the joy, problems and the social situation of individuals who are different from oneself can transform the reader into a more sensitive and empathic human. Books invite this change of perspective gently, especially those written from a first person perspective, and create an understanding that might be harder to achieve through lectures or other formats of exposure. Still, the creation of these novels is strongly dependent on their respective socio-cultural contexts and authors might face limited operational freedom due the societal dynamics of power. It is the aim of this thesis to uncover how much influence socio-cultural contexts have on the representation of young adult homosexual identity construction in LGBTQ young adult novels. The focus will rest on male homosexuality.

To achieve this aim I will focus on two research questions: How can male young adult homosexual identities be constructed in young adult novels? How can these identity constructions be contextualised with the socio-cultural context? To enable a better reflection on the influence of socio-cultural contexts, I will conduct an exemplary analysis on two novels published in the same geographical region, the United States of America, but in two different temporal contexts. The two novels are *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*,

published in 1969, and *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, published in 2015. *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* was the first young adult novel to focus on homosexuality. Since this book tells the story of two boys exploring homosexuality, the second book will also focus on male homosexuality. With regards to the first research question, I assume that both novels use definite categories of 'gay' and 'straight' and do not depict other, more nuanced ways of sexual self-identification. I further assume that homosexual identity formation is represented in a neutral or positive manner. With regards to the second research question, I assume that both novels reproduce their respective socio-cultural context and its inherent power relations without challenging them. To answer these two research questions, I will conduct a literary analysis based on a combination of narratology and Critical Discourse Analysis.

Within this thesis I operate on the basis of Queer Theory. Queer Theory's goal is to deconstruct categories and reveal power relations. It will be explained in more detail in chapter 6.1. Throughout this thesis, the acronym LGBTQ will be used. Although, strictly speaking, this acronym refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer, or questioning, its use here does not imply a strict adherence to these categories. In accordance with Queer Theory's critique on categorisation, this thesis is aware of the innumerable possible nuances of expressing and identifying oneself along a spectrum of sexuality and gender. Therefore, the acronym LGBTQ is intended as a placeholder and stands for all possible variants. When the term 'homosexual' is employed, it means the sexual-object choice of an individual that self-identifies with the same gender as oneself. 'Gay' and 'lesbian' imply the same meaning but with regards to male and female, respectively. However, this thesis uses these categories to facilitate an approximation to the descriptions in the novels but they are, by no means, strictly and exhaustively defined.

The organisation of this thesis progresses from creating a theoretical background towards the analysis of both novels. Chapter 2 contains the review of the academic work that has already been performed on LGBTQ young adult literature. Chapter 3 presents an extensive overview of homosexuality, its history and the specific socio-cultural contexts of 1969 and 2015. A basic understanding of young adult homosexual identity formation is provided in chapter 4, before chapter 5 reviews the development of the genre of young adult literature. Chapter 6 explains the applied methods and chapter 7 presents the literary analysis and its results. Finally, chapter 8 summarises the findings and concludes this thesis.

2. Literature Review

Before establishing the theoretical foundation of this thesis, it is important to familiarise oneself with the research that has already been conducted. First, this chapter will advocate the merit of research on LGBTQ Young Adult Literature. Second, multiple directions for analysis taken by researchers in the field will be discussed. Thirdly, future perspectives and the value of this thesis' analysis will be provided.

As LGBTQ visibility increased throughout the last decades, so did the number of publications of Literature aimed at young adults with LGBTQ themes and content. As Michael Cart and Christine A. Jenkins point out in their ground-breaking book *The Heart has its Reasons,* in 2006, approximately 200 young adult novels with LGBTQ content were published in the U.S. from 1969-2004. Examining the years of publication closer, they notice a steep increase of publications throughout the past decades, which substantiates a growing interest, urgency and market. Conceding a certain degree of statistical uncertainty, they determine that in the 1970's an approximate average of one title per year was published. Four titles per year were published in the 1980's, while seven titles per year were released in the 1990's. In the early 2000's over twelve titles per year were published. Between 2006 and 2017 the number of titles per year published has further increases, as will be discussed in chapter 5. However, it is not only the increase in material that arouses the justified interest of many scholars. LGBTQ rights, visibility and representation in the real world, as well as the fictional world, remain a strongly contended and hotly debated cultural, social and political issue. Intensity is especially increased when children and young adults are concerned. This becomes evident in the many attempts of local governments to limit or deny school or public libraries access to literature with LGBTQ content, e.g. the Alabama House Bill 30 in 2005 or a resolution by Oklahoma state legislature that prohibits young adults access to LGBTQ books in public libraries (Cart, and Jenkins xv-xvi). This highlights the impact of this specific subgenre and, thus, the necessity for academic research. It also hints at the potential and vastness of the topic area, allowing it to expand into research areas including literature, linguistic, history, sociology and psychology. The key directions research has taken will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

One aspect research is heavily concerned with is the overall development of the specific LGBTQ subgenre of young adult literature and how it could be researched effectively. Much of Christine Jenkins' work focuses on tracing the development of the genre back to its origins

in 1969. Focusing on the time from 1969-1992, she examines the sixty published LGBTQ novels with regards to common themes and representations (e.g. race, class, gender, appearances, problems and patterns) and how these have changed over the course of more than two decades (Jenkins, *Young Adult* 147-149). Expanding her work to include literary works up to 1997, Jenkins (*From Queer* 326) does not only reflect on the development of the genre but, also, on whether the mass market would ever want to catch up with societal change and alter the policy of censure on the genre. She concludes it does not. Furthermore, Jenkins explores other researchers' techniques to discover innovative ways to understand the evolution of the genre, e.g. Historian Gerda Lerner's model of women's historiography or Rudine Sims Bishop's model for African-American inclusion in children's literature (*From Queer* 306-312). In her collaboration with Michael Cart, which resulted in the aforementioned book, Jenkins expands her area of research once more, analysing developments in the LGBTQ subgenre from 1969-2004 and created a heuristic for LGBTQ young adult literature, inspired by Bishop's model. Additionally, the book provides an overview of important historic developments and an exhaustive list of published books of LGBTQ young adult literature (Cart, and Jenkins *The heart*). Details on how the subgenre developed will be provided in chapter 5.

Other facets, apart from the evolution of the genre, are of great interest to researchers as well. The emergence of Queer Theory in the 1990's has spurred scientists to unravel and disclose constructions of power. Corrine Wickens (*Queering*), for example, analyses relevant literature published between 2000 and 2005 with regards to character construction, how those characters are inhibited and, ultimately, what messages the books relay. Of further interest to her is how LGBTQ characters, albeit presented in a positive light, are often opposed by homophobic characters, serving the purpose to create a challenge to homophobia. This purpose is poorly served and Wickens concludes that homophobia may be challenged but is ultimately left intact (*Codes, Silences* 148). Challenging heteronormativity and analysing elements of homophobia in LGBTQ young adult novels is a recurring element in research. The inquiries of Laurie Barth Walczak (ii-iii) trace heteronormativity and homophobia in novels from 1969 to 2009 with the aim to identify ideological and hegemonic forces in literature. Other research focuses on more general topic areas and analyses reinforced or refuted stereotypes, the image of homosexuality in novels, the construction and classification of characters and character development, e.g. Cuseo (*Homosexual*), Brautigam (*The Image*) and Beck (*Conceptions*).

It has been mentioned above that some regional legislators and school policies tend to view LGBTQ themed literature as inappropriate for teenagers. As a result, researchers like Mollie Blackburn attempt to provide tools for teachers and readers alike, to accomplish a better understanding of LGBTQ literature and to successfully identify and select it. For teaching purposes, her analyses shall help with in-classroom discussions and analyses that do not make the mistake of reproducing heteronormativity. Furthermore, Blackburn argues that the disruptive nature of queer texts on various levels provides students with more possibilities of being and expressing oneself (Blackburn, Clark, and Nemeth 43-44). In her call for an increase in LGBTQ themed input in classrooms, Blackburn aligns with other educators and scholars calling for more inclusion, e.g. Schall and Kauffmann (*Exploring*) and Smith (*Montana*).

As a recent anthology by Michelle Abate and Kenneth Kidd demonstrates, research has expanded in the past decades. In their book *Over the Rainbow* they assemble essays, written between 1997 and 2010, in relation to three major research categories: queering the canon, changes in literature after Stonewall in 1969, and queer readers and writers. The first category represents essays that concern themselves with queer-reading pre-1969 literature and tracing hidden LGBTQ themes and motifs. Among those essays are contributions by Tison Pugh (*There*), analysing the queer Utopia in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz,* and Roberta Seelinger Trites (*Queer*), who traces lesbian politics in *Little Women*. Overall, the contributions in this section uncover queer themes and tropes in literature, dating back to the 1800's, and analyse how these themes are realised, how they interact with their heteronormative context and what merit a contemporary queer reading might yield. The second category is concerned with the analysis of literature written after 1969 and how it transformed itself to its present state. This section contains, among others, essays by Vanessa Wayne Lee (*'Unshelter Me'*), examining the development of representation and depiction of lesbians in a male dominated heteronormative society, and Robert McRuer (*Reading*), describing the solutions of a heteronormative society's dilemma with children's literature's need in the 1980's to address AIDS and, simultaneously, shun and decry homosexual characters and life-style. The third category is concerned with the queerness of fictional characters, writers and the reader (Abate, and Kidd 2-8). This section extends to more creative starting points, arching from analysis and proposition of reading strategies for lesbian readers by Sherrie A. Inness (*Is Nancy*), over Jess Battis' (*Trans Magic*) examination of magic and its link to gender through its transformative powers in young adult fiction, to an overview of creative fan responses through LGBTQ centred fan fiction of Harry Potter by Catherine Tosenberger

(*Homosexuality*). The essays collected by Abate and Kidd make clear, that not only literature created in the early years of the gay liberation movement are of scholarly interest. Furthermore, highlighted by especially the last section in the book, is academic interest unconventional LGBTQ literary work that is inspired by other, not necessarily queer, literary work.

With regards to the future of LGBTQ young adult literature, it will be interesting to see how it reflects on issues such as racism and sexism. Jenkins (*Young Adult* 159-160) has already noted in 1993 that lesbian characters are dramatically underrepresented, as are gay or lesbian people of colour and the LGBTQ community. In 2015, Laura Jiménez' (*Representations*) analysis of award-winning LGBTQ books between 2000 and 2013 still seems to validate Jenkins' criticism.

This thesis will not focus on finding various forms of representation, as has been done before, but seeks to specifically root two young adult novels in their socio-cultural context. The merit will be to see how identity construction and the novel in general reflect the specific context of the time of their development and creation. The following chapters will lay the necessary theoretical framework, beginning with the concept and history of homosexuality in the next chapter.

3. Definition and History of Homosexuality

The attempt to define a broad and far reaching concept such as homosexuality and even the attempt to provide an overview of its history appears to be a Herculean task. However, this is the precise aim of this chapter. Due to the vast amount of material, possibilities for discussion and the many important details of the subject-matter itself, as well as of its historical development, this chapter can only provide a limited, customised outline of the most relevant ideas and incidents. It is for the same reason, as well as the focus on male homosexuality, that other important issues such as existing racism and sexism within the LGBTQ community, deserving research in their own respect, are only addressed parenthetically. Nevertheless, this chapter will create a basic understanding of the concept of homosexuality, essential terminology and homosexuality throughout history. Ultimately, the focus will shift to a proper socio-cultural contextualisation of the eras of interest in US-history: 1969 and 2015.With regards to homosexuality, these time periods represent two strongly contrasting socio-cultural

contexts. The strong contrast will facilitate the understanding of the influence the socio-cultural context has on the young adult literature they produce.

3.1. Approaching a Definition of Homosexuality

The term homosexuality is, nowadays, quickly applied to certain people or practices but when asked to consider what the term comprises precisely and what it actually includes or excludes, the answer is not easily found, if at all. This is in part an issue of terminology, as well as historic and cultural contextualisation, for the concept of 'homosexuality' is not universally agreed on. The dawn of the modern concept of homosexuality occurred in 1869, when the term itself was first used in print, in German by Karl Maria Kertbeny. He used the term in two pamphlets, published in Leipzig, to prevent the criminalisation of homosexual sexual intercourse in the Federation of North German States. The definition that provided the basis for the use of this term was simply referring to sexual attraction towards a person of the same sex as oneself. The simplicity of this definition, however, facilitated the usage of this newly coined term and its spread into various fields of research. The conception of homosexuality encountered today encapsulates three rather different spheres: psychological condition or orientation, erotic desire or sexual object choice, and sexual practice or behaviour. The conjunction of these three spheres is what enables the modern definition of homosexuality to cover such a broad area (Halperin, *How to* 109-110).

Before the 19th century, such unification under one term did not exist. In his attempt to approach the history of male homosexuality, Halperin notes that there simply was no "category of discourse or experience" in existence that could have encompassed the wide "range of same-sex sexual behaviour, desires, psychologies, and socialities, as well as the various forms of gender deviance" that outlines the modern definition of homosexuality (*How to* 89). However, in his research, Halperin identifies four pre-homosexual models and practices: effeminacy, active sodomy, friendship or male love, and passivity or inversion. He filtered and shaped these categories from the content of source material, e.g. letters, court files and literature, that reaches back to ancient Greece. Nevertheless, certain ambiguity and overlap is possible. The definitions for these models and practices are as follows: effeminacy describes men who abandoned the stereotypical, competitive society of men for the pleasure of the stereotypically soft society of women. Active sodomy refers to the active penetration of a subordinate male counterpart. Most eras, like Antiquity, registered active sodomy either as a

minor perversity in the sexual act or a strong desire for dominance. The penetrator's masculinity was, however, neither perceived as tainted nor questioned, which was the most important aspect. Male love and friendship is about equality, sameness and mutual respect, putting it in sharp contrast to active sodomy and its aim to dominate for power and pleasure. Both active sodomy and male friendship did not deviate but rather confirm conventional norms of masculinity, as defined by some European societies. Finally, passivity or inversion means being penetrated by another male. In contrast to the modern perception of sexual acts, the penetrated individual did not necessarily comply for sexual pleasure. (*How to* 92-103). On the one hand, Halperin's definition of pre-homosexual models regarding male sexuality shows that behaviour that would have been categorised as clearly homosexual from a modern point of view, was perceived as quite differently in the context of another time, albeit not always favourably. On the other hand, his overview leads to the conclusion that the term homosexuality might have oversimplified a complex reality, which is why the modern use of the term exhibits such capacious boundaries.

The inclusive nature of the term, as well the diversifying individuality of identity also impacted on the homosexual movement and its representative activists in the second half of the 20th century, especially in regards to terminology. However, there is no holistic solution to the issue of terminology. Since individuals' acceptance of certain terms varied throughout their development, there are various terms and acronyms available, subject to change and substitution. Two of the most generic terms in regards to homosexuality are the terms *gay* and *lesbian*. The term *gay* refers to men who are exclusively attracted to men and *lesbian* refers to women who are exclusively attracted to women. However, since the world is not black and white, despite the concept of binary opposites propagated by the heteronormative society, more possibilities in identification with sexuality, sex and gender entered the mainstream stage. Bisexuality, for instance, refers to individuals being attracted to more than one gender or sex. Other expressions of self and sexuality include *questioning*, referring to questioning not only ones' sexuality but possibly gender and sex, *asexuality*, which means that individuals feel no sexual attraction to other people, and *queer*, nowadays describing anything deviating from the norm. The latter term was used as a slur against sexually deviating individuals and especially gays and lesbians until the Gay and Lesbian movement slowly reclaimed since its initiation in the 1970's. during the 1970's. Still, not all members of the community embrace the term and use it in a positive and proud sense, so it might still be considered offensive. There are many other terms, for instance transgender, gender-fluid, intersex, polyamory, which are, however, out of the scope of this paper (Serano ch.1).

For activists to unite sexual and gender minorities and to create a collective voice, the representation in terminology aimed at a maximum of possible inclusion. That is why usually an acronym consisting of a combination of the letters and characters L, G, B, T, Q, A, +, * (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Allied, undefined/unmentioned) is used, representing different parts of the community e.g. LGBT, LGBTI, LGBTIQ, LGBTI+, LGBTIA, GLB, etc. (Serano ch.1). Alternatives to the growing string of letters have been proposed, e.g. the term gender and sexual minority (GSM). It aims to be a more inclusive and flexible term. However, the term 'minority' creates a problematic normative focus and so far the term is scarcely found in current academic literature (University of Derby).

Although amply attempted, it is difficult to arrive at a clear definition of homosexuality that can be universally agreed on. Therefore, after having presented certain aspects of the issue, it is important to clarify how this thesis defines homosexuality. Bearing in mind the complexity of human beings, their identities and their sexualities the definition is kept rather vague. Drawing on the sociological and post-structural perspective, e.g. Horowitz and Newcomb (*A Multidimensional*), this thesis considers homosexuality as an interplay of same-sex desire, same-sex behaviour and self-identification as homosexual.

To further clarify the concept and the historic roots of homosexuality, the next section will provide examples of its status from Antiquity to the USA in the mid-20th century.

3.2. Historical Development from Antiquity to the USA in the 1950's

The previous section was focused on establishing a definition of homosexuality and models that preceded our modern conception of it in a more abstract way. Building on this knowledge, this section will provide a longitudinal cut to embed these abstract models in different periods of human history. This exemplification through historic developments should demonstrate different attitudes in different times and cultures as well as the fact that same-sex practices and affections are as old as civilisation.

Although premodern societies lacked a neutral, scientific term this does not imply that same-sex love, desire or intercourse are modern phenomena. Therefore, it is not surprising that already earliest literary works of Antiquity discuss this subject matter. A classic example would be the speech of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, a work which discusses different forms of Eros, i.e. love. In his speech, Aristophanes tells the myth of how human beings were

originally round, with two faces, two sets of genitals (facing outwards) and eight limbs. These creatures were purely male, purely female or androgynous. Due to their growing ambition, the God Zeus sought to put them in their place, without the risk of losing their affection or the sacrifices they made to the Gods. He decided to split them in half. The separated creatures were so desperate, they clung to one another in hope to reunite and starved in the process. To save their lives, Zeus permitted for a sense of reunion by turning their genitals to their fronts so they could mate. These humans wanted to reunite and mate with their original other halves, purely male, purely female or androgynous, thus explaining various affection types. In contemporary Athenian society, however, these individuals were not considered homosexuals but rather e.g. if male, willing young boys or lovers of youth. In fact, there was no category of homosexuality that could have applied to both male and female (Halperin, *Sex before* 43-47). This indicates that, although the ancient world did not establish a unifying category, same-sex affection, desire and intercourse not only existed but were publicly discussed and entertained.

Continuing from Antiquity to the Middle Ages, cultural as well as religious differences become more apparent. Literary work of the Islamic world of the early Middle Ages, such as *The Arabian Nights*, discuss or mention same-sex intercourse or sexual preferences. Once again, a lack of precise and universal terminology can be observed which, however, does not indicate ignorance. Individual Muslim scientific writers, e.g. Qustã ibn Luqã, discussed the reasons for homosexuality, believing it is hereditary. In Europe, Christian theology already exerted high influence in regards to this topic. Same-sex object choice was considered as vice, a potential in already sinful individuals. Sodomy, however, was not universally defined. Some clerics considered improper sexual acts, regardless of the gender of the participants, as sodomy, while others applied the term exclusively to sexual intercourse between men (Boswell 27-28).

Travelling through time to the era of early colonisation and the Elizabethan era reveals that European conceptions of gender and sexuality significantly influenced the perception and treatment of same-sex relations in the colonies, with legal implications until today. At the time, European countries practiced sodomy laws for any deviant and improper sexual practice. In Britain, same-sex relations were illegal. Nevertheless, same-sex allusions in theatre and art were culturally and commonly accepted and cross-dressing in theatre was even mandatory, since women were prohibited to act in plays. This background is of special relevance because the colonisers who settled in the region of the future USA, during the 1500s and 1600s, were predominantly Puritans from Britain. They had fled religious

persecution in the Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan era. Upon arrival in their new home, they established a religious society, with strict sodomy laws to avoid any deviance from the established norm. What these laws considered to be sodomy, e.g. public masturbation or anal sex, varied significantly. Nevertheless, the common denominator was that these acts were considered abominable or as acts against nature and that they were considered a capital crime, punishable by death (Bronski 5-8).

As the British colonisers adapted to the region they occupied and cemented their dominance, they began to prosper and to flourish. The established sodomy laws, based on the bible or old British law, were preserved until the American Revolution and the War of Independence. This marked the moment when the death penalty for sodomy was abolished in most of the states. However, same-sex acts were reclassified as felony with only murder and rape being more severely punished (D'Emilio 13-14). The expansion to the West marked another turning point. Living conditions in the West were a lot harsher than in the colonised East and, thus, softened the norms of gender and sexuality. Women for example had to work on farms or in professions traditionally reserved for men and less legal policing facilitated deviation from gender norms and restrictions. Additionally, the Western frontier offered a life that was frequently sex-segregated, which resulted in the emergence of homo-social communities. Although there is rarely any hard-evidence of sexual relationships within these communities, as they remained illegal, homo-eroticism is positively, albeit implicitly, referred to in literary work, e.g. Badger Clark's *The Lost Pardner* (Bronski 41-43).

One example of these homo-social communities is San Francisco. The Goldrush of the 1850's, which was male-dominated, was accompanied by a relative high tolerance of illegal behaviour, including same-sex relationships. The city recorded a sharp rise in residents, growing from a population of 500 in 1846 to 25.000 in 1850. Out of these 25.000 residents only about 300 were women, which explains why same-sex dances and cross-dressing were not uncommon (Bronski 46). Urbanisation and industrialisation in the second half of the 19th century generally facilitated the emergence of a homosexual identity and the slow but steady formation of homosexual communities. These communities benefitted from the free labour, the dissolution of the family as the predominant economic unit and economic independence for men and women on the thriving markets. Furthermore, the anonymity of great cities, in contrast to small, rural towns, helped people to realise their sexual preferences and exchange with people of similar orientation. By 1915, distinctly organised communities had developed

and the 1920's and 30's witnessed a growing subculture and the evolution towards a collective consciousness and group identity (D'Emilio 11-13).

New York's Harlem during the roaring twenties is a shimmering example of the building of a gay, in this case even African-American, community and subculture. Though the relationship was not devoid of racism, their events attracted white homosexuals as well. Gays and Lesbians had the chance to meet and mingle at bars and cabarets, street corners and rent parties. Thematically, this intense socialising and partying lifestyle even made its way into Jazz, the music this time is so famous for. Although this period of relative freedom for the Harlem gay subculture declined rapidly after the Stock Market crash of 1929, which forced it back into the shadows, the created foundation for institutions and networks has been of great value until today (Garber 318-319).

Although this might paint a positive picture of a slowly developing homosexual identity and pride, a process long in the making, the reality was still harsh and dangerous for LGBTQ people. Neither the church, nor the law supported same-sex eroticism, as D'Emilio poignantly summarises:

> As gay subculture took root in twentieth-century American cities, police invoked laws against disorderly conduct, vagrancy, public lewdness, assault, and solicitation in order to haul in their victims. Gay men who made assignations in public places, lesbians and homosexuals who patronized gay bars, and occasionally even guests at gay parties in private homes risked arrest. (14)

This should clarify that, although the homosexual community and identity were being solidified, they were persecuted and supressed by the law and law enforcing officers. However, religion and law were not the only sources of condemnation for homosexuals. The 1880's and 90's marked the appearance of the first scientific and medical literature discussing whether homosexuality was a vice, a weakness of the individual, insanity or evolutionary degeneracy. By the 1920's, the consensus reached by those advocating assessing homosexuality with the help of a medical model was that, in its origin, it was a hereditary disease. Medical solutions ranged from ignorance to surgery. Homosexuality was medically defined as disease until the 1970's. However, due to the works of Freud and the ultimate transfer of sexuality studies from the body to the psyche, the focus shifted from a physical problem to a mental health issue requiring psychiatric treatment. The causes for homosexuality were increasingly explained with psychological factors such as unresolved Oedipal complexes. Nonetheless, the medical discussion with regards to homosexuality was

mainly conducted in professional circles and did not affect the general public until World War II, when psychiatric screenings for the army were conducted. The war left a society that strictly categorised sexual behaviour as either good or bad. Of course, homosexuality was ascribed to the latter category. On the verge of the 1950's legislation, religion and medicine were jointly working on a solution for the 'problem' of homosexuality they were painting for the American public (D'Emilio 15-17).

This section concludes its journey through time, which began in Hellenistic Antiquity, on the verge of the 1950's in the United States of America. Due to the brevity of the chapter and the extensiveness of the subject matter, it is necessary to note that this overview cannot do justice to varying degrees of self-awareness, varying cultural differences, gender and ethnic issues or discrimination, religious exegeses on the topic of same-sex affection, desire or sexual acts in each of the discussed periods. This chapter showed that same-sex affection, desire and practices are not an invention of modernity but have been acknowledged at least since Hellenistic Antiquity. Same-sex desire, and sexuality in general, was diversely comprehended by societies and individuals, ascribing it differing degrees of relevance and purposes and, thus, resulting in vastly varying public opinions. The emergence of the term homosexuality and the construction of a homosexual identity and community was accompanied by resistance and persecution via law, medicine and religious entities. It is this climate that defined the 1950's and 60' in the USA. In a next step, this paper will narrow the focus from a broad overview for general understanding to a more detailed and multi-facetted discussion of specific periods of US history that are of special interest to this paper. Therefore, the next sections will offer more detailed analyses of the historic contexts of the years 1969 and 2015 respectively.

3.3. Detailed Historic Context of 1969

The previous section has focused on various stages of representation, visibility and acceptance of male same-sex desire and affection throughout the history of the past 2500 years. This section will outline, in sufficient detail, the broader historic context of the year 1969, the year of publication of the first young adult novel scrutinised by this thesis. To achieve a maximum understanding of this period, this section will present an overview of historic events and developments alongside a particular focus on correlations between homosexuality and legislation, culture and religion.

The roots for this particular period can be traced to the 1950's. The United States were engaged in the so-called Cold War, the ideological and military conflict with the Soviet Union and Communism. This conflict resulted in an extreme surge of paranoia and the fear of traitors within the United States. With Senator Joseph McCarthy in a vanguard role, the government began years of persecution and repression, in search for supporters of communism, known as the McCarthy-Era. However, Communism was not the only target. Ultimately, every behaviour that deviated from the prescribed norm could be considered as un-American and was being targeted. Homosexuality was amongst these deviances. As the government purged its own ranks from such deviant individuals, President Eisenhower introduced Executive Order Nr. 10450 in 1953. This allowed 'sexual perversion' to be considered grounds for investigation under the federal scrutiny program. More than 800 homosexual federal employees resigned or were dismissed in the first two years after the implementation of this Executive Order (Frank 11-15).

Another aspect was that homosexuality was perceived as a psychological malady, as has already been discussed in the previous section. The 50's, however, saw not only the cementation of that view in the general public but amongst gays themselves. This development was supported by the intensely mediated and propagated 'ideal' family of the white American middle-class, which included a working father, a stay-at-home mother and happy children. Additionally, since gays had to fear repression, persecution and stigmatisation, only very few were living their sexuality publicly and openly, which left the stage to explain homosexuality to those who believed it to be a sickness of the mind. This facilitated the dissemination of false facts and myths. To a large extent, the American public believed that homosexuals were of shady character and prowled the streets in search of young and straight victims so they could 'infect' them with homosexuality. In the 1950's hospitalisation became an option which was not only welcome by the public but by gays themselves, who had internalised society's attitudes and believed that they had a curable medical condition. The applied treatments, however, were cruel, ranging from aversion and pain therapy to electroshocks and lobotomies. Only few gay voices rose to oppose these predominant beliefs, like Donald Cory Webster who published a book in 1951 called *The Homosexual in America.* Webster, homosexual himself, attempted to paint a realistic picture of a gay people and, thus, counter the predominant demonisation (Kuhn 35-38).

The federal persecution in the McCarthy-Era and the predominant public belief that homosexuals had an infectious malady forced the gay scene, if established at all, into hiding.

Especially teenagers were effectively isolated and there were no role models to look to for guidance. States, schools, laws and families were propagating homosexuals not only as perverts but also, in the light of the McCarthy-Era, as enemies (Frank 7). This sentiment was the foundation for the 60's, where homosexuality was not publicly accepted, few gays were openly out and seeing homosexuality not as a sickness was increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, a movement was forming.

Henry Hay founded the *Mattachine Society* in 1951. Although in the beginning nobody wanted to officially join out of fear, Hay managed to establish discussion groups that slowly morphed into the *Mattachine Society*. Secrecy was imperative when the members met and identities were handled with great care. When they began appealing arrests and court cases the organisation grew to more than 2000 members in a short time. By the end of the 50's the organisation had switched from secrecy to visibility to fight for equal rights. Likewise, In San Francisco, in 1955, the *Daughters of Bilitis* were founded by four lesbian couples. It was a social club for lesbians in contrast to the heteronormative bar scene. These two organisations grew and spread through the US in the 60's and transformed into nationwide organisations that increased visibility, informed the public and fought for equal rights. Furthermore, they inspired the formation of other groups such as the *Student Homophile League*. Together with the civil rights movement that began in the 50's and expanded into the 60's they heralded a new American revolution (Kuhn 39-44).

Ultimately, in 1969, an event took place that should inspire the gay movement and give confidence to excluded and denounced individuals: The Stonewall Riots. The Stonewall Inn was a gay bar in New York City, on Christopher Street. Although gays were forced to live a rather secret live, their freedoms varied from region to region and gay bars, offering socialising opportunities, did exist. However, gay bars, due to the precarious legal situation, were often private clubs and owned by the Mafia. They took advantage of the need of homosexuals to find a place to socialise and exploited them. In the Stonewall Inn, drinks were overpriced and watered down, the dishes were not cleaned properly for there was no running water behind the bar, there was barely any decoration to make the establishment look inviting and the Mafia had no respect or fondness for homosexuals. Yet, it was the only gay bar in the area where dancing was allowed and, in the two-and-a-half-years since its opening, the Stonewall Inn turned into the most popular gay bar in Greenwich Village. However, Gay bars were also frequent subjects to police raids (Duberman 79-80). Due to an impeding mayoral election in 1969, the raids intensified drastically. The well-planned raid of the Stonewall Inn

on June 28th sought to shut the bar down indefinitely. The bar was stormed, alcohol seized, personnel arrested, the scarce furniture destroyed and all the customers lined up on the wall for identification. However, this night the ongoing humiliation and police-brutality was too much and the crowd did not disperse afterwards but grew and began to throw stones, bottles and coins at the police, who retreated back into the Inn. Shortly afterwards, Molotov Cocktails were flung and the aggression of the crowd unloaded completely. The riots resurged on two more nights of the subsequent week. This show of power and anger, however, changed the movement forever and marked the beginning of a more confident and brighter future. The first anniversary of the riots was commemorated by the first Pride Parade in 1970 (Frank 31-37).

This brief historic contextualisation of the events leading up to the year 1969 shows a transition from persecution, living in isolation and on the margin of society to a movement and individuals gaining confidence and breaking the wall of visibility, grasping the chance for a better future. This transition happened despite extensively detrimental legislative circumstances, which will be discussed below.

As a dangerously misinformed public perceived homosexuality as a threat to a healthy society, it is no surprise that homosexuality was treated an act of sodomy by the law. Sodomy laws had been in place since the arrival of the Pilgrims and were still in effect in the 1950's and 1960's. Even worse, by the end of the 1950's, the idea of sodomy has transformed from implying rape-like aggression towards women, men or animals to describing only same-sex sexual activities. Varying from state to state, acting out one's homosexual desires could result in punishments ranging from fines to a life sentence in prison. Especially in the 1950's, although some laws were clearly unconstitutional, laws were not challenged because no one dared to come forward. However, the *Mattachine Society* and the *Daughters of Bilitis* resisted in a way they believed to be right. They exposed power abuses by officials and educated their members and readers of their magazines about basic civil rights to aide them in the case of arrest. Furthermore, many homosexuals carried a booklet by the *Mattachine Society* with them name *Your rights in Case of Arrest*. It took until the early 60's that discrimination against homosexuals was openly opposed in court, e.g. the case of Franklin Kameny 1961. Many legal advantages were gained from set precedents by the civil rights movement, even though this was barely credited at the time, since the gay movement was predominantly white-middle-class (Eskridge Jr. 129-139). Although progress was made, the police continued to raid gay bars frequently and even had the right to close them indefinitely simply because gay people convened there. Holding hands, dancing and kissing was also prohibited with a

person of the same gender as oneself and could lead to arrest (Frank 21). Furthermore, being arrested on the grounds of homosexuality would lead to the release of a picture on the front page of the newspaper. This would not only discredit and publicly shame the offender but would have severe repercussions on the personal and professional life, since this always resulted in dismissal and loss of insurance. Unfortunately, suicides were also a too frequent consequence (Frank 10). Despite the dire legal situation, however, the gay subculture managed to thrive in the 60's as members learned to adjust to the rules.

Considering that the gay community slowly commenced the process of organisation, resistance and fighting for equality, it seems clear that gay culture, too, entered a new era of consolidation, diversification and expansion. Albeit a subculture, certain archetypes with regards to fashion and styling as well as a distinct semiotic code were observable. Hal Fischer collected them in 1977 in a photographic study in San Francisco. With regards to archetypes, the male gay culture drew, not unlike the straight culture, inspiration from sexual fantasies and prototypes and moulded their characteristics into fashion, creating a 'gay look'. The individual items forming that look have a completely neutral stance in the general culture but create a meaningful style in the male gay community. Fischer identifies 5 main archetypes: classical, natural, western, urbane and leather. Even more interesting are the semiotic codes that were created. Even though they were only observed at the onset of the 70's, it can be assumed that codes had existed even before they were identified by Fischer, since these semiotic systems were intended for identification as well as invisibility in the larger cultural frame. Gays have, in general, been ignored and eschewed by the public and scientific community, gay iconography was even less likely to gain attention. In contrast to traditional western cultures that use signs of non-accessibility, e.g. wedding rings, Fischer determined that gay culture uses signs of accessibility. Items used can vary from handkerchiefs and keys to earrings, and colours might have a signalling effect for various, sexual practices. The side of the body the item is attached to bears meaning as well: the left side of the body signals interest to exercise dominant sexual behaviour and the right side to exercise passive sexual behaviour. Thus, a broad mix of signals could be sent to those who knew how to read them. It should be kept in mind, though, that signals varied from community to community, city to city and state to state and sometimes they were just a sign of fashion and not intended to signal anything at all. This semiotic code was a subtle way to safeguard anonymity on the one hand and still being able to participate in a gay life-style on the other hand (Fischer *Gay Semiotics*).

A final and important piece in the mosaic of the historic context of 1969 is religion. As the previous section has already shown, religion has been vital for the United States since colonisation. It is also a vital part for LGBTQ people, since most Americans are being raised in an organised religious environment resulting in an internal struggle and a charged relationship with an immerging LGBTQ identity. Although acceptance and tolerance has spread through many religious communities in recent years, this cannot be verified for the 50's and 60's (Human Rights Campaign). As this section has shown, LGBTQ people were only commencing to break the wall of invisibility and abandoning the protection of anonymity. Society was only about to change, so the various teachings of the many religions could not have outpaced them. They were still upholding the dogmas they had been holding up throughout their history. Therefore, homosexuality and homosexual practices were considered acts of sodomy and as sin. John D'Emilio (18-19) points out that where medicine was constantly progressing and adapting its points of view and attitudes towards homosexuality, law and religion remained stagnant. Religious organisations rather contributed to restricting the public discussion about the topic, e.g. by branding homosexuality as a crime, that is not to be named among good Christians.

In conclusion, this section has portrayed the historic context of 1969 in the United States. LGBTQ people were shunned from mainstream public discourse, branded as sick by the field of medicine, prosecuted, harassed and humiliated by the law and its enforcing officers and proclaimed as sinners by religion. Nevertheless, the community grew stronger and adapted to the legal and societal oppression and even created a functioning subculture with distinct semiotic signs. Ultimately, LGBTQ individuals were seeking recognition and to be seen as who they were and began to stand up to their oppressors. In how far they succeeded will become evident in the next section, which discusses the historic context of 2015.

3.4. Detailed Historic Context of 2015

Similarly to the previous section, the focus of this part rests on the historic context of the second relevant time period for this thesis, namely 2015. Again, this will be achieved by discussing the general historic development, enriched with facets of legislature, culture and religion.

With the confidence obtained at the Stonewall Riots, the 1970's heralded a decade of establishing more visibility and influence for the homosexual community. The creation of the

Gay Liberation Front, as well as the *Gay Activist Alliance* indicates a more public and organised attempt to engage with lawmakers to improve the legal and social stance. Ties with the democratic party deepened in 1980, resulting in openly gay and lesbian representatives and a platform that was at least crudely acknowledging of homosexuality, but the Republicans were not as welcoming. Although progress was made during the 70s, the majority of the community remained in the safety of the closet since the general public attitude remained largely homophobic (Frank 38-60).

The 1980's were a decade of deep crisis for the LGBTQ community from which it emerged stronger and more determined than ever. The cause was the break-out of AIDS. The initially rare cases of young men dying of symptoms usually only attested to the elderly, soon became a far spreading threat. As this sickness haunted the gay community the politicians and society remained oblivious and ignorant. From 1980 to 1990, the public discussion changed completely. The initial reaction was a complete lack of public debate and gradually transformed to scare-mongering and panic. Gay gathering spots, bathhouses and other venues were closed, those who were infected lost their jobs and newspapers engaged in campaigns of extreme defamation. Some individuals, e.g. Pastor Jerry Falwell proclaimed AIDS as the judgment of God for homosexuals, while others called it the gay cancer. The even more tragic and truly fatal aspect was that the government completely ignored the issue and neither offered faster access to medicine, nor funding for disease research or offer support on any other level. This, however, forced the gay community to connect both on a local and nation-wide level. Locally, to support one another to cope with the sickness, which included socialising, knowledge exchange but, even more importantly, to care for one another as the sickness progressed and self-support became increasingly difficult. On a nation-wide level, the mission of organisations such as *ACT-UP* was to fight defamation and to force politicians to acknowledge the problem, fund research for more effective medicine and to speed up the release of the drugs. Individuals and organisations alike were literally fighting for lives (Duberman 288-295). It was not until 1990 that the general public began to not only fear those suffering from AIDS but to feel sympathy for them and that congress, finally, passed a bill that would provide immediate support and funding. This was the Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency, or CARE, Act. Although AIDS was far from defeated, the general situation improved and, albeit a high price was paid, the gay movement had become stronger: it was now extremely organised and had realised the profound disadvantage of their legal status. This paved the way for the fight for equal rights that began in the early years of the 1990's (Frank 73-74).

The further general historic developments are tightly intertwined with the legal advancements of gay equal rights. Therefore, before the legal situation of 2015 can be presented, general legal achievements should be discussed. In 1986, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Bower vs. Hardwick* that states could decide themselves whether sodomy was criminalised or not. Although many states removed sodomy laws from their penal codes, in the early 1990's more than 20 states still had not taken that step. However, 1996 marked the first time that the US Supreme Court saw the need to put LGBTQ persons under constitutional protection. With the ruling in *Romer vs. Evans* the Justices repealed Amendment 2 of the Colorado State Constitution which prohibited laws protecting homosexuals from discrimination. The final major achievement that decriminalised homosexuality and homosexual practices entirely was the ruling *Lawrence vs. Texas* in 2003. This case fought Texas' sodomy laws, which only considered homosexual practices as sodomy. The ruling in favour of Lawrence clarified that homosexuals had a right to choose to be homosexual, a right to privacy like any other citizen, their sexual practices could not be marked as crime and that the government had no right to interfere. Thus, homosexuals were no longer presumptive criminals, and sodomy laws were declared unconstitutional and effectively voided. The decision affected many other areas of legislature as well, e.g. family law (Frank 83-97).

This historic legislative development that legitimised homosexuality nationwide lay the groundwork for further progress. Skipping ahead to the current legal situation, it seems evident that much has been achieved in regards to equal rights, but it should also be noted that laws vary dramatically from region to region. Furthermore, the following will describe the legal situation as it appears on paper, which does not expel the possibility of resistance to certain laws. Due to the various areas of the law concerned, e.g. discrimination in housing, workplace or the legal status of adoption, the following figure, retrieved from *The Guardian*, shall provide an overview of the inconsistencies of the laws across the nation:

Figure 1 Gay Rights in the USA by State and Type (The Guardian US interactive team)

As state-laws are always subject to the elected executive power, they are regularly altered and adapted, especially if a change of power has taken place. Updated in June 2015, this version of the law landscape of the United States depicts, even though by now two years old, clearly varying legal conditions for LGBTQ people. Moreover, it presents a snapshot of the legal situation constituting the framework for the second book under analysis. Every state is mapped with regards to laws concerning marriage, hospital visits, adoption, employment, housing, hate crimes and schools. Legality is indicated by a strongly coloured box, illegality, no law or ambiguity is marked with an empty box, limited laws or legality are indicated by a lightly coloured box and a prohibition by a striped box. Firstly, a paradox can be observed in the figure: although, by far, not every state has enacted laws regarding all the subitems addressed in the figure, marriage, the most disputed category of all, is legal in every single state. This is due to the Supreme Court ruling on June 26th 2015, legalising gay marriage throughout the nation. This, albeit not necessarily explicitly enacted in individual state laws, affected other areas e.g. the right for hospital visitations as spouse. It is also evident that rights and protection do not extend into the housing or work domain in every state. Even though not necessarily enforced, in states such as Arkansas, North Carolina or Florida LGBTQ people can be dismissed on grounds of their sexuality. Additionally, tenancies can be terminated on

the same grounds. Again, this does not imply that these laws, or rather the lack thereof, are enforced or that it is socially acceptable to act upon them but should the situation arise, LGBTQ people are still in a disadvantageous legal position. Another observation highlighted by the chart is the regional division. Apparently, most Southeast and Midwest states implemented scarcely any LGBTQ rights and protection laws, apart from those prescribed by federal judges or the Supreme Court. If those federal decision were overturned, LGBTQ people would lose those rights, since they were not implemented separately into the constitutions and penal codes of these states. Therefore, it still matters where you live as an LGBTQ person and to

The Figure has clearly shown that tremendous progress has been made when compared to the legal situation of 2003 and, especially, when compared to the 1950's and 60's. As many states had already embraced LGBTQ rights prior to respective Supreme Court decisions, other states merely reluctantly implemented federal rulings and did not pursue further equalisation. This reluctance is highlighted when certain laws, e.g. sodomy laws, are not removed from the penal codes, even though they were ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. As reported by the New York Times, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, men were arrested for violation of Louisiana Statute prohibiting *unnatural carnal copulation*. Prior, they had discussed or agreed to have sex in private with undercover officers from the Baton Rouge community policing unit. Although prosecution was declined in each case by the District Attorney's office, this is still a sign of deliberate targeting (Robertson *After*). This shows that federal regulations can overrule individual state legislation but this merely renders certain laws ineffective and does not remove them from actual state legislation. These loopholes can be exploited for anti-LGBTQ purposes and, as the example above shows, might still lead to legally supported discrimination and harassment.

Summarising the legal development, it is evident that improvement has been achieved, resulting in a fairer and more equal legal condition for LGBTQ people in 2015. Most importantly, homosexuality has been legalised. After another 13 years, even marriage became a legal option for same-sex couples. Nevertheless, equal rights and legal protection extending into areas such as work environment, housing or hate crimes remain a privilege and reveal a regional chasm. The possibility for a still positive development of this magnitude for the LGBTQ community was only achievable because of transforming societal attitudes and changing culture.

During the 1990's, after the initial peak of the AIDS crisis, gay politics veered towards the idea to achieve equality not merely with radically fighting on the political stages of the nation but rather to change the attitudes of society in general. The numbers verify the success of this strategy, as public support for e.g. same-sex marriage grew from 27 to 53 per cent in the years 1993-2010 (Frank 87). This development was facilitated by the mainstream mass media. Exploiting the ubiquity of television, ensuring visibility and proper presentation and representation on this cultural medium seemed imperative. Based on the assumption that cultural representation constructs reality and does not merely mirror it, the reinforcement of heterosexist and heteronormative values via television had to be dispelled (Porfido 61). In his book, Ron Becker points out that up until the 1990's families and communities represented on television were exclusively heterosexual. The 90's were the turning point. Homosexual characters and plot lines became more common and between 1994 and 1997 every prime-time show had produced at least one gay-themed episode (3). Famous shows like *The Nanny*, *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, *ER*, *Law & Order* all implemented gay story lines (227-232). Peele, however, argues that most shows, e.g. *Friends*, played with homoerotic desire but did not allow it a serious moment. Although implemented, it was never allowed to seriously question or challenge mainstream heterosexual norms (2-3). As the famous example of Ellen DeGeneres shows, embracing homosexual identities on national television comes with a price. She and her character on the show *Ellen* came out in 1997. The difficulties of mainstreaming a lesbian character proved too controversial and difficult for the network and they cancelled the show one season after the outing (Reed 12-19). The turn of the millennium heralded a new era for LGBTQ representation on television with shows like *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, *Will & Grace* and *Queer as Folk*. Especially the last two centred unapologetically on the LGBTQ life in all its glory and with all its challenges. Although it sounds like a smooth success story, the progress also stirred anti-LGBTQ sentiment, resulting in what Becker considered the *straight panic* (Becker 3-4). Conservatives saw heterosexual norms under attack, unable to think outside the mental categories of heterosexual norms, aiming to uphold the social contract, which feminist theorist Monique Wittig considers to be an inherently heterosexual contract (Reed 14-15). In defiance of all criticism, television has developed further and nowadays there is barely any TV programme without an LGBTQ character or plotline.

When considering the change of the cultural landscape of today further, it becomes apparent that music plays a vital role for the LGBTQ community, too. It is important to note that music encases every aspect of human society, be it mainstream or subculture. Music has immense

power and influence due to its "capacity to construct, express, stimulate and channel sexual urges and desires" (Taylor 47). These expressed urgencies, although sometimes perceived as a threat to morale, can be found everywhere in the history of music, throughout all genres. And especially popular music, enhanced by its multimodality, e.g. music, lyrics, performances and music videos, and the icons it created, e.g. Marilyn Manson and Lady Gaga, is influencing mass culture by offering a platform to deviances from gender and sexuality norms (Taylor 47-48).

One final, modern, cultural aspect that deserves attention in this context is the change that came with the internet and social media. Websites like Facebook, YouTube, Tumblr, and dating apps like Grindr have had immense impact on LGBTQ culture and identity development. They have facilitated not only communication and self-representation but also identity experimentation, online dating, relationship development and sexual encounters. Studies in 2012 showed that about 70 per cent of American male same-sex couples met online (Blackwell, Birnholtz, and Abbot 1118). Especially LGBTQ teenagers, who are only beginning to solidify their identity, benefit from these new channels of communication and information. During various stages of self-acceptance and coming out, these websites serve many purposes ranging from initially collecting information, getting in contact with other LGBTQ teenagers, learning from role models and exchanging experiences to slowly transforming these online relationships and identity traits to the offline world. The offered protection of the online options of anonymity and control over participating or not are vital to these initial phases of identity consolidation (Fox, and Ralston 640-641). The importance of the internet and social media for the construction of the young male homosexual identity will be considered in more detail in chapter 5.

Summarising the cultural facets of the context of 2015 shows that the legal progress that had been made was accompanied by a strong increase in visibility and representation in cultural mass media such as television or music. Additionally, the spreading access to the internet expanded the community's possibilities of communication. The possibilities of anonymous experimentation, participation and information acquisition were enhanced by innovative social media websites and apps, overcoming regional boundaries and depressing isolation. Another aspect that remains to be discussed is religion, which is deeply rooted in the culture and identity of the United States of America. To complete the parameters of the socio-cultural context of 2015, the attitudes of religious denominations and organisations towards the LGBTQ community will be discussed in the following.

Due to the political and cultural change that occurred in the United States from the 1970s onwards, religious organisations and denominations were forced to address the issue of homosexuality. Surprisingly, not all religious responses contained condemnation and rejection. The Episcopal Church, for instance, began affirmative processes in the early 1970s, resulting in a resolution in 1976 proclaiming the conviction that homosexual persons were entitled to equal protection under the law and a resolution in 1998 apologising to LGBTQ identifying individuals should they have been mistreated by the church. Additionally, the Episcopal Church ordains openly out persons and blesses same-sex-relationships. The United Church of Christ has championed a similarly progressive path. Apart from these two openly affirmative Christian denominations, there are many others whose view on homosexuality can be considered ambivalent. The United Methodist Church, for instance, insists that all persons are entitled to basic human and civil rights, regardless of sexual orientation, but does not support same-sex marriage or LGBTQ-ordination, as the practice of homosexuality is not compatible with Christian teaching. To underline their view on the civil and human rights for all persons, they encourage their members to sign petitions or vote to veto laws that would restrict these rights. Other examples for ambivalent relationships or partial acceptance are the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. or the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Generally, they advocate for equality before the law but could not agree on or define clear guidelines with regards to homosexuality, resulting in carefully hedged language use. Many other evangelical Christian or Christian groups, such as the Southern Baptist Convention or Jehova's Witnesses, have a long history of condemnation and rejection of homosexuality, therefore, opposing homosexual practices as well as ordination and unions. The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints present special cases. Both denominations differentiate between homosexual tendencies and practices. While practices are deemed unacceptable, tendencies are considered a trial imposed on the individual. Therefore, these denominations call on homosexual persons to live in chastity (Fuist, Stoll, and Kniss 72-79).

Similarly, other faith positions, apart from Christianity, differ again. In Judaism, the conservative, the Reconstructionist and Reform branches demonstrate, to varying degrees, tolerant and welcoming attitudes towards LGBTQ people and causes, whereas the orthodox branch still considers homosexuality a biblical crime. However, even within these branches, individual rabbis may lead a different path and, thus, experiences may vary. Islam, in general, rejects and opposes homosexuality (Human Rights Campaign). This overview highlights the strongly differing degrees of acceptance and support offered by different denominations or the differences even within one denomination itself, when no consensus can be achieved.

Altogether, this brief overview of various faith positions on LGBTQ issues shows that attitudes vary significantly but, also, that the situation has improved greatly in comparison to the 1960s. Many denominations have adopted an accepting attitude towards its LGBTQ members, some even actively promoting and supporting their causes. Other denominations have at least begun the process of discussion. The fact that many denominations are in a state of ambiguity signals that there are said process of discussion, which can be considered as positive, for this prevents them from statements of condemnation or at least encourages them to treat the subject and individuals with more care and respect. Of course, even if the situation has improved overall, many denominations may still vary regionally and from congregation to congregation. However, every single positive change is important in a cultural context where many adults were raised and socialised in religious communities, which are important for identity construction, with devastating effects if individuals are ousted from the environment that constitutes a major part of their social life and identity.

Although complete equal rights have not yet been achieved and conservative resistance constantly attempts to revoke or undermine already gained rights, this section clearly showed that the socio-cultural context of 2015 is a vast improvement when compared to 1969. It was a hard fight that demanded many sacrifices, spanning from invisibility through the peak of the AIDS crisis to the nationwide abolishment of sodomy laws. The result is a better present for LGBTQ people. Same-sex marriage was legalised nationwide, public opinion and mainstream culture have a more accepting attitude towards LGBTQ persons and issues, and even some religious denominations offer sanctuary and a religious community to those who seek it. Having established the socio-cultural contexts that impact strongly on LGBTQ people, the next chapter will explore how (homosexual) identities are generally constructed.

4. Construction of Young Adult Homosexual Identity

This chapter will explore the concept of 'identity'. The following sections will present an overview of the approach this thesis takes towards identity construction and continue with the construction and significant aspects of a young adult, homosexual identity.

4.1. Construction of Identity and Sexual Identity

The concept of 'identity' has attracted the attention of various scientific disciplines. Each discipline, e.g. philosophy, psychology and sociology, approaches this concept from a field-specific angle and focuses on significant facets related to their scientific interest. This thesis will build upon the understanding of 'identity' from the view of postmodern and poststructuralist theorists. In this tradition 'identity' is not a stable unit of being but rather a compound of culturally regulated, socially constructed and constantly changing identities. Deriving from Foucault and Derrida, this approach believes that the body is real but meanings, such as sexuality, are discursively produced and ascribed. These attributions of meaning are influenced by historical and socio-cultural contexts and their prevalent signs and language. As language structures thought processes, these contexts and their dominant language define what people think, how they think and, ultimately, how they can act. This aligns with Butler's concept of 'performativity' which means the reiteration of a dominant set of norms. These norms are, in turn, disguised by the performance and the act appears as normal. Despite the complexity of the concept of 'identity', individuals rarely question their perceived cohesive sense of self, even though a different version of self is performed in various social discourses and settings (Wickens *Queering Young Adult* 15-19).

The active construction of identity, and especially sexual identity, is an important aspect of the social constructionist viewpoint. Their stance can be summarised as follows:

> The social constructionist viewpoint is unique in its assertion that people actively construct their identities and perceptions and use their social context to do so. [...] [S]exual identity is constructed and maintained through the process of social interaction in specific social and his-torical context. A person's identity is socially created, bestowed, and main-tained [...], and the sexual identity develops within this framework. (Horowitz, and Newcomb 10-11)

This approach ascertains the complexity of sexual identity and that sexual orientation is influenced by the interaction of many factors. It is further important how the individual, but also society, evaluates these factors and how they are experienced. The social constructionist view believes that changes in sexual identities are possible, due to the given complexity. They empower the individual by ascribing them a more active role in arriving at a healthy sexual identity. Due to the complexity of sexual identity, and because socially constructed labels may not be fitting for every individual, the social constructionists separate desire, behaviour and identity (Horowitz, and Newcomb 11-17). This allows for a more distinguished differentiation

as it considers "fluidity in sexual identity to occur over time in re- sponse to interactions with ever-changing social structures, life events, and self-constructs" (Horowitz, and Newcomb 17).

Another post-structural discursive framework is to regard identities as narratively defined. That implies that identities are not in the stories that are told but are the stories themselves. These stories about oneself are told by individuals to themselves, other individuals or groups. They are stronger the more often they are repeated and, thus, are cemented as truth about oneself. The socio-cultural context governs what stories can be told, should be told or are not allowed to be told. Consequently, this prescriptive context evaluates 'good' and 'bad' and defines how to be and how not to be. The aspect of not-telling, in fact silencing, is especially relevant for homosexuality (Wickens *Queering Young Adult* 17-18).

Altogether, this thesis' sees identity, sexuality included, as constructed in discursive and socially regulated contexts. These contexts dictate norms, influencing what people can think, say and ultimately do. Furthermore, sexual identity can be separated into desire, behaviour and identity to allow a more fluid definition of sexual identity and, in the case of this thesis, homosexual identity. Various views on the development and significant aspects of homosexual and young adult identities are discussed in the next section.

4.2. Young Adult and Homosexual Identity

Young adult identity is closely related to adolescence. Adolescence is, basically, a time of change and confusion, as identity formation is a key developmental part of it. Teenagers engage in a cycle of constant re-evaluation of childhood identifications, which are replaced by self-defined commitments. These commitments might, in turn, become subject to multiple re-evaluation process, until a satisfying set of commitments is established. These are day to day processes and are significantly influenced by the individual's social context (Klimstra 80-82). Peer influence and friendships also impact strongly on the identity formation process. As autonomy increases, so does the time teenagers spend with their peers. Thus, expectations and opinions of peers increase in value. Close friends have even greater influence, being co-conspirator, mirror, confidante and accepting audience in one. Altogether, these social contacts influence choices of exploration and commitment and, thus, identity formation processes (Jones et al. 54).

When it comes to the formation of a homosexual identity it is necessary to clarify that this process is fundamentally different from other developmental processes. It is a distinct process of change, since children and young adults are socialised with the ideal heterosexual image and are presumed to be heterosexual. Furthermore, the realisation of one's sexuality is a personal and private process which "means that negative concepts often remain un-defended against the excesses of social stigma and prejudice" (Rowen, and Malcolm 79). Several scientists, amongst them Cass (*Homosexual*), Coleman (*Developmental*) and Troiden (*The Formation*), have created various developmental stage models of homosexual identity formation and coming out processes. Although this thesis rather agrees with critical voices on these models and, as has been clarified in the section above, champions a discursive and situational identity formation process, it is still of merit to understand these models, as their findings might enrich this study. Although the models differ to certain degrees on public identity disclosure and number of stages, they display many similarities as the following visual summary shows:
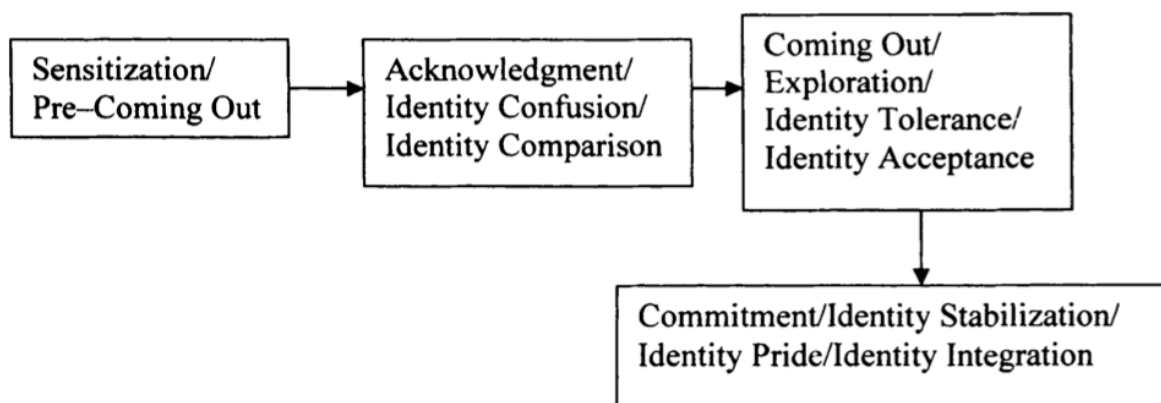
Figure 2 Summary of Stage Models of Gay/Lesbian Identity (Kaufman, and Johnson 827)

The various models develop homosexual identity in four to six stages but they all share the above shown similarities. The initial phase a growing awareness and ultimate acceptance of possibly labelling oneself as homosexual. This acceptance of possibility will lead to a stage of confusion, which encourages identity comparison. Role models facilitate the completion and success of this stage. These aspects should culminate in a sense of acceptance and a positive attitude towards this new identity, transcending the individual to the next stage. In this stage, the individual might want to experiment, and experience a growing desire to disclose the new identity. Finally, a stable and healthy synthesis of the homosexual identity and the concept of

self is reached (Rowen, and Malcolm 78-79). Although this thesis does not build on this linear approach, the various stages reflect important issues for an emerging homosexual identity, such as confusion, self-acceptance, experimentation, pride and coming out.

Further important issues for an emerging homosexual identity are internalised homophobia and stigma-management. Internalised homophobia means the frequent development of negative self-conceptions due to societally regulated, personal and institutional negative attitudes towards homosexuality. Homophobia is not the fear of homosexuality, as the term would suggest, but denotes general negative views on it. To achieve a synthesis of sexual behaviour and self-acceptance, the individual needs to overcome these culturally learned negative attitudes (Rowen, and Malcolm 79-80). Depending on the socio-cultural context of an individual, their sexuality might be stigmatised to a certain degree, resulting in the need for stigma-management. If the stigma is already publicly known, stigma-management usually focuses on managing tensions in interactions. If the stigma is not publicly known, individuals tend to focus on information management. In correlation with internalised homophobia, identity work is necessary to develop a positive attitude towards oneself and the socio-culturally created stigma. The contact with other, similarly stigmatised individuals is of great value to achieve this positive attitude. Additionally, some individuals will attempt to fake 'normalcy' to fit into the dominant group. Depending on the social situation, the degree of adaption may vary (Kaufman, and Johnson 812-814).

A certain degree of relief to these issues is offered by the technological advancements of the 21st century and the opportunities offered by the online-world. They have completely transformed the processes of identity experimentation and formation, especially for teenagers. As more than 90% of American teenagers use the internet and, thus, access the provided new media opportunities, these new channels of communication and interaction have a strong impact on identity formation. On these new media platforms, e.g. Tumblr, Youtube and Facebook, teenagers have the chance to inform themselves, exchange experiences and experiment with their identity. These opportunities might not be present in their offline, physical reality. Albeit bearing the risks of an online presence in mind, these online spaces, and the high degree of anonymity, provide a safe haven and can help to develop a positive LGBTQ identity. Online and offline do not represent completely separated spheres but influence each other strongly. The coming out in the real world, for instance, might be facilitated if the individual has already experienced the coming out in the offline world. The internet serves as a test run and coming out experiences from peers are also described as

helpful. Research suggests that 21st century teenagers form complete LGBTQ identities online and, when they are ready, transfer it the offline world (Craig, and McInroy 95-105).

In everyday life, individuals scarcely question the way identities are constructed or performed. Hence, it can be assumed that most readers of LGBTQ young adult literature do not question the construction of identities within these novels, either. In order for this thesis to answer precisely this often-avoided question, it is imperative to understand the genre of young adult literature itself. The next chapter offers an overview of the genre and its LGBTQ subgenre.

5. The Genre: Young Adult literature

To achieve a proper understanding of the two novels in question it is important to link them not only to their socio-cultural contexts but to their positioning within the genre of young adult literature as well. This requires a brief overview of what young adult literature is, how it developed, especially the relevant subgenre of LGBTQ young adult literature, and the limitations that are imposed on it by publishers and censorship.

Altogether, it is quite difficult to arrive at a universal understanding of what this specific genre comprises, since this depends greatly on how adolescence and childhood are perceived. Furthermore, the subject matter is complicated, uncomfortable and constantly changing, as Karen Coats (325) observes:

> […] adolescence is a threshold condition, a liminal state that is fraught with angst, drama and change anxiety. The burden of adolescent literature has always been to achieve synchronicity with the concerns of an audience that is defined by its state of flux and impermanence. Adolescence is a phase someone goes through. […] And this is an added dimension […] – its status in culture undergoes change as well.

On the one hand, this statement emphasises the difficult nature of the subject matter, as it is, in fact, change and new frontiers. On the other hand, it highlights the importance of contextualisation, the precise aim not only of this chapter but this thesis in general.

Michael Cart ascribes the genre incredible value as it supports teenagers in the challenging times of adolescence. The value derives from the literature's relevance to the lives of its readers who can see themselves reflected in the stories and realise that they are not alone. These books also broaden their reader's personal horizon, burst the bubble and may foster

understanding, empathy or compassion for people who are not like the reader (Cart *Young Adult*).

Continuing with an outline of the genre, the basic facets of audience, purpose and opportunity need to be addressed. The primary audience are teenagers and the themes of the literature usually reflect issues that concern teenagers e.g. friendship, love, conflicts and struggle with everyday situations. However, it is less about the adolescence of the reader, but the adolescence of the character in the books that is the important characteristic. It is assumed that teenagers would like to read about other teenagers, their problems and how they cope with them. Sometimes it is merely about fun and reading about what one would like to do, if it was only possible. The endeavour to attract the attention of teenagers, competing with various other media-elements, without exposing them to content that is deemed too explicit or adult, bears the danger of simply mirroring society and its moral code without questioning it (Eccleshare 542). Nevertheless, contemporary young adult fiction has the opportunity to reflect societal issues swiftly and, thus, "make moral, social and cultural problems both accessible and urgent" (Coats 318). The easiest way for a preliminary understanding of the genre and what it encompasses is to look at its historical development, which will be presented in the following.

5.1. History, Development and Censorship of Young Adult Literature and the LGBTQ Subgenre

First, this section will present a general overview of the historical development of Young Adult Literature. Second, the development and key aspects of the LGBTQ subgenre will be highlighted. This overview, as well as the data and statistics it comprises, can no longer exclusively refer to US publications. It addresses the overall development in the North-American and British context, albeit it is clearly dominated by US contributions.

Referring to the genre in general, Michael Cart describes it as a restless, dynamic and risk-taking art that remained, at its core, a literature of contemporary realism, although it has embraced many other genres as well. He traces its origins back to the 1930's and the Great Depression, when unemployment drove young people to schools where they formed a youth culture and, thus, emerged the target audience. The term 'young adult' was coined in 1944 by Margret Scoggin but it was not commonly used until the 1950's. The first work that is by some researchers considered the first young adult novel is Maureen Daly's *Seventeenth*

Summer, published in 1942. However, it was published as an adult novel. Its success with teenagers prompted others to write specifically for teenagers, so-called 'junior novels', but they did not relate to the real lives of young adults at all. The publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsider* and Robert Lipsyte's *The Contender* in the early 1960's changed that and born was a hard-edged and realistic fiction that became known as young adult literature (Cart *Young Adult*). These novels did not feature idealised characters, they adapted their language and used slang to mirror speech acts of contemporary youth and did not necessarily end happily (Jenkins *Young Adult* 147).

The 1970's can be considered the Golden Age of this genre. However, these single-issue problem novels were mostly concerned with a current problem and treated the issue in a rather one-dimensional and flat fashion. The 1980's rejected this notion and turned to romance. In the early 1990' the genre was at the brink of extinction but pivoted back in the last moment and began to bloom again. This was largely due to growing recognition the of retail market, creating stand-alone young adult departments, the inclusion of young adult books in high-school classrooms and a growing teen population. The literature of this time also revived the 1970's problem novel but with enriched stories and complex characters, artful settings and a style of well-informed naturalism. As more publishers created separate young adult divisions, publications and sales skyrocketed in the new millennium. It was this era that gave birth to massive commercial successes such as *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games* and *Twilight*. Overall, the content has become more sophisticated and aims at addressing a broader definition of young adult, with books published for 10 year olds as well as 22 year olds and above. Overall, the market is expanding and sales' figures keep increasing. When looking at statistics it can be observed that, nowadays, 5 to 6000 young adult novels are published every year. 25 years ago, a strong year saw approximately 250 novels published (Cart *Young Adult*).

In comparison, since the publication of the first LGBTQ young adult novel in 1969, the growth rate of the subgenre has been much slower, albeit steadily increasing. From 1969 to 1984 thirty-one titles with gay or lesbian content were published. From 1985 to 1992 thirty titles were released and from 1993 to 1997 thirty-eight. For these three initial phases, the given publishing numbers accumulate to 1.9 titles per year in the first sixteen years, 3.75 titles per year in the following eight years and 7.6 titles per year in the final four years (Jenkins *From Queer to* 301). The 21st century witnessed a sharp increase in publications with LGBTQ pointing towards a growing accepting and interested readership. However, as positive as this

development may be, the LGBTQ literature is still only a marginal part of the overall young adult literature published annually, as the following graph shows:

Year	Books with LGBTQ characters	Percent of YA books published
2010	11	0.28
2011	25	0.63
2012	34	0.85
2013	29	0.73
2014	47	1.18

Figure 3 Number of LGBTQ Books Published Annually (Jiménez 407)

With regards to content and characters, Michael Cart (*Honoring Their Stories*) observes that, in the first few published novels, the gay main characters or someone close to him/her always meets an untimely death. *Annie On My Mind,* in 1982, was the first novel to suggest that homosexual characters are not doomed to die and can have a happy ending. The 1990's were the decade that increased the material of non-fiction made available to LGBTQ young adults, telling real-life stories of real people. In addition to Cart's observations, Jenkins (*From Queer to* 300) notes that the majority of titles published reinforce social stereotypes. Whereas the reinforcement of stereotypes is rather unsurprising, in her exhaustive study of LGBTQ young adult literature from 1969 to 1997, Jenkins notices two very interesting developments within the subgenre. The first observed development regards the representation of gender and is portrayed in the graph below:
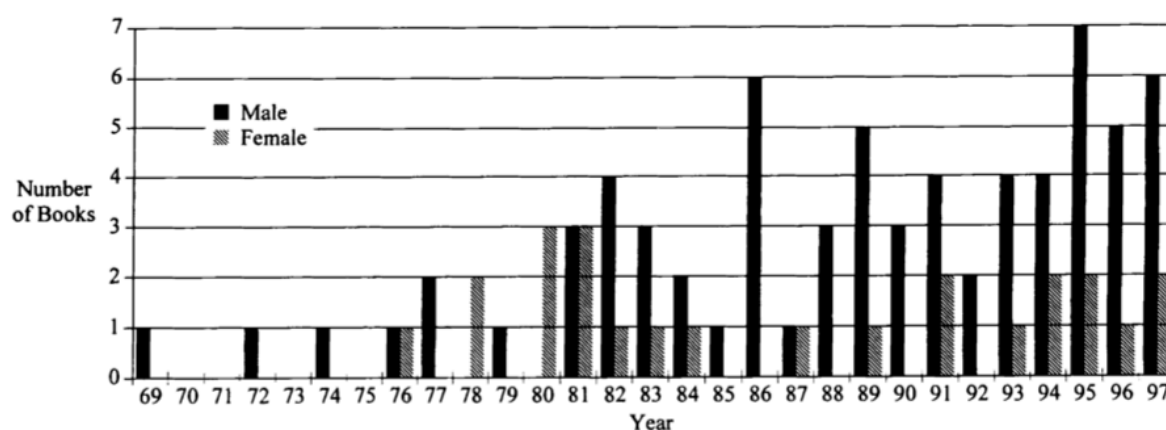

Figure 4 Gender of Character in Novels with Gay/Lesbian Issue/Identity (Jenkins *From Queer to* 303)

As the graph clearly shows, male representation dominates the genre. This implies that, although stories of female homosexuality are present, women have to fight an uphill battle on two fronts: sexuality and gender. Recent years improved the situation to some extent, as there is more material available in general, but, as Jiménez (412-416) confirms, the representation of male characters and male homosexuality still clearly dominates. A similar problem can be observed with ethnicity and social status. The characters portrayed in young adult and LGBTQ young adult literature are primarily male, white and middle class. However, current literature is slowly expanding and features the first trans, intersex and genderfluid characters and also includes bisexuality (Cart *Young Adult*). Nevertheless, the spectrum of social and ethnical backgrounds, as well as the spectrum of gender and sexual identifications, is still underdeveloped in the genre.

The second development observed by Jenkins, is an increase in narrative distance. While the first decade of LGBTQ young adult literature centred on a homosexual protagonist, struggling with his or her sexual orientation, the 80's initiated a time of homosexuality being viewed through heteronormative lenses, as gay characters became secondary characters, e.g. relatives and teachers of the heterosexual protagonist. This development becomes strikingly evident in the following graph:
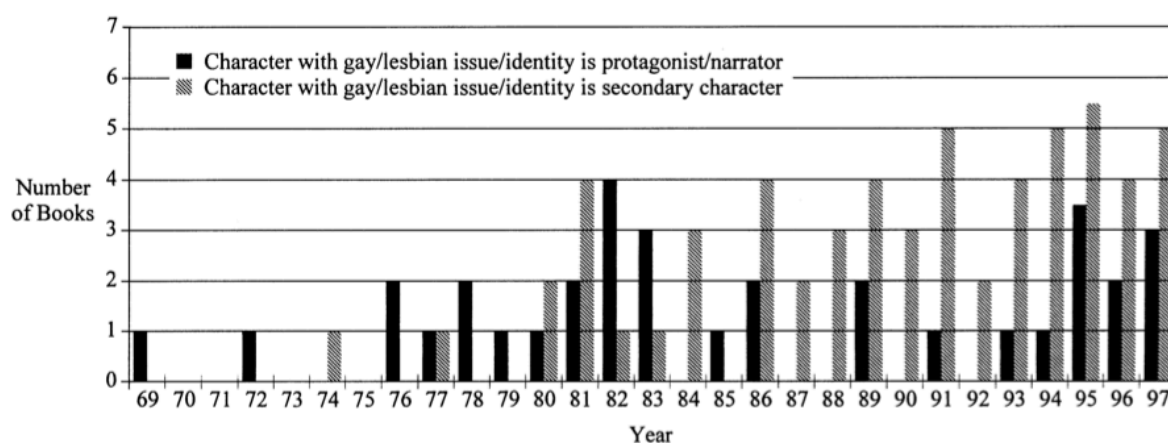
Figure 5 Role of Character in Novel with Gay/Lesbian Issue/Identity (Jenkins *From Queer to* 304)

The graph shows that, from the early 80's to the late 90's, young adults were not offered a protagonist's insight into the LGBTQ world, but had to experience it via a heterosexual protagonist, coming to terms with the homosexuality of a character close to him or her. When observing currently published literature, this trend seems to have somewhat reversed again or,

at least reached an equilibrium, probably depending on theme and intended message of the book.

In combination, these observations show, on the one hand, that LGBTQ young adult literature struggles with issues of diversity within itself and, on the other hand, struggles with the way of portraying homosexuality. The latter aspect is additionally complicated through the matter of censorship.

Prior to contextualising the impact of censorship on LGBTQ young adult literature, it is important to define the term. "Censorship is when a person or group successfully imposes their values upon others by stifling words, images, or ideas and preventing them from reaching the public marketplace of ideas" (Auguste 5). Certain ideas or stories might be blocked or forced to be changed by publishers, prior to publishing. Once a book is released, a method of censorship is to deny a book's target audience access to it. The official ways to deny access to books are twofold: challenging or banning books. A book challenge is an attempt to remove or restrict a book in question. It is initiated by a request forwarded by an individual or a group. A book ban is the actual removal of the book in question from libraries. Other ways to censor the reading material offered to young adults would be to deny diversity and hence the necessity certain books, to restrict them to adult sections in the library or to deny purchase for alleged lacked shelf-space (Auguste 5).

Young adult books are the most frequently challenged books on the market. Challenges and bans have increased and intensified over the years. As has been shown above, the early years of the genre observed a transformation towards new realism. As it pushed the boundaries of acceptable content for reading materials the genre stirred criticism and protests, evoking intense censorship efforts. The reasons for book challenges, bans and censorship are manifold. To name merely the highest-ranking reasons, most books are challenged because of violence, offensive language, being considered unsuited for the age group, sexual explicitness and homosexuality. The American Library Association, in its endeavour to inform about and limit censorship, collects information about book challenges and book bans. Between 1990 and 2010 892 books, not exclusively young adult literature, were challenged for the reason of portrayed homosexuality (Auguste 2-7). It can be assumed that the writing and publishing process is directly influenced by the pressure of censorship exerted on already published works. On the one hand, as was discussed above, appreciation for the overall genre amongst publishers increased only at the end of the 1990's but they will still exercise caution to publish sensitive materials or controversial topics, especially when LGBTQ issues are

concerned. On the other hand, writers who wish to be published or seek commercial success might exercise more caution and less prudence in terms of formulation, style and content.

This theoretical background on the genre raises certain expectations for the novels in question and their respective contexts of 1969 and 2015. The 1969 novel is expected to focus strongly on a problem and less on the fiction. Furthermore, the characters are not expected to reflect multiple facets of homosexual identity or to be ethnically or socially diverse. Lastly, by convention of the genre and existing censorship pressure, a happy ending or positive promotion of homosexuality cannot be expected. On the other hand, the novel published in 2015 is less predictable. It can be expected to have a well-rounded story with multiple facets and multi-faceted characters. The issue of missing diversity might, however, endure. In how far the fear of censorship might affect the novel cannot be assumed by the context of its time. Nevertheless, as the boundaries have already been pushed very far and in various directions, anything from sex to foul language, violence and abuse might appear.

This chapter completes the relevant theoretical overview of socio-cultural contextualisation, identity formation and genre information. The next chapter presents the applied methodological framework for this study.

6. Methodology

The preceding chapters lay the theoretical foundation on which the analysis of the books *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* and *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* is based. This chapter will explain the methodology that is applied to answer both research questions. The first research question, how young adult homosexual identity is constructed, will be answered with the help of narratology and Critical Discourse Analysis. Originating from this basis, the focus will be broadened via Critical Discourse Analysis to ensure an answer to the second research question, the novels' respective historic and socio-cultural contextualisation. As this thesis operates from the perspective of Queer Theory the results will dismantle various power relations and whether the books under scrutiny complied to or opposed various societal limitations. The necessary concepts of Queer Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and Narratology will be introduced in the following sections of this chapter.

6.1. Queer Theory

Queer Theory can be considered an umbrella term for a broad variety of often heterogeneous scientific approaches. They are unified by their critical focus on heteronormativity which portrays specific forms of heterosexuality as preferable and normal. Its development is rooted in the gay and lesbian movements of the 70's and 80's and activists' growing doubt about the existence of a general, generic and coherent gay or lesbian subject. Without such a coherent subject, however, political agency and research was increasingly difficult. The perceived insufficient achievement of activists on the frontier of deconstruction led to the proper establishment of Queer Theory. Its proclaimed goal is to de-construct or blur powerful conceptions, usually operating in binaries, most prominently male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Queer Theory not only aims at de-constructing existing categories and conceptions but attempts to do so without creating new confining categories, or at least not exhaustively defined ones. Furthermore, it views these conceptions as discursively constructed and does not exclusively observe 'gay' and 'lesbian' sexualities but includes perspectives on heterosexuality construction as well (Motschenbacher, and Stegu 519-521). Its overall approach can be summarised as follows:

> What makes Queer Theory [...] distinct across the spectrum of critical academic paradigms is the fact that the realm of sexuality is used as a starting point for its questioning practice. A long-term goal of Queer Theory is the reconceptuali-sation [sic!] of dominant discourses which shape our understanding of gender and sexuality, often to the detriment of people who, for various reasons, are judged as not meeting the heteronormative ideal. Although the widely used singular form *Queer Theory* suggests a certain degree of internal homogeneity, the affinity of Queer Theory to postmodernist, and in particular poststructuralist, thinking prohibits a monolithic reading and results in a (deliberately) pluralistic conceptualisation. (Motschenbacher, and Stegu 520)

This summary further reveals that Queer Theory analyses the dominant discourse and applies *queer* readings or attitudes to it from a marginalised perspective. The result of this process is the exposure of power relations and its effects. The achievement of this goal allows or even requires a plurality of methods, conceptualisations and approaches. It is, however, of utmost importance to remain highly critical of oneself, as well as the applied concepts and methods, to prevent substitution of one supressing conceptualisation or power-construction with another.

6.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) operates in wonderful harmony with Queer Theory. CDA's precise aim is not to merely analyse discourse but to be critical of it and its underlying structures of power. Hillary Janks summarises CDA as follows:

> Critical discourse analysis (CDA) stems from a critical theory of language which sees the use of language as a form of social practice. All social practices are tied to specific historical contexts and are the means by which existing social relations are reproduced or contested and different interests are served. It is the questions pertaining to interests that relate discourse to relations of power. How is the text positioned or positioning? Whose interests are served by this positioning? Whose interests are negated? What are the consequences of this positioning? Where analysis seeks to understand how discourse is implicated in relations of power it is called critical discourse analysis. (329)

By applying a critical analysis to discourses, power relations and its beneficiaries and disadvantaged are revealed. However, there are many ways to do discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. This thesis will follow the conceptions of Norman Fairclough (2-3) of CDA. His approach tends to reconcile research that focuses more on linguistic features with research that focuses on social-theoretical issues. Fairclough uses the term 'text' in a very broad sense, generally meaning all language in use. His interpretation does not exclusively consist of linguistic features since pictures and music are frequently used in relation with some texts, e.g. television advertisements or newspaper articles. The term 'discourse' is even less universally agreed on, as Wickens (*The Investigation of* 152) points out. Linguistically construed, 'discourse' means everything related to dialogue. James Gee includes behaviour, thinking, valuing and believing, whereas Foucault sees it as a structural frame providing a possibility of statements in a specific context, on a specific topic, in a specific manner depending on the established network of power. Fairclough (3-4) uses the term much in the way he defines CDA in general, as language in use and as an element of social life interconnected with its many facets. Therefore, discourse should never be observed from only a linguistic point of view or a social research point of view. It rather comprises of different dimensions that are connected. Fairclough's approach to CDA and the interconnectedness of the dimensions becomes most apparent in the following graph:
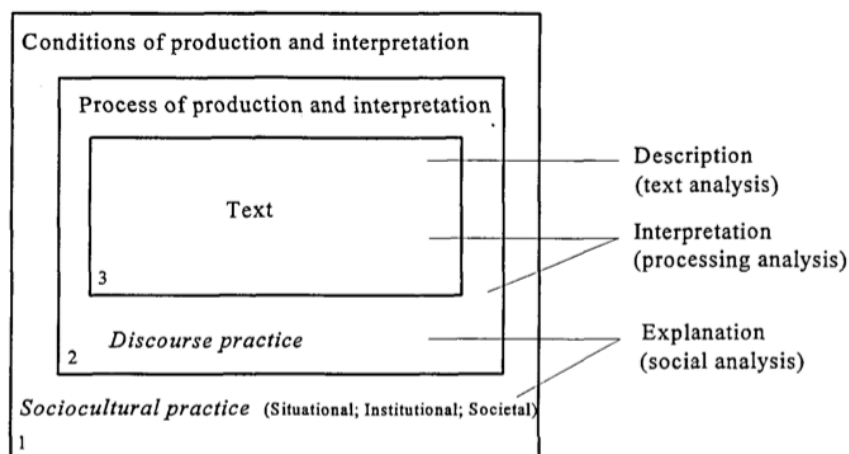
```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Conditions of production and interpretation     │
│  ┌──────────────────────────────────────────┐   │
│  │ Process of production and interpretation  │   │
│  │  ┌────────────────────────────────┐       │   │── Description
│  │  │                                │       │   │   (text analysis)
│  │  │           Text                 │       │   │
│  │  │                                │       │   │── Interpretation
│  │  │ 3                              │       │   │   (processing analysis)
│  │  └────────────────────────────────┘       │   │
│  │                                           │   │── Explanation
│  │  Discourse practice                       │   │   (social analysis)
│  │ 2                                         │   │
│  └──────────────────────────────────────────┘   │
│ Sociocultural practice (Situational; Institutional; Societal) │
│ 1                                               │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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Figure 6 Fairclough's Dimension of Discourse and Discourse Analysis (Jank 330)

The source text itself and its textual analysis is the basic dimension. How the text was produced and received is the second dimension and requires interpretation. The final dimension creates the connection to the socio-cultural contexts and exposes power-relations. Albeit important, the second dimension will be merely marginally addressed in this thesis' analysis since the answers to the research questions at hand are mainly found in the dimensions one and three.

A focus on lexical choices and agency with regards to homosexuality will serve to partially answer both research questions. Given that the 'texts' under scrutiny are novels, the method of analysis for the textual and, therefore, core dimension will be narratology.

6.3. Narratology

To perform a literary analysis of the two novels, this thesis will draw on the theoretical background of narratology; the theory of the structure of narratives (Jahn N2.1.1.). Apart from a general analysis, the relevant aspects of narratology for this thesis' inquisitive focus are narration (voice), focalisation (mood), narrative modes, character analysis and characterisation. These aspects will be briefly defined below.

Jahn (N3.1.-N3.1.10.) defines narration (voice) as concerned with identifying the narrating voice. It is the narrating agency that manages what is being told, or not, and in what manner. Narrators may be either overt or covert and are either present in the story (homodiegetic) or not (heterodiegetic).

Focalisation (mood) restricts narrative information. It presents the story as looked at from a specific point of view. The focaliser is the agent functioning as the centre of perspectival orientation. There may be more than one focaliser throughout the text. Focalisation may be external or internal and can create a certain view on the focaliser (Jahn N3.2.-N3.2.5.).

Narrative modes comprise the analysis of the ways in which stories are presented. A primary distinction must be made between 'showing' and 'telling'. In a showing mode of presentation, the reader is basically a direct witness to events and there is barely any mediation or overt narratorial presence. Telling, on the other hand, leaves the narrator firmly in control of the overall setting and presentation. The two major narrative modes are the scenic presentation, a showing mode featuring a continuous stream of the unfolding events, and the summary, a telling mode featuring a condensed and structured version of events. These are complimented by two minor narrative modes: description and comment (Jahn N5.3.-N5.3.2.).

Character analysis and characterisation focus on how characters are introduced to the reader and how they are described by other characters or themselves. Additionally, this allows for assessment of narrator-reliability and flatness or well-roundedness of characters (Jahn N7.-N7.9.)

The focus on these aspects of narratology will yield important results with regards to the first research question. The juxtaposition of all findings, including those for the first research question, with the socio-cultural contexts presented in chapter 3 will raise the analysis to the final dimension and answer the second research question.

7. Analysis

This chapter will present and exemplify the results of the conducted analysis. Each novel will be introduced by a short synopsis, then each research question is addressed individually.

7.1. I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip.

This novel, published in 1969, tells the story of thirteen-year-old Davy Ross. Since he was five years old, he had lived with his grandmother in Boston and only had scarce contact with his divorced parents. His best friend and companion is his Dachshund Fred. The story begins with the funeral of Davy's grandmother. After her death, it is decided that he will move to

New York to live with his alcoholic mother. In his new school, Davy befriends Altschuler. They become close friends and, one afternoon, they kiss. Although confused, this does not remain the only occasion they share a kiss. Eventually, Davy's mother finds them asleep on the living room floor, innocently entangled. However, this incident reveals that Altschuler and Davy have been making out frequently, which initiates a series of events that, eventually, lead to Fred being run over by a car. Davy is severely traumatised, feels guilty, and does not want to see Altschuler again. In the end, they become friends once more and agree that they can 'respect' each other.

7.1.1. Research Question 1

In this novel, the reader encounters two young adult homosexual characters: Davy and Altschuler. With regards to identity construction, more information on Davy than Altschuler is extractable from the text, since he is the protagonist of this book. Therefore, the focus of this analysis lies with Davy. Altschuler's identity will be addressed at the end of this section. Information on Davy's identity construction can be found mainly in the interactions and conversations in the second half of the book. His identity is in a constant process of change: First, he realises his homosexual desire and starts experimenting with homosexual behaviour, but with a rather positive attitude. Second, he feels guilty for the death of his dog Fred and rejects the aforementioned desire and behaviour. Ultimately, his state of identity is left with great ambiguity and room for interpretation.

As 'voice' plays only a minor role to the processes of identity construction in this book, it is only briefly discussed in this paragraph. The story is told from Davy's perspective. An autodiegetic voice is used and Davy is an overt narrator and the sole focaliser. As the reader experiences the novel exclusively from Davy's perspective, which results in selected and filtered information about certain situations and characters, he is an unreliable narrator. A technique often employed is the narrative report of discourse. Conversations are rarely completely described in direct speech acts but often cut short by Davy's summary of what had been said.

Davy provides only limited information about himself. He barely describes himself and the information that is provided is always given rather late. A description of his thoughts and emotions with regards to himself are also scarce. He is, however, keen on describing other characters and his opinions on them.

Typical for a young adult identity, and especially a homosexual identity, the reader encounters Davy in a constant state of change and confusion. After becoming friends with Altschuler, and their intense collaboration on a school project, the looming change becomes apparent in a dream. The dream sequence appears in the middle of the book and begins with a feeling of familiarity, as Davy walks Fred on a beach close to where is grandmother lived. Then, change sets in:

> But after a while, as the beach got longer and longer and less the beach I knew but some other beach, the beach, the one that rims the beautiful ocean that people think about, the one without seaweed and jellyfish, poor Fred wasn't in the picture anymore. I was. Just me. […] I took off my clothes in the dream and then ran along the beach. I ran along the very rim of the tide, and it became windy and the sand blew all over me. I threw myself on the beach because the sand began to sting me as it blew against my body. […] I only knew that I didn't have what I needed to go on, to do anything. […] I think the wind stopped. […] I did get up, and I did walk back, and Fred did trot into the picture I was dreaming about, and the beach did get smaller, and I must have found my clothes, and it all came out OK in the end. (120-121)

The dream shows that Davy is about to enter unknown territory. Approaching this new destination means to leave behind everything that is familiar to him, including his best friend Fred. Furthermore, the wind represents the hardships that need to be overcome if Davy wants to reach this destination. The dream reveals that he is not ready for this change to happen, since he decides to return to the familiar part of the beach and Fred. In the dream, Davy consciously denies the change. In his real life, the intimacy between Altschuler and him increases and change happens nonetheless.

Various aspects might be considered as a hint towards a steadily developing sexual desire between Davy and Altschuler. First, the way Altschuler immediately stands out at their first encounter. He is the only classmate who does not take notice of him, even ignores him, when Davy is introduced. Second, the extensive description of Davy's intimate relationship with Fred is gradually replaced by descriptions of his relationship with Altschuler. Third, the dream sequence, triggered by their close collaboration. The moment they first kiss still comes as a surprise. It happens after they playfully chased Fred around Davy's apartment and lie down on the floor:

> I close my eyes. I feel unusual. Lying there. Close to Altschuler. I don't want to get up. I want to stay lying there. I feel a slight shiver and shake from it. Not cold though. Unusual. So I open my eyes. Altschuler is still lying there too. He looks at me

peculiarly, and I'm sure I look at him the same way. Suddenly Fred jumps in between us. First he licks my face, then Altschuler's, and back and forth between us. I think that this unusual feeling I have will end, but in a minute the three of us are lying there, our heads together. I guess I kiss Altschuler and he kisses me. It isn't like the dumb kiss I gave Mary Lou Gerrity in Massachusetts before I left. It just happens. And when it stops we sit up and turn away from each other. Fred has trotted off, maybe tired of both of us by now. (149-150)

This is one of the moments where Davy describes in more detail how he feels, although he cannot precisely define his feelings and uses the word 'unusual'. Arguably, this appears to be the proper word to use for a teenager experiencing romantic feelings and physical desire for the first time. It is a rather neutral word and does not judge the ensuing situation in advance. The description of the kiss is short, almost casual, and lacks the emotional description applied in the preceding lines. Furthermore, it is directly compared to a kiss Davy shared with a girl at the beginning of the book. In this comparison, he seemingly ascribes the kiss with Altschuler a better quality and another level of seriousness, as it is not a 'dumb' kiss. The context is also different, since the first proper kiss with Mary Lou Gerrity was a good-bye kiss, whereas the desire to kiss Altschuler developed naturally in the situation and it "just happens". The reaction to the kiss, and the kisses that follow, is extremely relevant to understand the manner of Davy's identity construction. His reactions seem to imply that his exercised homosexual behaviour, as well as his lasting homosexual desire for Altschuler, is perceived with a mix of ignorance and confusion. In a first instance, they do not talk much about the kiss and quickly talk about the school-play they worked on together. The fact that they conclude that "'We're just a couple of great kids,' I say. 'We sure are,' Altschuler says" (150), asserts that their homosexual behaviour did not impair their positive self-perception. Throughout their continuously intensifying relationship, Davy is confused and has to convince himself multiple times that they are not doing anything 'wrong'. This is evident in the following passages:

There is nothing wrong with Altschuler and me, is there? I know it's not like making out with a girl. It's just something that happened. It's not dirty, or anything like that. It's all right, isn't it? (161)

[…] I have a new way of looking at Altschuler because of what we did last night. Don't get me wrong, I'm not ashamed. There was nothing wrong about it, I keep telling myself. (158)

Throughout the whole story the extent of their physical relationship remains ambiguous and, at this point in the story, no other character is aware of Davy's and Altschuler's homosexual desire and behaviour. Although Davy has to make a continuous effort to convince himself that what they are doing is not 'wrong', his overall perception of himself and his behaviour can be

considered as positive. At this moment in the story he is experimenting with his sexuality but he does not self-identify as homosexual. He even considers it impossible to be gay. Being convinced that he is not homosexual does not stop him from acting like a teenager in love or in a relationship. This is exemplified when he says that "I want to call up that bastard Altschuler and have a good long chat with him. What about? I don't know. Do you have to have a reason? So I call him" (159). Obviously, Davy misses Altschuler when they are not together.

The development of Davy's potential acceptance and self-identification as homosexual is dramatically disrupted. One afternoon, as Davy and Altschuler try Whiskey for the first time and fall asleep on the living room floor of Davy's apartment, his mother finds them and draws the correct conclusions. His attempts to explain the situation do not satisfy her:

> "Asleep? What the hell is wrong with you, Davy? It's not even six thirty, and you and Douglas are asleep on the floor in the dark!"
> "What do you mean wrong?" I ask. (166)

After weeks of convincing himself that they were not doing anything 'wrong', Davy seemingly refuses to be convinced otherwise by his mother's verbal attacks and immediate condemnation. He keeps questioning her negative remarks, while she attempts to determine the true nature of Davy's and Altschuler's relationship:

> "Davy, Davy", she says, "truth."
> I nod
> "Nothing … unnatural…happened this afternoon with you and Douglas, did it?"
> "No" I say.
> "Or ever?"
> "What do you mean 'unnatural'?" (169)

Davy does not explain his feelings in this situation. It remains uncertain whether he is seriously confused by his mother's choice of words, or whether his response is an attempt to avoid answering her follow up question. He even might intend to defy her. In a positive reading, he stands by his choices and defies his mother's criticism. In a negative reading, he is thrown back into a state of confusion and re-evaluation of identity determining choices. Regardless of the reader's preferred interpretation, Davy's identity formation process is completely disrupted because of the trauma that is caused by Fred's death. Since Davy's mother was not able to cope with the situation at hand, she called Davy's father to talk to him.

In the meantime, she takes Fred for a walk. The dog breaks free and is run over by a car. In the following weeks, Davy does not talk to Altschuler and is looking for someone to blame. Ultimately, he arrives at the conclusion that Fred's death was a direct result of Altschuler and him making out:

> Yes, God, yes. It's my fault. Because of everything I did. It wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for me. It is too my fault! All that messing around. Nothing would have happened to Fred if I hadn't been messing around with Altschuler. My fault. Mine! (180)

Establishing this chain of causality is detrimental to Davy's picture of self, as well as his, so far, positive attitude towards his sexual desire and behaviour. He avoids Altschuler completely and uses baseball to distract himself from his emotional turmoil. After weeks of isolation and denial, Altschuler seeks yet another opportunity at reconciliation, when both are taking a shower after a baseball match. As he tells Davy how great he was in the game and, in the process, touches his shoulder, Davy claims that he does not want to be touched. When Altschuler teasingly asks "'Since when?'" (184), the smouldering conflict between them erupts:

> "We're going to end up a couple of queers," I say. "You know that, don't you? All that junk back there before Fred died. You know what happens, don't you?"
> "You're crazy," Altschuler says. He shuts off his shower and turns to walk away. I don't know what gets into me. I grab Altschuler and pull him back to my shower.
> "Like hell I'm crazy," I yell at him. Then I don't know what else to do. I have hold of Altschuler with one hand, so I raise my other hand and smack him across the face. Hard. He is wet and slippery, so it is easy for him to pull away from me.
> "You sure as hell are crazy," he says.
> I go after him again. "Don't you know what happened to Fred? Don't you know why?"
> "It had nothing to do with us."
> "It was because of what we did, you dumb bastard! That's why my mother was walking Fred that night. Because of us. Because of all that queering around."
> "Shut up, Davy," Altschuler says. "You sound like a creep."
> "I'm a creep alright," I say. "So are you!" (185)

This interaction reveals the negative attitude Davy has adopted towards homosexual behaviour. He reasserts his belief that homosexual behaviour entails severe consequences. Not willing to suffer any more of these consequences, Davy rejects the prospect of accepting a homosexual identity. He seems to be afraid of a future as homosexual. Although he obviously does not want to be gay, in this interaction he seems to understand that, deep down, he probably is, when he says, "'I'm a creep alright […] So are you!'". Although this can be read

as an affirmation of homosexuality, due to his choice of words it is rather a condemnation and rejection of this perception of self. The scene further reveals the emotional distress the situation causes. Emotions such as confusion, guilt, fear and anger are channelled into a violent outburst directed at the source of his homosexual desire and behaviour. Thus, he does not only attack the boy but, by extension, his own homosexual identity.

So far Davy's identity has been subject to multiple changes. His initially positive, though confused, attitude towards his emerging homosexual desire and behaviour was transformed into a negative attitude and rejection after Fred's death. The final pages of this novel are to a certain extent ambiguous with regards to Davy's identity. On the one hand, he seemingly accepts that he does experience homosexual desire. On the other hand, he denies himself the ensuing homosexual behaviour. Ultimately, he is unwilling to self-identify as homosexual, as the following passage shows:

> And we talk. For the first time in my life I talk about some of the things I am afraid of that I think about. "Look, Altschuler," I say after a few minutes. "I think we have to talk about this queer business."
> "OK."
> "That was a very peculiar night, wasn't it? I don't want you to think I've done that before."
> "OK," Altschuler says.
> "Is that all you can say? I mean didn't it upset you?"
> "Sure it did. But it didn't feel wrong. Did it to you?"
> "Look what happened."
> "What happened to Fred had nothing to do with what we did."
> […]
> "I guess the important thing is not to do it again," I say.
> "I don't care. If you think it's dirty or something like that, I wouldn't do it again. If I were you."
> "Maybe if we made out with some girls, we wouldn't' have to think about, you know, the other," I say. (197)

Although he admits to having certain homoerotic thoughts, Davy asserts various negative attitudes towards the possibility of a homosexual self-identification. First, he restablishes a direct connection between homosexuality and fatal consequences. Second, it seems important to him that Altschuler is not under the impression that Davy has ever done anything alike before. Thus, he attempts to substantiate his assertion that this episode was nothing more than a short-lived curiosity that can be disregarded. Third, Davy wants to keep himself from repeating their physical interaction in the future. Fourth, he wants to engage in heterosexual behaviour to distract himself from his homosexual desire. Kissing girls, adhering to

heterosexual norms, and to fit into the dominant group is perceived as the solution to his predicament. Altogether, this exemplifies an elaborate effort on Davy's part to deny himself what he desires and to keep him from self-identifying as homosexual.

The strongest ambiguity, however, is represented in the final lines of the book. After Davy and Altschuler had their above quoted conversation, they talk about who they want to be like when they grow up. Davy says that he simply wants to be himself or a person like his grandmother. He continues to describe his relationship with her, and Fred, as a relationship of mutual respect. About the two individuals he had the deepest emotional connection to, who are both dead, he says, "We respected each other" (198). Altschuler, talking about his best friend who has already deceased, as well, says, "I respected Wilkins" (199). The word 'respect' in this context implies a strong affection that can, probably, be equated with love. The novel ends with both of them saying:

> "I guess we could respect each other," I say. "Do you think so?"
> "Sure," Altschuler says. (199)

On the surface, Davy rejects homosexual identity, desire and behaviour. Despite this conscious denial, he commits himself emotionally to Altschuler, on a deeper level. This commitment creates a strong ambiguity and seriously questions whether Davy will succeed in his process of denial. Thus, the novel leaves Davy's identity at a moment where he is, on the one hand, aware but not accepting of his homosexual inclination and, on the other hand, emotionally strongly committed to the object of his homosexual desire.

Since the aspect of homosexuality appears relatively late in the novel, and is only marginally reflected internally by the protagonist, the main cues to Davy's homosexual identity formation are the interactions quoted extensively above. For the second gay character involved, Altschuler, the only cues provided are his responses in these interactions, or when he and his behaviour are described by the focaliser. Still, these instances hint at Altschuler being more accepting of his desires and the prospect of self-identifying as homosexual. At least, he constantly emphasises that he does not think what they did was "wrong", "dirty" or the cause for Fred's death (197).

7.1.2. Research Question 2

This section will contextualise the findings of the previous section with the socio-cultural conditions described in chapter 3.3. The results are twofold: First, the fact that a published young adult novel focuses openly on the topic of homosexuality can be considered ground-breaking and progressive. Second, although this publication breaks a taboo, it does so by reiterating and adhering to the dominant, heteronormative discourse and the power structures of its time. Therefore, it expands and stretches the boundaries of the possible but in a manner that does not threaten societal norms and order.

A first example of how this novel reiterates dominant discourse is the talk Davy has with his father, after his mother discovered his secret. During this conversation, Davy's father brands homosexual behaviour as a mere phase and lifestyle:

> ["]I don't want to make a big case out of this. Your mother does though. She's an emotional person. She gets upset easily. She thinks you will end up … well, I don't know what lengths her imagination will carry her to." My father goes on to tell me that a lot of boys play around in a lot of ways when they are growing up, and I shouldn't get involved in some special way of life which will close off other ways of life to me. (173)

By stating that it is not uncommon amongst boys to experiment a little bit, it is implied that it is not necessarily something that needs to be taken seriously. Ultimately, curiosity will fade and 'proper' interests, as prescribed by a heteronormative society, will be pursued. The most important part is the threatening hint at the consequences that a pursuit of a 'homosexual lifestyle' would entail. This reference can be traced clearly to the socio-cultural reality of self-identifying homosexuals at the time. By the end of the story, Davy performs precisely this idea of homosexuality: even though he has homoerotic thoughts and desires, he wants to make sure that it remains a phase and does not pursue this 'lifestyle'.

Another resonance of the socio-cultural context, with regards to the idea of 'lifestyle', is the notion that homosexuality is a choice. Davy chooses to deny his desires and feelings and decides to behave heterosexually. It is evident, however, that this is merely the result of the traumatic circumstances and his parents' reaction. Before his mother found the boys asleep on the floor, Davy was growing increasingly accepting of his homosexual behaviour. This denial of desire and control of behaviour supports the idea that homosexuality is a choice that can be easily controlled. At one point in the story Davy even says that "it is not in my nature to queer around" (182), further nurturing the impression of homosexuality as 'unnatural'. The

potentially negative, emotional consequences if one's self-identification is not synthesised with one's true desires are completely neglected. Additionally, Davy does not succeed at it.

The cruellest reflection of the socio-cultural context in this novel is the suggestion that embracing a homosexual identity entails fatal consequences. As has been shown in the previous section, Davy blames not only himself for Fred's death but, concretely, his homosexual behaviour. This link between death and homosexuality remains almost unchallenged. Only Altschuler does not see a connection and, after confirming this belief many times, tells Davy, "[g]o ahead and feel guilty if you want to. I don't" (197). Given that Davy is not convinced and that he repeatedly reconfirms this belief, by far outnumbering Altschuler's objections, this link remains firmly in place. A more interpretive reading reveals another homosexual relationship that resulted in death: the relationship of Altschuler and Wilkins. This is only supported by indications, circumstantial evidence, and interpretation but it is a possible reading. Little is known about the relationship between Altschuler and Wilkins. The most significant implication of Wilkins' importance for Altschuler is revealed at the very end of the book, when he says that "I respected Wilkins" (199). Prior to that utterance, the reader only learns that they were close friends, living in the same building, attending school together since they were three years old, and visited a candy story every Friday on their way home. Wilkins dies in the first part of the book, shortly after Altschuler described his disease by saying that "[s]omething happened to his blood. He gets tired all the time. He's supposed to die this month" (92). Being aware of the relationship between Altschuler and Davy, it seems probable that Altschuler has already made homosexual experiences: with Wilkins. Bearing in mind their young age, this does not necessarily imply a physical relationship. Altschuler and Wilkins might have shared an emotional connection, desire or behaviour that went deeper than a regular friendship. Wilkins disease and subsequent death can be interpreted as the fatal consequence. It seemingly required such consequences to allow the representation of homosexuality in young adult novels at the time. A happy ending or the prospect of a future for a homosexual relationship did definitely not meet these criteria.

Segueing from content to presentation, the next interesting constituent is the narrative mode, i.e. what is being told or omitted and in what manner. This angle of analysis reveals that physical homosexual intimacy can only be implied and not described in much detail. Overall, a telling mode is employed, with many parts of conversations being summarised by Davy. The result is that, on an emotional level, the conversations are partly read like the minutes of a

meeting. Through his summaries, Davy omits minor emotional clues e.g. actions, reactions, or facial movements during speech-acts. Most importantly, the manner of the utterances is withheld, e.g. a whisper, a shout, with a smile, a plea, or with distress or strain in the voice. Whenever a scene is shortened by these summaries, it becomes an emotionless and dry account of the uttered words and actions, as this passage exemplifies:

> "If there are problems about anything, just ask me," Mother urges. Since she plans to go back to New York in another few days, the offer isn't as generous as it seems. Mother tells me that she's done everything she can, don't I think? I tell her sure she has. To forestall one of the long talks she has been having with me in the last week when there's been no one else around, I tell her that I have a lot of homework to do. That's not a good reason for not talking "heart-to-heart" as Mother puts it, so I sit down and Mother talks. […] I say Yes and No when she wants me to, and an hour and a half later she tells me that we've had a good talk, haven't we? I tell her we have, and she tells me I stay up too late for my age. (38-39)

The passage above exhibits an extensiveness and detail that is completely missing in the recounts of Davy's and Altschuler's homosexual physical interactions. The way Davy describes their first kiss it seems to happen in passing and fleetingly. He says, "I guess I kiss Altschuler and he kisses me" (150). To give more details on the manner or emotional implications of the kiss seems to be impossible in the context of 1969. The only way to rate and, by extension, describe the kiss appears to be by comparison with the only heterosexual kiss mentioned in the novel. When they kiss, Davy says, "[i]t isn't like the dumb kiss I gave Mary Lou Gerrity in Massachusetts before I left" (150). This rating implies a qualitative subordination of the kiss he shared with the girl. It might also imply that the kiss with Altschuler was more intense and advanced. Davy's statement exploits an opportunity to indirectly describe and qualify the kiss in more detail by referencing the earlier description of heterosexual behaviour that was specified as "the first time we've opened our mouths when kissed" (39). The kiss between the boys remains the only blunt description of their physical relationship. All other incidents are merely circumstantially referred to and remain unspecified implications. The night Altschuler spends at Davy's place is the perfect example. It is the beginning of a new chapter and the reader is only aware that Altschuler was invited by Davy's mother for a sleep over. The night itself is not witnessed by the reader and the next morning commences as follows:

> My mother does not come home until very late on Saturday, so she is still snoozing when Altschuler leaves on Sunday morning. It is the strangest, weirdest good-bye I ever had to say to anybody—somebody I saw every day last week, including Saturday,

and will see every day this week. We horse around over some fried eggs I make and talk about Miss Stuart and stuff like that, but I have a new way of looking at Altschuler because of what we did together last night. Don't get me wrong, I'm not ashamed. There is nothing to wrong about it, I keep telling myself. We got to talking about all the girls we had made out with. I told him about Mary Lou Gerrity and how I am more or less engaged to her, and that I haven't made out in New York because of being faithful to her. He told me about some girl named Enid Gerber he made out with at summer camp last year, and they are engaged too. That's how it happened. (158)

The first hint, that something significant happened during the night, is the "strangest, weirdest good-bye". Still, the source of this feeling is not explained and Davy continues to describe the morning in sufficient, distracting detail. Only a few lines later the reader learns that they did something "together last night". Again, neither a specification, nor an explanation is provided and the events of Saturday night remain ambiguous. For the better part of the paragraph, Davy describes his relationship with Mary Lou and Altschuler's relationship with Enid Gerber. He concludes that they are both bound in heteronormative, heterosexual rituals. It is seemingly impossible to describe, or even imply, homosexual behaviour without the need for a more extensive description of heterosexual behaviour. The boy's physical interaction is only vaguely hinted at, again as "it". The true nature and details of what transpired between them remains unclear. It is never clearly specified whether they were cuddling, kissing, masturbating or more. With regards to what can be said in the context of 1969, and how, it appears that homosexual behaviour had to be buried deeply in a longer passage of circumstantial descriptions, distractions and filibusters. In relation to the above mentioned fatal consequences, it appears that homosexual behaviour needs to be either represented with a negative connotation, or to be relativised by proximity to the description of heterosexual behaviour. Although these findings highlight the powerful influence of the dominant discourse at the time on the narrative mode and the possibilities of content presentation, a more differentiated perspective is necessary. Although the reader is not directly experiencing the events of that Saturday night and is only allowed a short glimpse at the kiss that the boys share, the fact that the kiss happens at all is remarkable for 1969. It seems incomprehensible from a modern, 21st century perspective, but a gay kiss in a young adult novel of an era that still considered homosexuality a disease and illegal is certainly ground-breaking. This advance into mainstream visibility might have been more significant to young, homosexual readers, than all negative implications combined.

Regardless of the impact this implicative mode has on the reader, the novel captures vividly the societal condemnation and fear of homosexuality. This becomes most apparent in the

lexical choices throughout novel. First, the word 'queer' is used on several occasions. It is always used in a negative context and refers to an undesirable 'state', something one needs to fear to become. Since the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement and its continuous effort to reclaim the term is still several years in the making, 'queer' is exclusively used as an insult and slur. The term is first mentioned by Davy, after the first kiss with Altschuler. He is reflecting on himself, Altschuler and their situation. He affirms that they are both very tough guys and he concludes that "a couple of guys like Altschuler and me don't have to worry about being queer or anything like that. Hell, no" (150). The quote shows that the possibility of being 'queer' and, consequently, self-identifying oneself as homosexual, is something one needs to worry about and to be afraid of. His conclusive "[h]ell, no" shows that he strongly rejects that label for himself. Later, when Davy talks with his father about Altschuler, this notion is reconfirmed when he says, "I'm not queer or anything, if that is what you think" (173). During his escalating conflict with Altschuler, towards the end of the novel, the prospect to "end up a couple of queers" is seemingly equated with being a creep, since Davy continues to say, "I'm a creep all right" (185). Second, the lexical choices regarding homosexual behaviour are equally negatively connoted. The nicest reference to their kiss is Davy saying that he "want[s] to talk to Altschuler about yesterday and all the *goofy business* on the floor" (emphasis added, 153). The description of the kiss as "goofy business" is, on the one hand, Davy's avoidance to articulate what actually happened and, on the other hand, degrading and dismissing the potential honesty and seriousness of the event, as well as its implications. Later in the story, Davy refers to their homosexual actions as "all the *junk* back there before Fred died" and "all that *queering around*" (emphasis added, 185). The term "junk" is an extraordinary escalation of negatively connoted lexical choices. Third, the possibility of a manifesting homosexual desire, behaviour or identity is constantly linked to words such as "unnatural" (169), "wrong" (166) and "dirty" (197), as well as the concept of shame (158). Although these terms do not remain completely unquestioned or unchallenged, they are a clear indication that the belief that homosexuality is something unnatural, dirty and shameful is the common point of departure in the society of 1969. It reveals the marginalised and condemned position homosexual individuals are assigned to by participants of the dominant discourse in the socio-cultural context of this time.

Another aspect of how this novel and its identity construction can be aligned with its socio-cultural context becomes observable by shifting the focus to the second dimension of Fairclough's model: its reception at the time of production and publication. It appears that the

novel has created a perfect equilibrium between pushing boundaries and reiterating dominant discourse because it was critically well received. At the time of production, when Donovan had to find a publisher, he wrote a letter to editor Ursula Nordstrom. She was the head of department of books for boys and girls at Harper & Row. Nordstrom, a lesbian herself, had been interested for some time in publishing a book that focused on a romantic or physical relationship between two young adults of the same sex. Donovan's manuscript, which he advertised to her as a book on 'buddy-love', seemed to be what she was looking for (Horning 221-222). Nordstrom prepared for an intense backlash, being aware of the general public's opinion on homosexuality. Her concerns were, for the most part, unnecessary, as the book was positively reviewed in professional library journals. Outside the professional world, reviews ranged from positive to negative. Overall, it was highly recommended and considered suitable for young adults (Horning 224-225). The insights gained from the book's reception are twofold: first, it successfully balances challenging social norms and sufficiently adhering to them. Second, it grasps the change that is happening within society. *I'll Get There* was published only months before Stonewall and is yet another prelude to increased LGBTQ visibility and the tough fight for change and equality.

Altogether, this section determined an overwhelming reproduction of the dominant discourse of the socio-cultural context of 1969. Its dominantly negative views on homosexuality and its ensuing disadvantaged legal and societal stance for individuals who self-identify as homosexual are plainly reproduced in the novel's plot, mode and lexical choices. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that Davy's and Altschuler's kiss shattered societal shackles, thus, defying and undermining the established power-relations. It might be argued that breaking this specific societal taboo was only possible because the rest of the novel did not threaten the dominant discourse and power relations. It was further established that Donovan exploited restrictions to their full extent e.g. with his ambiguous finale. From a modern point of view, the negative implications for self-identifying as homosexual are overwhelming. For a gay teenager in 1969, the kiss might be just enough.

7.2. Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda

This novel was published in 2015 and follows Simon Spier through a very important phase in his young life: his coming out and first love. Simon is a 17 year old boy, living just outside Atlanta, Georgia. The only person who knows that he self-identifies as gay is another gay boy from his school. They connected anonymously via their school's tumblr page and use

pseudonyms in their emails to not identify themselves. In these emails Simon calls himself Jacques and the other boy calls himself Blue. The story begins when Simon's classmate, Martin, discovers these emails and threatens to release them, if Simon will not help him to get closer to his friend Abby. As the complexities of teenage life unfold, including various love dramas in his circle of friends, and Simons email friendship turns into a mutual crush, his secret is revealed. Simon is forced to come out to his family and friends, who all support him. Successfully manoeuvring the difficulties of everyday life after coming out publicly, his final struggle is to uncover the true identity of his first, but still virtual, love. After some minor setbacks, Blue is revealed to be Bram Greenfeld, an African-American boy in Simon's class, and they enter in a proper relationship. The book ends with both boys happily exploring what it means to have a boyfriend.

7.2.1. Research Question 1

The reader has, again, the opportunity to discover two homosexual identities in this novel: Simon's and Bram's. In this specific example, both identities are in a very similar place of their identity construction process: Both have accepted their homosexuality and self-identify as gay. However, both are only out in the online world and have not transferred their online-identity performance to the offline world. Most information is provided about Simon but this analysis will examine both identities simultaneously, due to their similarity and considerable overlap. Altogether, the presented homosexual identities are accepting of, and content with, their homosexual desire and identity. They are still inexperienced, with regards to homosexual behaviour. In accordance with young adult identities, Simon is struggling with continuous change and the additional pressure of coming out. Throughout the story, a significant identity progress can be witnessed: first, the reader encounters two closeted gay boys with the desire to come out but who are not yet ready to take that step. Second, the actual coming out and how it is handled in various social contexts is highlighted. Third, the complete synthesis of offline and online identity occurs and the first experiences with homosexual behaviour lead to a complete harmony of desire, behaviour and identity. Albeit being the central focus, coping with the coming out process, and its accompanied, varying identity performances, is depicted as only one part of a complex teenage identity and life.

Simon is the focaliser of the story and an autodiegetic voice is used, making him an unreliable narrator. However, some chapters are not narrated at all but present the email correspondence between Jacques and Blue. These chapters show no mediation at all and shed light on Blue's

perspective, without the filter of Simon's perception. This allows a less biased analysis of his character, too.

Prior to his coming out, Simon has to manoeuvre various social contexts with the desire to come out but, simultaneously, feeling that he is not ready. The result is threefold: being insulted by proxy, feeling guilty and holding back. A first example is his family. Simon's family consists, apart from himself, of his mother, father, his older sister Alice and his younger Sister Nora. His need for secrecy forces him to lie during a regular dinner conversation about the love interests of his best friend Nick. He agrees with his mother that Nick, having a crush on Abby, will soon attempt to woe her. However, he has the urge to say something entirely different, supresses it and only thinks the words, "*That's funny, Mom, because get this. I'm actually trying to prevent Nick from getting the girl he likes, so Martin Addison won't tell the whole school I'm gay. Did I mention I'm gay?* I mean how do people even begin with this stuff?" (Albertalli 20). Although he is clearly comfortable with referring to himself as gay, he does not see a way to start a light-shedding conversation or speak his thoughts out loud. Another issue is the way Simon feels whenever homosexuality is discussed mockingly, even with no bad intentions. This is illustrated when the whole family watches the *Bachelorette* and comments on the contestants:

> "Are you kidding me?" my dad says. "The gay one?"
> "Daniel's not gay," Nora objects.
> "Kid, he's a one-man Pride Parade. An eternal flame."
> My whole body tenses. Leah once said that she'd rather have people call her fat directly than have to sit there and listen to them talking shit about some other girl's weight. I actually think I agree with that. Nothing is worse than the secret humiliation of being insulted by proxy. (24)

Since he is not ready to come out, he has to suffer in silence. This conversation does not display a negative attitude towards homosexuality but it does become the object of ridicule. Simon appears to be a very self-reflected person and is aware of the intended meaning. Still, this interaction would have played out differently, if his father had been aware of his son's homosexuality. Even if it does not lead to Simon questioning his sexual identity, it does induce him to wonder about his father's true attitude towards homosexuality. This is expressed when he muses, "I never know if my dad says that kind of stuff because he means it, or if he's just trying to push Alice's buttons. I mean, if that's the way he feels, I guess it's good to know. Even if I can't un-know it" (24).

Simon faces similar issues when he is around his friends, or at school. When he is interacting with boys he is attracted to and cannot act on his desire, without being exposed, he can only fantasise about it, e.g. "*Hey, Cal. Are we supposed to be making out right now? Are we supposed to be having mind-blowing sex in the dressing room right now?*" (100). Furthermore, since finding a boyfriend or girlfriend is a central endeavour of many teenagers, it comes as no surprise that his friends tend to read romantic intentions into simple interactions. So does his new friend Abby after a party and in advance of a school dance:

> "You could ask Leah," Abby says. She looks at me sidelong, with a weird, probing expression.
> I feel a storm of laughter brewing "You think I like Leah."
> "I don't know," she says smiling and shrugging. "You looked so sweet together tonight."
> "Me and Leah?" I ask. *But I'm gay. GAY. Gaaaaaaaayyyyy.*
> God, I should really just tell her. I can kind of picture her reaction. Eyes widening. Mouth falling open.
> Yeah. Maybe not tonight. (52)

Again, Simon cannot properly explain his reasons, apart from being Leah's best friend. Instead, he is internally screaming that he is gay. Screaming, as if it is getting harder to keep it inside and as if it was obvious, in his opinion. But it is the deep friendship with Leah and Nick that apparently tortures him the most. Coming out to them would initiate a profound change and is accompanied by the danger of being rejected. Simon summarises that, "this gay thing. It feels so big. It's almost insurmountable. I don't know how to tell them something like this and still come out of it feeling like Simon. Because if Leah and Nick don't recognize me, I don't even recognize myself anymore" (133). His fear refers to the way he is perceived and accepted in one of his most important social groups. It implies the importance the perception of others holds for a positive self-perception. Nevertheless, these difficult situations never draw his self-identification, or his positive attitude towards it, into question. The notion that homosexuality is nothing he needs to be ashamed of is never questioned, by anyone, in the book.

Before their coming out, the only interaction where Simon and Bram allowed themselves to talk about their homosexual identities and desires was their email conversation. Over the course of their correspondence, they talk freely about the discovery of their homosexuality, they support each other in their coming out, and deepen their relationship via intensifying flirtations. In their earliest discussions, they share their experience on how they noticed their

homosexual identity and compare experiences. Both boys exhibit an extraordinarily high level of self-reflection. Apparently, Simon's and Bram's sexual awakening began with fantasies and dreams. Simon says, "I don't' even know how I figured it out. It was a bunch of little things. Like this weird dream I had once about Daniel Radcliffe" (12-13). Bram, in his disguise as Blue, reports that his cousin's brother-in-law triggered his sexual fantasies. He says, "[i]t's not awkward, exactly because the whole thing was in my head. It's really amazing, isn't it? Someone can trigger your sexual identity crisis and not have a clue they're doing it" (15). On the one hand, these statements imply that they were playing out possibilities and fantasies in their heads. On the other hand, they reflect it in a casual fashion, as if arriving at the conclusion that they were gay was not that difficult or confusing. Nevertheless, their realisation triggered different reactions in a broader context. While Bram did not enter any relationships after he began to self-identify as gay, Simon had three girlfriends, two even after he self-identified as gay. He says, "[t]he girlfriend thing is a little hard to explain. Everything just sort of happened. […] Honestly, though? I think the real reason I had a girlfriend was because I didn't one hundred percent believe I was gay. Or maybe I didn't think it was permanent" (16). As they are completely honest with each other in their conversations, Simon reflects that the had a certain amount of doubt and believed that it might only be a phase. It might be regarded as a hint at an initial desire to fit the societal mold, since participating in the dominant discourse, especially at that age, involves performing the rituals of having a girlfriend.

Another aspect of their online friendship is that they offer each other a peer to practice their sexual identity with, and prepare each other for their coming out to the offline world. Simon and Bram are completely aware of the importance of their online relationship. They reflect on a meta level about the effects of their online identity performance on their offline life and that this construct works only because of the protection offered by anonymity. Blue affirms the significance of anonymity by saying, "Whatever it is we're doing here, I don't think it works if we know each other's real identities" (60-61). Simon confirms this view, claiming that he was only able to open himself up because of the provided anonymity. He says, "If Blue were a real junior at Creekwood with a locker and a GPA and a Facebook profile, I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be telling him anything. I mean, he is a real junior at Creekwood. I know that. But in a way, he lives in my laptop. It's hard to explain" (17).

Through their online relationship, they are growing closer to one another, even if they do not know their true identities. Their emails begin with curiosity and companionship and slowly transform into an intense flirt containing barely concealed sexual desire. They write increasingly nice and sweet things to each other, call each other 'cute', and begin to completely obsess with one another. Ultimately, they neither conceal their emotional inclination towards one another, e.g. by signing their emails with "Love, Blue" (144), nor their physical desire, e.g. by writing, "I'm glad you're finding me distracting. It wouldn't be fair, otherwise," (107), "we could just do other things instead of talking. I mean. I'm just saying" (90), or, "I also like to imagine you fantasizing about sex. I can't believe I just wrote that. I can't believe I'm hitting send" (79). Altogether, these are clear indications that the confidence in their offline identity performance is growing and that the synthesis of sexual identity, desire and behaviour is increasing. It highlights the obvious significance of an online identity manifestation for Simon and Bram, before they dare the same identity performance in the offline world. A side effect of this growing confidence and attachment is that their online personas increasingly influence their offline personas and life. Simon says, "It's weird, because Blue's emails used to be this extra thing that was separate from my actual life. But now I think maybe the emails are my life. Everything else feels like I'm slogging through a dream" (121). Online and offline cannot remain two separate spheres. They influence each other. Worries from the offline world are communicated online, while confidence and perception of self from the online world are permeating offline identity performances.

The gained confidence and synthesis of their online identity performance inspires and encourages them to come out to their families and friends. When Blue tells Simon that he is planning to come out to his father, and later his mother, Simon feels the urge to do the same. The novel clearly shows that coming out is not a one-time event but an often repeated action. Simon has to come out three times in the course of this book: to Abby, to his family and to his friends. Coming out to Abby is the only time Simon does so out of his own volition. They are driving home in Simon's car when the situation unfolds as follows:

> "Abby. Can I tell you something?"
> "Sure, what's up?"
> The music seems to fall away. We're stopped at a red, and I'm waiting to turn left, and all I can hear is the frantic clicking of my turn signal. I think my heart is beating to its rhythm.
> "You can't tell anyone," I say. "No one else knows this." […]
> I didn't plan to do this tonight.
> "So. The thing is; I'm gay."

> It's the first time I've said those words out loud. I pause with my hands on the steering wheel, waiting for feel something extraordinary. (123-124)

This coming out is an immediate reaction to Blue planning his coming out that night. This urges Simon to come out, too, although it was not planned. He is clearly nervous, exemplified by his heart beating frantically, but he tries to tell her casually, as if in passing. Furthermore, since he is driving he can avoid looking at her directly and it is almost as if he says it out loud to himself. The fact that he is waiting to "feel something extraordinary" implies the high expectations that accompany the coming out. Simon's coming out to his family occurs as a direct consequence of Martin outing him on the school's tumblr page.

> "Hey. I want to talk to you guys about something." I try to sound casual, but my voice is froggy. Nora looks at me and gives me a tiny, quick smile, and my stomach sort of flips. […] I don't know how people do this. How Blue did this. Two words. Two freaking words, and I am not the same Simon anymore. My hand is over my mouth, and I stare straight ahead. I don't know why I thought this would be easy.
> "I know what this is," says my dad. "Let me guess. You're gay. You got someone pregnant. *You're* pregnant."
> "Dad, stop it," says Alice.
> I close my eyes.
> "I'm pregnant," I say.
> "I thought so, kid" says my dad. "You're glowing."
> I look him in the eye. "Really, though. I'm gay."
> Two words.
> Everyone is quiet for a moment.
> And then my mom says, "Honey. That's …God, that's…thank you for telling us." […]
> "We're proud of you," she adds. (163-164)

The emotional turmoil becomes apparent in his physical reactions. It thwarts his attempts to sound casual and he loses control of the sound of his voice. The longer Simon hesitates, the worse it gets. It highlights that he perceives this as a high-stake moment. The tension of the actual coming out moment is relieved by jokes, making the emotionally intense moment probably more bearable. It is interesting to observe that he believes these two words will change who he is. Although he is aware of his homosexuality, he can still pretend that he does not have to change, if it is only Blue who knows the truth. It further highlights, that Simon's self-perception is strongly dependent on how he is perceived by his social context. By revealing his homosexual identity, he would not change. The way he is situated in social contexts and how he can perform his identity in them, however, would be subject to drastic change. Simon's third coming out is to Nick and Leah:

> "So they took that post down"
> "I know," I say, and there's a nervous flutter in my gut. […]
> "I know what you're not asking me," I finally say.
> She shrugs, smiling slightly.
> "I am gay. That part's true."
> "Okay," she says.
> I realize that Nick has stopped humming
> "But I'm not turning this into a big thing tonight, okay? I don't know. Do you guys want ice cream?" I pull myself up.
> "Did you just tell us you're gay?" asks Nick.
> "Yes."
> "Okay," he says. (177-178)

Simon is seemingly tired of making a "big deal" out of it and comes out very casually. A trace of nervousness, exemplified by his fluttery gut, remains. It does not matter how many times Simon comes out, it is every time "a leap of faith" (129). It is also apparent, that the reaction to Simon's coming out is supportive and positive in every case. Neither Simon, nor his friends or family question his determination or the validity of his self-identification. It is never necessary for Simon to explain his reasons or to defend who he is. He is accepted as who he is every time. Thus, the transfer from online identity performance to the offline world is accomplished.

In another email conversation, Blue and Simon confirm the vital role they have played for each other's coming out. They reflect, once more, on a meta level and describe the sensation of being out. Blue's email reads:

> Anyway, I want to thank you. I didn't tell you this before, Jacques, but you should really know that you're the reason I was able to do this. I wasn't sure I'd ever find the courage. It's really kind of incredible. I feel like there's a wall coming down, and I don't know why, and I don't know what's going to happen. I just know you're the reason for it. So, thanks for that. (127)

Bram's coming out was decisively facilitated by Simon's support. It emphasises the importance for LGBTQ teenagers to connect with peers and to have someone to share the experience with. In this passage, he describes the coming out as a wall coming down. The wall functioned as a protection against detrimental influences from the outside but, simultaneously, kept the protected and growing identity imprisoned. The removal of this wall sets Bram free, even though the consequences and future effects remain uncertain. Coming out remains a risk and he is only willing to take it because he had the opportunity to build personal strength via his online identity performance as Blue. Simon was certain that his

family would accept him as a homosexual but was afraid, nonetheless. About his emotional reaction to his coming out he says, "I feel mostly relieved and a little embarrassed, because I feel like I made it into a bigger deal than it needed to be. It's funny, though. A part of me feels like I jumped over some kind of border, and now I'm on the other side realizing I can't cross back. I think it's a good feeling, or at least an exciting feeling. But I'm not sure" (128). Both contend that there is no way back into the closet but, probably fuelled by the positive reactions of their loved ones, consider this moment and the future ahead as an exciting, new chapter. It shows that they have a positive attitude towards their homosexual identities and are mostly confident and excited about the prospect of performing their complete self in the real world.

So far, the representation of homosexual identities in this novel has progressed from a positive, yet secret, self-identification as gay, to coming out and successfully transferring the practiced online identity into the offline world. The third instance of identity representation and construction is the performance of identity after the coming out and during the initiation of physical homosexual behaviour.

The first social setting where Simon's identity performance changes is school. He was publicly outed by Martin on the tumblr. His overall conclusion is that being publicly out attracts a lot of attention, both positive and negative. He describes how various students smiled at him in passing, other outed students exchanged phone numbers with him, and some approached him to assure him that Jesus still loved him. Even if these seem to be indifferent to positive responses, Simon feels "that being out to the universe is completely exhausting" (198). Another aspect are the negative responses, i.e. bullying. Some students would approach him and try to fake kiss him, others changed his name to "Semen Queer" (204). Uninvolved students were amused by the bullying and did not intervene. Simon says, "everyone starts laughing again. I mean, I don't even know these people. I don't know why in God's name this is funny to them" (188). Although bullying does not take up much of the plot, it does occur repeatedly. Simon, summarising his feelings towards bullying reasonably, says, "I guess I'm getting a little fucking tired of this. I'm trying not to let it touch me. I shouldn't care if stupid people call me a stupid word, and I shouldn't care what people think of me. But I always care" (220). Logic tells him that he should not care but he always does. This highlights that Simon has a strong personality and identity foundation. If he was less confident in his homosexuality he might attempt to deny it or, even worse, change who he is, for the sake of

being accepted by those bullying classmates. It is a show of strength and it is concluded that "who you like can't be forced or persuaded or manipulated" (255).

Secondly, Abby and Nick take Simon out to a gay bar. This chapter reveals the excitement about being amongst other LGBTQ individuals and the opportunity to talk and flirt freely. Certainly, drinking more than just one beer for the first time intensified the experience but Simon enjoys this relaxed setting that he describes as "this strange universe. […] And it feels amazing" (232). He is shy but eager to actively perform his gay identity and describes his excitement as follows:

> […] the host, resting his hand on my shoulder for barely a second, but it's enough to make my stomach flutter. [And] I accidently make eye contact with a hot guy wearing a tight V-neck shirt, and I look away quickly, but my heart pounds. […] [T]he fluttery feeling takes over completely. I don't even know. This is so totally different from my normal. (229)

He appears to be completely, but positively, overwhelmed by the situation. The nervous feeling he describes here is fundamentally different from the nervousness described when he had his coming out. It is a positive excitement. He appears to bring down his walls completely and allows himself to immerse in the situation. Simon seemingly confirms that this setting makes him feel welcome and as if he belongs by saying, "talking is just easier now, and it's easier than not talking, and everything I say is the right thing" (231). His complete comfort and effortlessness in this situation highlight the value of LGBTQ community establishments, where one does not need to be on guard and can forget the social stress and discomfort that, at times, accompany a self-identification as gay.

Although this first experience of homosexual behaviour and practiced identity was a significant substantiation to his identity consolidation in the offline world, a proper relationship with Blue remained Simon's ultimate objective. After overcoming various difficulties and misunderstandings, Simon discovers that Bram is Blue and they begin a relationship. They get to know each other and spend time together and Simon proactively initiates their first kiss in Bram's car. He says, "the rain makes a kind of curtain, which is probably a for the best. Because all of a sudden, I'm leaning over the gear stick, and my hands are on his shoulders, and I'm trying to keep breathing. All I can see are Bram's lips. Which fall gently open the moment I lean in to kiss him" (276). Throughout the initial phase of their relationship, the physical tension is almost unbearable for him and by taking the first step Simon completely synchronises desire, behaviour and identity. It becomes more than clear

that Simon is eager to explore this new chapter of his life and to completely embrace his identity when he and Bram decide to enter a committed relationship:

> "I'm all in, if you are," he says.
> "All in?" I say. "Like what? Like boyfriend?"
> "I mean, yeah. If that's what you want."
> "That's what I want," I say. My boyfriend. My brown eyed, grammar nerd, soccer star boyfriend. And I can't stop smiling. I mean, there are times when it's actually more work not to smile. (276-277)

After the clarification of "All in" there is absolutely no hesitation or doubt on Simon's part. This reaffirms, once more, the positive attitude he holds towards his homosexual identity and that he completely embraces it as a vital part of his overall identity. Being teenagers, they follow some rituals that straight teenagers adhere to, as well. They change their relationship status on Facebook, the website that is describes by Nick as "the lowest common denominator of social discourse" but a "vehicle for constructing and performing identity" (152). Therefore, it can be concluded that Simon and Bram have made a full transition from closeted teenagers, who were holding back in interactions in real life, to openly out teenagers, who are in a publicly announced and performed homosexual relationship.

Simon's and Bram's lexical choices further reflect a positive attitude towards a homosexual identity. This identity is never questioned or denigrated. The explicit lack of a negative self-description is supported by affirmative statements, e.g. "Okay, I'm not going to deny it. I'm not ashamed of it" (160). Merely a recurring use of the term 'gay stuff' could allow a slightly negative reading, but that would stem from a forced interpretation. The usage of 'gay stuff' in this novel appears to reflect a typical, teenage habit: to circumvent the explicit description of various aspects of personal and intimate emotions and behaviour. In conversations, homosexual experiences are subsumed and summarised under the paradigm of 'gay stuff' in order to avoid explicitness with regards to the various aspects it constitutes, e.g. erotic fantasies, talking about a crush, masturbation, sex and many more. It does not reflect a negative attitude on homosexual self-identification.

Ultimately, accepting and performing his homosexuality is only one part of Simon's overall identity. It is not presented, or perceived by the characters, as the only denominator of identity. It is embedded in the complexity of a young adult identity. It is subject to constant change and performs in complex social contexts and group dynamics, such as performance at school, romantic drama, jealousy, growing independence and many first-times, e.g. alcohol,

kiss, crush and many more. Simon makes it clear that all these changes are difficult to synchronise with what he already knows about himself and says, "I need to spend some time in my head with this new Simon" (54). He has to understand these changes himself, before he is ready to behave in accordance with them. It is also highlighted that the implementation of these changes involves a constant struggle with his social context. Referring to his parents he says, "They put me in a box, and every time I try to nudge the lid open, they slam it back down. It's like nothing about me is allowed to change." (162). This statement refers not exclusively to sexuality, but is applicable to every teenager and the myriad of minor changes they experience and need to justify. The development of a homosexual identity adds an extra layer of change and complication on top of the foundation of a young adult identity. Simon articulates the process of synchronisation of these two entities by stating, "There's this huge part of me, and I'm still trying it on. And I don't know how it fits together. How I fit together. It's like a new version of me" (284). Again, it emphasises that, albeit being a big part, sexual identity is merely a part of an overall identity.

7.2.2. Research Question 2

Contrasting the above analysed construction of a young adult homosexual identity with its respective socio-cultural context of 2015 leads to several insights: first, it reflects the increased legal, social, and cultural freedom and acceptance homosexual individuals enjoy, nowadays. Second, it raises awareness for modern difficulties self-identifying homosexuals face, e.g. synchronising online and offline identity formation processes, how to organise the coming out, public display of affection and school bullying. Third, it reveals the ambiguity of insights one and two, and further touches, as much as the scope of a 300-page novel allows it, on various LGBTQ issues, e.g. religion, the matter of location, race, homophobia and cross-dressing. These insights permit the conclusion that the novel shows and reflects the vastly improved stance of homosexual individuals in the dominant discourse and power structure, but, simultaneously, scrutinises the current status quo by critical reflection and pointing towards neglected issues and new frontiers.

The first insight is supported by Simon's adamantly positive self-identification as gay and the positive reactions of those close to him. Abby, being the first one to learn that Simon is gay, responds with the phrase "I'm really honoured" (124). His parents' reaction emphasises their love and support when they say, "We're proud of you" (164). These statements illustrate the

high degree of approval that is possible in 2015. It should, however, not suggest that this reflects the reality of every LGBTQ individual, as there are drastic differences. The clear message is that this level of acceptance is a distinct possibility, which was completely unthinkable a few decades ago, as Bram's statement confirms, "[W]e're so lucky we're coming out now and not twenty years ago" (129).

Another demonstration of a more accepting socio-cultural context is the fact that the description of homosexual behaviour, and sexual behaviour in general, is more extensive and detailed. The reader is witness to intimate scenes as perceived by the focaliser, Simon. For instance, after a flirtatious email correspondence with Blue, Simon is turned on and the reader is witness to the ensuing sexual fantasies and masturbation:

> I'm jittery and awake and completely in knots, all from an email. And I'm so hard. So, that's kind of strange. […] I wonder what it would be like to meet him in person, after all this time. Would we even have to speak? Would we go straight into making out? I think I can picture it. He's in my bedroom, and we're totally alone. […] And then his hands cup my face, and all of a sudden, he's kissing me.
> My hands cup my face. Well. My left hand cups my face. My right hand is occupied. I picture it. He kisses me, and it's nothing like Rachel or Anna or Carys. I can't even. It's not even in the same stratosphere. There's this electric tingly feeling radiating through my whole body and my brain has gone fuzzy and I actually think I can hear my heartbeat.
> I have to be so, so quiet. Nora's on the other side of the wall.
> His tongue is in my mouth. His hands slide up under my shirt, and he trails this fingers across my chest. I'm so close. It's almost unbearable. *God*. Blue.
> My whole body turns to jelly. (80-81)

The reader does not only learn about Simon's masturbation but is part of it, from beginning to end. Although euphemisms and paraphrases are employed, e.g. "I'm so hard", "My right hand is occupied" and "My whole body turns to jelly", the description is unambiguous and leaves no room for interpretation. The fact that Simon's arousal is based on another man and the fantasy of homosexual behaviour is not just vaguely implied but straightforward and constantly reiterated. This explicitness, as well as the lengthy and detailed co-experiences for the reader, continue when Simon and Bram enter their physical relationship:

> And then I kiss him for real, and he kisses me back, and his hands fist my hair. And we're kissing like it's breathing. My stomach flutters wildly. And somehow we end up horizontal, his hands curved up around my back. […] [H]e pulls me in closer and kisses me urgently. And suddenly, I'm hard, and I know he is, too. It's thrilling and strange and completely terrifying. (301-302)

This passage hints, again, at an intensifying sexual lust. The description does not end with the kissing but is already hinting at the subsequent step: sex. Even though the story of the novel does not progress to the point where Simon and Bram engage in sexual intercourse for the first time, they are almost at that point. The reader is made aware of their intense desire for sex and the imminence of it. The fact that sexual explicitness of homosexual behaviour is accepted to this degree of intensity implies the possibilities in the real life socio-cultural context of 2015.

The improvement on legal and cultural acceptance generates the emergence of other, new challenges for self-identifying homosexuals. Especially Jacques' and Blue's emails allow the novel to be highly critical and reflective on a variety of issues. The most prominent example and key aspect of the novel is the coming out. Both characters establish and criticise the fact that straight is the default. Proposing a solution, Simon writes, "As a side note, don't you think everyone should have to come out? Why is straight the default? Everyone should have to declare one way or another, and it should be this big awkward thing whether you're straight, gay, bi, or whatever. I'm just saying" (146). The main point of criticism is that the coming out is yet another obstacle that needs to be overcome. The proposal is equality. In another statement, Simon says:

> As far as I know, coming out isn't something that straight kids generally worry about. That's the thing people wouldn't understand. It's not even about me being gay, because I know deep down that my family would be fine with it. We're not religious. My parents are Democrats. My dad likes to joke around, and it would definitely be awkward, but I guess I'm lucky. I know they're not going to disown me. And I'm sure some people in school would give me hell, but my friends would be fine. […] But I'm tired of coming out. All I ever do is come out. I try not to change, but I keep changing, in all these tiny ways. I get a girlfriend. I have a beer. And every freaking time, I have to reintroduce myself to the universe all over again. (55-56)

This statement implies that being a teenager, all by itself, entails coming out constantly. Everybody changes throughout adolescence and grows up to become a completely transformed individual. Teenagers that fit the heterosexist norm, however, seemingly do not need to worry consciously about those changes. Teenagers that do not fit the norm do have to make a conscious effort to position themselves and achieve self- and altero-acceptance. Yet, again, homosexuality is portrayed as part of a whole, due to the assertion that being a teenager involves coming out, to varying degrees. Even though tolerance has increased, coming out as an LGBTQ individual is still risky. Blue writes about the risk and its related uncertainty, "you read about gay kids with really churchy Catholic parents, and the parents end up doing

PFLAG and Pride Parades and everything. And then you hear about parents who are totally fine with homosexuality, but can't handle it when their own kid comes out. You just never know" (106-107). Coming out can be considered a game-changer: being affected personally may alter pre-existing opinions and the degree of uncertainty and doubt for coming out LGBTQ individuals remains high. This is already a hint at the ambiguity of the tolerance of the socio-cultural context. Simon reflects that he is confident that his parents will support him but it is still not easy to take that step. Blue draws the comparison that a straight teenager "telling his parents he knocked someone up […] is totally the straight equivalent of coming out" (145). Following this line of argument, a coming out is potentially acceptable but, at least initially, uncomfortable and unpleasant. Another new issue related to the growing acceptance of homosexuality and the ensuing expectation of a coming out, if an individual self-identifies as such, are the politics of the coming out itself. Simon and Bram do not only have to consider if, when, and how to come out but, more importantly, consider the feelings of those they come out to, with regards to timing and order. Bram concludes, "I think it would have hurt my mom's feelings if I told my dad first. It can be complicated with divorced parents. This whole thing is really overwhelming" (116-117). Other factors, such as the given example of divorced parents, further complicate the matter and might result in negative repercussions, if not considered carefully.

Another issue, that is addressed in the novel, is the relevance of location. The book clearly shows that, although LGBTQ people have won many rights and protections, a publicly displayed homosexual relationship is not welcome in every part of the United States. It is not surprising that Simon needs to adapt his public identity performance and reduce public display of affection because he is living in Georgia, a former member state of the Confederation, located in the South-East of the United States and, generally speaking, a conservative state. When Bram and Simon return to their parked car, after attending a fair, he notes, "It's too public to hold hands. This being Georgia. So, I walk next to him, leaving space between us" (298). Acceptance and progress spread unevenly across the nation. The assumption that a homosexual identity can be expressed easier, and therefore facilitate experimentation and manifestation, in some locations than others is reaffirmed when Simon says, "Maybe it would be different if we lived in New York, but I don't know how to be gay in Georgia" (20-21).

Another aspect, that became increasingly interesting in the context of the new millennium is the internet and its importance for LGBTQ identity development. As ample examples in the

previous section have shown, Simon and Bram need and support each other. Their correspondence allows them to practice this specific part of their identity and talk about problems, e.g. the coming out, or feeling isolated from their families and friends because of this secret. Most importantly, since they are the only ones who know about each other's sexuality, this is their only chance to talk about their homosexual identity and reflect on it. Their correspondence clearly shows that they gave each other the necessary confidence to come out and pursue a positive homosexual identity in the offline world. It is a realistic reflection of what teenagers in a modern world would do, if they felt cut off and alone.

A final issue that is addressed shortly but can have a strong impact on a developing young adult identity is bullying at school. Teenagers can be cruel and do not necessarily need a reason to prey on a peer. Being an outed homosexual can make oneself a walking target. On the first day at school, after being outed by Martin on tumblr, this notion is reflected by Simon when the observes that, "No one has slid a homophobic note into the slats of my locker, which is good. No one's etched the word "fag" into my locker yet either, which is even better. I'm almost ready to believe that things have gotten better at Creekwood" (187). It shows that some sort of bullying or act of homophobia can be expected. It reflects the uneven spread of acceptance, geographically and demographically. Although LGBTQ people have gained nationwide rights and protections, some states implement them voluntarily, and even extend them unilaterally, while others, such as Georgia, merely adhere to these directives reluctantly. As figure 1 in chapter 3.4. shows, Georgia did not install any legislation to specifically protect LGBTQ individuals from hate crimes or bullying at school. The only protection that is offered are codes of conduct established by the schools themselves. Such a code is addressed in the novel: ""They can't get away with that?" says Brianna. "Don't we have a zero tolerance policy?" But Creekwood's zero tolerance bullying policy is enforced about as strictly as the freaking dress code" (191). This highlights the ambiguity of the gained rights and protections on paper, on the one hand, and their execution in the real world, on the other hand. Over the course of the novel, Simon's theatre teacher, Ms. Albright, is fierce in her opposition to bullying and becomes an important ally. Just as it is portrayed in the novel, LGBTQ people, especially students, need allies in an advanced power position to defend their obtained rights and demand their proper implementation and realisation. The gratitude Simon feels for Ms. Albright emphasises her significance.

So far, the construction of a young adult homosexual identity has operated within the confines of the dominant discourse of the socio-cultural context of 2015. Homosexuality is superficially accepted within the dominant discourse, or at least granted access, but the degree of profound acceptance, especially socially, varies. Consequently, the context of 2015 and its implications for identity construction and expression remain ambiguous, specific to certain situations and difficult to anticipate. To this day, homosexuality is an issue of social polarisation. The examples above have shown that increased acceptance generates new frontiers and issues that, in return, are not accepted or easily reconcilable with the dogma of the dominant discourse and its power structures. Through Simon's and Bram's identity development, the novel touches on other LGBTQ issues that remain sensitive terrain.

The first sensitive terrain that is approached is religion. The strong influence of religion in Georgia is evident in lexical choices used by Simon and other characters. They constantly use expression such as "for the love of Jesus" (44), "what in God's holy name" (44), "holy hell" (43) and "honest to God" (39). Due to fact that Simon is not religious, he does not need to reconcile his sexuality with his faith. Bram himself does not appear to be religious, either, but his family is religious. His mother is Episcopalian and his father is Jewish. He was not able to predict their reactions to his coming out and made the general statement that, "[i]t gets complicated when you bring religion into the equation. Technically, Jews and Episcopalians are supposed to be gay-friendly, but it's hard to really know how that applies to your own parents" (106). Ultimately, his parents' responses were calm and not religiously prejudiced at all. Still, in the few passages that discuss religion, it becomes evident that religion is a crucial and influential factor with regards to self-acceptance and the acceptance extended by family and friends.

The second subject is racism in general and, by extension, within the LGBTQ community and the genre of LGBTQ young adult literature. Bram is an African-American character and, therefore, this novel is already more ethnically inclusive than many other examples within this subgenre. During their email correspondences Jacques and Blue discuss the matter of societal default. Blue writes that, "[i]t's definitely annoying that straight (and white, for that matter) is the default, and that the only people who have to think about their identity are the ones who don't fit that mold" (147). Both teenagers have to cope with the constant changes that accompany adolescence and endure the additional anxiety of coming out. Bram has another facet added to this already complex situation: racism. He is one step further away from the heterosexual, white, middle, class male that appears to be the generic ideal and role model of

western society. Even Simon falls into the same trap. Not only did he not figure out Blue's true identity but did not even suspect that it could be Bram, due his ethnic background. He says, "I guess I assumed that Blue would be white. Which kind of makes me want to smack myself. White shouldn't be the default any more than straight should be the default. There shouldn't be a default" (268-269). With this statement the book critically reflects on racism, presumptions, and defaults and advocates for its complete abolishment and the establishment of true equality.

Other issues are addressed more briefly. Still, the novel provided a cursory overview of potential issues that deserve more detailed attention in the future. One example would be other sexual-orientations than heterosexual, gay and lesbian. One minor character in the novel, Cal, is briefly revealed to be bisexual. Simon describes this revelation as follows: "On Thursday after rehearsal, Cal very casually mentions that he's bisexual. And that maybe we should hang out sometime. It catches me off guard. All I can do is gape at him" (205). The issue is not pursued further but points at still unexploited potential and underrepresented facets of LGBTQ realities. Another issue is cross-dressing. Simon is seemingly very fond of dressing up. As a child, he would dress up as a girl for Halloween. He says, "dressing up used to mean something to me. I don't know how to explain it or reconcile it, but I haven't forgotten the feeling of silk and air against my legs" (65). Both, the love for cross-dressing and the bending of gender norms, are signposts for another unexplored territory and underrepresented aspect of identity construction. Finally, the issue of masculinity is addressed. It appears that modern society still links homosexuality to effeminacy and regards it as a loss of masculinity. This view is contradicted by Simon, when he says, "I feel secure in my masculinity, too. Being secure in your masculinity isn't the same as being straight" (65). Nevertheless, after his coming out the following conversation with his parents ensues:

> "Sorry I didn't turn out to be much of a boy," I say.
> My dad spins the chair around to face me directly. "Are you kidding me?"
> "Sort of."
> "You're an awesome boy," he says. "You're like a ninja."
> "Well thank you"
> "You're freaking welcome," he says. (250)

Even though Simon's intention is to make a joke, there is always a grain of truth, or belief, at the bottom of it. Therefore, the relationship of sexuality and masculinity is an issue that might deserve further attention.

The notion of a positive attitude towards homosexual identity, desire, and behaviour is further supported when regarding the overall lexical choices and euphemisms employed throughout the novel. Surprisingly explicit sexual references are used. In their emails, that steadily increase in sexual tension, Blue wants Simon to guess what he is eating. Simon writes, "You have me curious. A banana? Hot dog? Cucumber?" and Blue responds, "More like a giant baguette" (148). Masturbation is also unambiguously described by Simon, "It was a weird couple of weeks. That was the summer I taught myself how to do laundry. There are some socks that shouldn't be washed by your mom" (21). The only other significant lexical choices are the terms used as synonyms for a gay man by Simon's father, e.g. "one-man Pride Parade" and "eternal flame". Although not intended as hurtful slur, it is still a derogatory description. It shows that minor, belittling insults, are believed to be acceptable, if they are not intended to be truly harmful. Nevertheless, it does not attest a negative attitude towards homosexuality.

The success of *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* speaks for the socio-cultural acceptance of the topic. Critically, the novel was extremely well received. The website Goodreads (Goodreads) provides a rating of 4.26 out of 5, based on 49,990 ratings. 20[th] Century Fox purchased the movie rights and will bring Simon and his story to theatres in 2018 (IMDb). Its popularity clearly shows that this is subject has successfully breached mainstream society and media.

8. Conclusion and Implications

A final summary and discussion of the previously presented analysis is provided by this chapter. In a first step, the findings of research questions 1 and 2 are reviewed and contrasted with the expectations of this thesis. In a second step, implications for authors, readers, teachers and LGBTQ youth are discussed.

The first research question is concerned with how young adult male homosexual identities can be constructed. Firstly, I assumed that clear cut categories for 'gay' and 'straight' will be employed. Secondly, the analysed identity constructions were presumed to be consistent within one piece of work and to portray homosexual identities in a non-detrimental manner. These assumptions were only partly affirmed. In both novels, the reader encounters gay and straight characters. These classifications imply that the only option is to adhere to one of these

categories and to stick with it. Although bisexuality is another option that is offered in *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, it is only an additional category to choose from and does neither soften the limitations of these categories, nor draw the general categorisation process into question. The represented homosexual identities in *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* were, to a large extent, consistent and dealing with the same issues. *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* presents two different self-perceptions of homosexuals. Davy develops a negative attitude towards his homosexual behaviour and, consequently, enters a state of denial and conscious struggle with his identity development. In contrast, Altschuler adopts a more positive attitude towards his identity formation process and the resulting homosexual desire and behaviour. Overall, the two novels display strongly differing homosexual identities. First, the characters in *Simon vs. the homo sapiens agenda* have already accepted their self-identification as gay, their central issue being their coming out, while Davy in *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* is only growing aware of his inclinations. Simon's and Bram's identity construction is rooted firmly in the complexity of teenage drama and pitfalls, and displays a positive, accepting, and confident struggle, not with homosexuality, but with the issue of an open and public identity performance. Davy's identity construction, on the other hand, is not portrayed as a complex interaction of various factors but focuses mainly on his struggle with homosexuality. Ultimately, he represents a negative, rejecting, maybe ambiguous, attitude towards a homosexual identity, which complicates his overall identity construction. The strongly differing portray of possible homosexual identity construction and performances stems from the socio-cultural context, which is addressed by the second research question.

The second research question is concerned with the contextualisation of these identity constructions and the respective socio-cultural contexts of the novels. The relevant context for *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* is 1969 and for *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* it is 2015. I assumed that both novels reproduce the conditions of their respective socio-cultural contexts, thus, reproducing existing power relations instead of challenging them. This assumption can be merely partly affirmed. Especially *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip* needs to be interpreted in a nuanced manner. On the one hand, the overall negative portrayal of homosexuality, exemplified by plot, mode, lexical choices, and discursive construction of Davy's identity, seemingly reinforces the conclusion that the novel plainly reproduces the disadvantaged stance and discrimination LGBTQ individuals had to endure in the context of 1969. On the other hand, many opportunities are exploited to challenge the heterosexist norms, e.g. the kiss, Davy's initial acceptance of his homosexual

behaviour, Altschuler's constant resistance to Davy's negativity, and the ambiguous ending. Overall, I arrive at the conclusion that Donovan created an equilibrium between challenging of and adhering to the power relations at the time to enable the publication and success of the book. *Simon vs. the homo sapiens agenda* was published in a far more accepting but, also, far more polarised context. Much progress has been made but legal and cultural advances spread unevenly across the nation and only slowly permeated the various layers of society. The prominent visibility of homosexuality in the cultural mainstream implies that Albertalli's book is not ground-breaking but rather operates within the extended limitations of what is, nowadays and widely, considered culturally appropriate. It exhibits a high degree of sexuality, desire and drama, which teenagers are more than accustomed to in the context of 2015. On the other hand, it is the extraordinarily positive and almost natural adoption of a homosexual identity that assists in increasing the acceptance for LGBTQ individuals. When comparing the representation of Simon's and Bram's relationship to heterosexual romantic teenage fiction, they appear rather similar. Furthermore, the novel critically reflects on various social issues, e.g. racism, societal defaults and norms, and the struggle of coming out. These reflections question the established status quo, highlight that equality has not yet been reached, and argue the irrelevance of socially pre-ascribed categories. Therefore, I conclude that, on the one hand, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* does not challenge pre-existing power relations strongly but solidifies the perspective of 'normalcy' on homosexual relationships. On the other hand, it does extend a challenge, but not exclusively with regards to homosexuality and homosexual identity construction, but on socio-cultural defaults in general. Altogether, it is evident that the socio-cultural contexts play a vital part in the development and reception of literature. It is, simultaneously, challenged and reproduced.

Choosing books with differing socio-cultural backgrounds enables an implicit comparison. The presentations of homosexuality and identity formation processes are fundamentally different, due to their respective context. It also hints at the overall progress of the genre, which became more explicit, direct and critical. Finally, it marks the struggles of each socio-cultural context with LGBTQ issues: the struggle in 1969 was mainly homosexuality and self-identifying as gay. In 2015, the acceptance of a homosexual identity might still be an issue, but the focus has expanded to other issues, as well, e.g. coming out and bullying.

The results of this analysis emphasise the necessity to be constantly aware of socio-cultural contexts and power relations, and offer implications for authors, readers, teachers and (LGBTQ) teenagers. As an author of young adult literature, it is important to critically reflect

on oneself as an individual in the wider socio-cultural context. This is necessary to avoid an unconscious reproduction of established power relations, which might result in detrimental consequences for struggling young LGBTQ readers. As a reader, it is important to root the work of literature in its respective socio-cultural context, to enhance understanding and interpretation. It puts the novel in perspective and helps to uncover subtle layers of resistance, as it was exhibited in *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip.* Teachers need to consider the literature they bring into the classroom with extra care. The exposure to LGBTQ content can have a significant impact on students, with regards to knowledge, empathy and identity construction. In the selection process, it is important for teachers to familiarise themselves with represented identity constructions and their respective socio-cultural context. Providing students with tools to link identity constructions with context enables them to reflect on power relations and might result in changes of behaviour within their own social group. Teenagers of any sexual orientation will benefit greatly from a well-balanced selection of young adult literature, including LGBTQ literature. To reach true equality on every level, be it gender, sexuality, class or race, teenagers need to be exposed to a broad variety of personalities and to touching and realistic stories. It is just as important for a gay boy to know about the joys and issues a lesbian girl has to face, as it is for a straight African-American boy to know about the joys and issues a bisexual trans-girl experiences. It is difficult to think outside the box and outside of the confinements of the known. LGBTQ literature can contribute to that difficult task and give a voice to many more stories and ways of being. Out of the two analysed novels, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* would be the obvious choice this teaching objective, due to its message and realistic representation. Homosexuality was not depicted as something extraordinary but as another facet of the identity of two teenagers. Furthermore, it was well synchronised with everyday issues and dramas teenagers face, showing that 'gay' teenagers are not that much different from 'straight' teenagers. Another important implication concerns LGBTQ teenagers who feel lonely and are in need of role models, safe havens and support. They need to be made aware of the importance of socio-cultural contexts and the literature they produce. This knowledge will help them to select the literature they want to read and prevent them from being involuntarily subjected to negative representations of homosexual identity construction processes.

Future young adult literature will want to continue to challenge heterosexist norms, increase diversity and blur the strict lines drawn by categories, in order to better represent the innumerable nuances of identities within society. Most importantly, they will want to provide places where LGBTQ teenagers can feel safe, happy and at home.

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Abstract

English Version

This thesis contains the literary analysis of two LGBTQ young adult novels with regards to their respective socio-cultural context and its influence on their representation of 'gay' identity construction. The first novel, *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*, was published in 1969 and the second novel, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, was published in 2015. Both were written and published in the United States of America. The central assumption is that gay identity construction is represented in a neutral or positive manner and that both novels plainly reproduce their respective socio-cultural contexts and its underlying power relations. The analysis is based on Queer Theory, narratology and Critical Discourse Analysis. In the first part, the theoretical background is created by discussing the socio-cultural contexts of 1969 and 2015, as well as identity construction processes and genre developments. In the second part, the results are presented and discussed. The central assumptions are only partly confirmed.

Deutsche Version

Diese Diplomarbeit enthält die Analyse zweier LGBTQ Jugendromane, im Hinblick auf ihren jeweiligen soziokulturellen Kontext und den Einfluss den dieser auf die Repräsentation von homosexueller Identitätskonstruktion hat. Der erste Roman, *I'll Get There. It Better Be Worth the Trip*, wurde 1969 veröffentlicht. Der zweite Roman, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*, wurde 2015 veröffentlicht. Beide Werke wurden in den USA verfasst und publiziert. Es wird von der These ausgegangen, dass die Werke eine neutrale oder positive Repräsentation von homosexueller Identitätskonstruktion aufzeigen und ihren jeweiligen soziokulturellen Kontext, mit den ihm zugrundeliegenden Machtstrukturen, offenkundig widerspiegeln. Die Analyse beruht auf den Grundlagen der Queer Theory, Narratologie und Kritischen Diskursanalyse. Der erste Teil der Arbeit befasst sich mit dem notwendigen, theoretischen Gerüst und diskutiert die soziokulturellen Kontexte von 1969 und 2015, die Identitätskonstruktionsprozesse und die Entwicklungen im Jugendroman-Genre. Im zweiten Teil werden die Analyseergebnisse präsentiert und diskutiert. Die Ausgangsthesen konnten nur teilweise bestätigt werden.