

# Performativity of Homosexual Identity in Novel “They Both Die at The End”: A Queer Theory Analysis of Literature

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## SUBJECT

Literature

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## Abstract

This study analyzes Adam Silvera's novel 'They Both Die at The End', focusing on the homosexual identity of the main characters Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio. Applying the theory of Butler's performativity, the analysis studies their lives in three spheres: social, verbal, and sexual. It seeks to depict an emotion that goes beyond the bond's context, trying to contest heteronormativity. This research aims to show how homosexual identity is represented in the novel. Qualitative methods were used in this research, and the data collection method for this study involved reading and taking notes. The data is analyzed through data coding. The evidence from this study shows that Mateo changed from a state of insecurity to a state of confidence and love, all as a result of enjoying the company of the more self-assured Rufus. This research highlights the need to focus towards LGBTQ+ expressions, also the need for more constructs within psychology to understand character development and self-acceptance in queer arrangements.

## 1. Introduction

There is a significant change in societal attitudes toward the identification of homosexuals, with many indicating their sexual orientation without fear. It is a vast difference compared to the past when being gay was such an unspoken issue (Boasquevisque et al., 2023). The key issues include the fight for equal rights and protection against discrimination and the ongoing challenges posed by societal and cultural stigmas (Shahid, 2023). Exploring the biological and psychological underpinnings of sexuality offers insights into human behaviour and identity, helping to broaden scientific understanding of human diversity. This issue has become an urgent priority to ensure that all people can live freely and safely, regardless of their sexual orientation.

A person's identity as the concept of 'identity' is limited to "A sense of self that develops as the child differentiates from parents and family and takes place in society" (Jary & Jary, 1991). This principle focuses on people's perceptions and awareness of who they are and what is most important about them. Essential aspects of identity include nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation (homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual),

gender, and class (Jary & Jary,1991). Gay is part of the sexual identity of LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) who feel that they are different from the general social community. Homosexuality is a term used when someone has a sexual orientation with the same sex. The existence of literary works that use homosexuality or LGBTQ as a theme has existed since 1969 (Littlefield, 2016).

One of which is the novel by Adam Silvera, entitled 'They Both Die at the End', one of the novels that brought up that kind of relationship. It introduces the issue of tragic LGBTQ+ romance. It tells the story of two teenage characters, Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio, who receive phone calls from DeathCast. This national service notifies people who only have 24 hours left to live. Based on the brief synopsis above, the novel focuses on fiction and fantasy that do not occur in the real world. The novel's story will also involve the characters' identities and how they interact and express themselves.

Adam Silvera is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of *They Both Die at the End*, *The First to Die at the End*, *Happier Than Not*, *History Is All You Left Me*, the *Infinity Cycle* trilogy, and the *What If It is Us* duology with Becky Albertalli novels have received many starred reviews (Stevens, 2017). Silvera has become famous for his ability to address deep emotional themes such as love, loss, identity, and LGBTQ+ issues in his stories. It has been proven that, at present, many authors have written literary works with LGBTQ themes, including Adam Silvera.

'They Both Die at the End' is interesting to analyze because it represents how to self-accept and address the stigma against LGBTQ+. In addition, Buzzfeed (2019, as cited in Nandy (2022)), stated that 'They Both Died at the End' is still the best young adult novel of the decade. In 2020, this book was again talked about widely, and its popularity experienced a resurgence from the hashtag #BookTok, which was popular among readers on the *TikTok* social media platform. The book has received several awards and was nominated for Goodreads Choice Awards for young adult fiction. The success of this book in several countries, including being a #1 Bestseller in the UK and Australia, and the title of #1 New York Times Bestseller makes this book worth reviewing.

Numerous studies have examined this topic. First, a thesis by Widyatmoko (2005) entitled "*Homoseksualitas dalam Novel Larung*" analyzes the anxiety young people in Jakarta have about their lives and identities, including sexual orientation in the novel. This research uses Queer Theory and media culture & ideology theory to answer the problem. Second, a research conducted by Khurosan (2020) "*Performativitas Identitas Gender dan Seksualitas dalam Novel Imarah Yakubian Karya Ala Al-Aswani*" utilizing Butler's performativity theory, examines how the performativity of gender identity and sexuality of the characters are and how the characters' attitudes in the novel Imarah Yaqubian respond to the domination of heteronormativity. Lastly, a research conducted by Ristantika & Sudikan (2023), "*Identitas Lesbian dalam Novel Re: Karya Maman Suherman: Kajian Teori Queer Judith Butler*", aims to describe the performativity of appearance and physique, the performativity of lesbian conversations, and the performativity of sexual activity in lesbian characters in the novel Re: by Maman Suherman. In the novel Re: by Maman Suherman, it is found that the performativity of appearance and physicality is shown through lesbian appearance and attitude, the performativity of lesbian conversation is realized through the awareness and recognition of lesbian identity and the performativity of sexual activity is shown in the form of lesbian sexual treatment. Based on the explanation above, studies reveal that LGBT issues and gender identity are explored using Butler's Queer Theory in various literary works, such as literature and filmic media; as the previous studies focus on performativity in the local literature,

however, there is a gap in exploring homosexual performativity in Western literature, particularly the novel entitled 'They Both Die at The End'. Therefore, this research is intended to analyze how performativity, the social and cultural context of the novel, affects the development of homosexual identity. It is expected that this research will contribute to a broader understanding of how literature portrays LGBTQ+ identity within heteronormative and performative theory.

## **2. Literature of review**

### *Homosexual*

Same-sex attraction (SSA) or homosexuality is an attraction to people of the same sex (Sinyo, 2016). The attraction experienced by homosexuals includes feelings of love and sexual desire for their partners (Wulandari, 2018). The characteristics of gay homosexuals are as follows (Butler, 2019; Coleman, 1980; Mustafa, 2012): (1) neat appearance; (2) not talkative (tendency to be quiet); (3) always wearing body fragrances with a rather tacky smell; (4) speak lightly and tend to be soft; (5) do not like to hang out with many people; (6) act carefully in everything he does; (7) clothes are more likely to attract people's attention or be conspicuous. Several types of homosexuals can be categorized as follows (Butler, 2019; Coleman, 1980; Mustafa, 2012):

- 1) *Batant homosexual*, this type is the same as true gay, where men with female or feminine personalities. Usually, they will look soft in bright clothes.
- 2) *Desperate homosexuals*, usually these homosexuals, are married but still live their homosexual lives secretly from their wives. An example is a husband who always comes home late because of a job but carries out homosexual activities.
- 3) *Shy homosexuals*, usually always go to certain places to practice their homosexuality, such as visiting public toilets or steam baths that are driven by homosexual desires.
- 4) *Secret Homosexuals* are good at hiding their identity even though they are married and have a household. Most of them belong to the middle class.
- 5) *Situation Homosexual* is in a situation that makes the person have to behave like a homosexual because of the circumstances that force them to do so, such as for economic reasons that require them to make a living through homosexuality.
- 6) *Bisexual* individuals who have a relationship with both homosexual and heterosexual life. In short, they are people who practice both homosexuality and heterosexuality at the same time.
- 7) *Adjusted Homosexuals*, this group of homosexuals are more straightforward among themselves and adjust quickly. However, most of them end up getting divorced due to a lack of using emotions in the relationship.

### *Performativity*

Performativity is defined as repeatedly enacted behaviours (Howland, 2009). Performativity is not a single action but a repetition and a ritual that achieves results through naturalization in the context of a body; understandably, this happens based on duration (Butler, 1999). Moreover, she proposes her controversial theory that gender performance is natural (Olson, 2001). Gender performance can be seen in the words or attitudes directed at us and our attitudes, for example: "She is a girl." That sentence refers to her body as a woman's body rather than her identity. Meanwhile, our behaviour, such as cross-dressing in beauty pageants, shows us that there is no pure gender because transvestites behave, dress, and groom in a feminine way until the judges or the audience cannot distinguish them from real women. At the same time, they are born with the male sex (Khurosan, 2020). So Butler thinks gender is imitation, that no reality is as fixed as

we think it is, and that everything is unstable and subject to change. She then divides performativity into three categories as follows (Butler, 1993; Butler, 1997; Alaadhiya, 2002; Ritzer, 2014):

1) *Performativity of sexual appearance*

Performance of sexual appearance is crucial for understanding one's identity, with sexual orientation often focusing on femininity and physical orientation towards sexual orientation. Thus, a person's visible appearance can be directly linked to their sexual orientation. This performativity can be identified by how he dresses, behaves, and shows his sexual orientation. Moreover, there are some characteristics such as social norms and power structures regulate this performativity; it also provides space for resistance by subverting gendered appearances (e.g., through drag), and; sexual appearance and presentation are enacted through the body. For instance, LGBTQ+ often use social media to perform aspects of their queer identity through curated aesthetics or stylized photos that signal their sexual identity.

2) *Performativity of homosexual conversation*

A person who recognizes himself as homosexual will acknowledge his sexual orientation, a sign that he is experiencing identity change, and the performativity of sexual conversation recognizes the interaction and provides codes that justify himself as a homosexual to the interlocutor. There are some characteristics, such as: (1) that queer language often exists in contexts of vulnerability, (2) it also involves navigating cultural recognition, and (3) often subject to regulation or censorship. For instance, a gay couple might call his partner "my partner" to make it more neutral instead of "my boyfriend".

3) *Performativity of sexual activity*

The performativity of sexual activity in a gay person can be seen in how he treats his gay partner. Gay sexual activity is not the same as that of men and women. The form of sexuality of a gay man can be seen from his performativity and wishful thinking in his relationship with his gay partner. Queer marginalizing misconfigured sexuality and identity permanently remains open. There are some characteristics such as: (1) that, like gender, sexual activity is socially produced through recurrent actions that conform to societal standards of sexuality rather than being a simply biological act (2) sexual acts are not simply expressions of innate desires but are shaped by discursive forces, socially influenced understandings of the body, pleasure, and desire rather than being merely manifestations of primal needs. For instance, some people might express desires or fantasies that align with stereotypes or expectations within their gender or sexual orientation.

### *Heteronormativity*

Heteronormativity is a hegemonic system of norms, discourses, and practices that constructs heterosexuality as natural and superior to all other expressions of sexuality (Robinson, 2016). Heteronormativity is the social assumption that heterosexuality is preferred sexual orientation (Baraza, 2016). According to Warner (1991), the term heteronormativity was coined to illuminate the privileging of heterosexuality in social relations, which relegates sexual minorities to a marginal status position. Heteronormativity legitimates homophobia – the irrational fear of gay and lesbian people – and heterosexism – a discrimination that is resulted from the ideology that believes heterosexuality is superior compared to other sexual orientation (Baraza, 2016). Heteronormative standards and discourses that legitimate the discrimination of sexual minorities can be found in most social institutions, including religion, the family, education, the media, the law, and the state that the media often underrepresents lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people and/or presents them stereotypically (Robinson, 2016). Challenging the heteronormativity, LGBTQ+ individuals often face stigma and discrimination in various aspects of life, such as (Baraza, 2016; Casey et al., 2019):

- 1) Social stigma; sexual minorities challenge social exclusion, which is reflected on less participation in working life to things such as housing, education, and access to services as well as public safety.
- 2) Fear of revealing identity; members of society view LGBTQ+ as bad, immature, ill, and inferior. Moreover, those 'attributes' are understood to determine as criminal or otherwise worthy of social isolation, shame, and punishment.
- 3) Violence such as slur, harassment, and microaggression because of their sexual identity.

Various previous research has been conducted previously. First, the research conducted by Wulandari (2019) examines the changes in identity in a gay novel, focusing on the environment and Butler's queer theory. It aims to understand homosexual identities and their changes through a performance. The research uses qualitative methods with reading and note-taking techniques. Results show that performance affects whether a gay person should be sexually mature and feminized, and performance affects the gay person's sexual activity, leading to sexual transformation or realism.

Second, there is a thesis by Desabrina (2023). This study examines how performativity forms self-identity in Adam Silvera's novel *They Both Die at the End*. The research uses gender qualitatively to categorize events and data collected using reading and note-taking techniques. The results indicate that the main characters know their sexual identity and feel confident about it. The study focuses on the characteristics of gender identity through physical appearance and social and sexual activity, highlighting the difficulty in reaching a final understanding due to human freedom.

Third, research by Djumadin and Bunga (2024) aims to identify and describe homosexual behaviour in the novel *Lelaki Terindah* by Andrei Aksana. They used a qualitative approach and data collection techniques, including reading, underlining, and note-taking. The study uses literary psychology theory and finds that Rafky's character exhibits homosexual behaviour in various forms, including ideas, expressions, relationships, places, and desires. The research also reveals that Rafky's character is sincere, caring, and romantic, demonstrating the complexity of homosexual behavior in literature.

### **3. Research methods**

Qualitative research is used in this research. Qualitative research is defined as research where the data provided is obtained through data collection. In this example, research libraries can later be categorized into specific concepts (Ahmad & Muslimah, 2021). This research used qualitative research because it analyzes the novel, entitled 'They Both Die at The End', by revealing facts and reality about the homosexual group in the novel. This research does not prioritize numbers but rather prioritizes the depth of appreciation of the interaction between concepts being studied empirically. However, this research analyzes only chapters 3 and 4 of the novel due to particular reasons. First, as the research focuses on the representation of homosexual identity, these chapters provide moments, such as dialogues and interactions, in which the characters being studied express their identity, making them rich with performative acts that align with Queer Theory and Butler's concept of performativity. Second, these chapters illustrate how characters challenge heteronormative expectations, making them ideal for the analysis.

The data collection technique in this study uses reading and note-taking techniques. After reading the data source, the researcher writes down the necessary data

per the research question. The data found through data source analysis is then categorized through the following steps (Creswell, 2014; Saldaña, 2013; Yin, 2016):

1) Data coding

The steps for data coding are divided into three phrases: a) Before coding the data, the researchers identify the key themes which are relevant to the study. Besides, theoretical concepts are utilized as a guide for categorizing the data; b) The researchers read chapter 3 and 4 carefully, highlighting the text containing relevant dialogues, actions, and descriptions that depict homosexual identity as well as resistances against heteronormativity. These steps are supported by note-taking techniques to summarize key points and to predefine categories; c) The researchers then assign codes or labels to the extracted data. The labels to assign are Performativity of Social Appearance, Performativity of Homosexual Conversation, and Performativity of Sexual Activity for answering the first research question. The labels are presented in Table 1 as follows:

**Table 1.** Analysis of Homosexual Identity

No	Data	Performativity		
		Social Appearance	Homosexual Conversation	Sexual Activity

Codes:

SA = Social appearance

HC = Homosexual Conversation

SX = Sexual Activity

Moreover, to answer the second research question, the researchers assign codes to the data as well, referring to the Queer Theory by Butler (1990) and stigma and discrimination proposed by Baraza (2016). The labels for the data are Social Stigma, Fear of Revealing Identity, and Violence, which are presented in Table 2 as follows:

**Table 2.** Heteronormativity

No	Data	Heteronormativity		
		Social Stigma	Fear of Revealing Identity	Violence

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Codes:

SS = Social Stigma

FR = Fear of Revealing Identity

V = Violence

## 2) Data categorization

Data categorisation is a method used to organise the data sorted previously. The researchers categorise the data under the broader categories, namely Performativity of Social Appearance, Performativity of Homosexual Conversation, and Performativity of Sexual Activity, as shown in Table 1 above. Moreover, to answer the second research question, the researchers categorise the data under the thematic codes according to Butler (1999) and Baraza (2016): Social Stigma, Fear of Revealing Identity, and Violence.

## 3) Data analysing

The last step is data analysis. The researchers analyse and interpret each category then relate the findings to the theory. The steps in analysing the data are described as follows: a) Identify characters' homosexual identity through conversations, appearance, and sexual activity appears in the novel 'They Both Die at The End' by Adam Silvera using Butler's performativity theory; b) Analyse patterns through characters' interactions, narrative, expressions, and monologues that reflect challenges on heteronormativity; c) Write interpretation explaining the significance of the data in relation to the research questions, and; e) relate the findings with the theories.

## 4. Discussion

In the novel 'They Both Die at the End', the two main characters, Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio, show assertive homosexual behavior through their interactions and conversations. Through the growth of Mateo Torrez and Rufus Emeterio, Adam Silvera creates a complex portrayal of homosexual identity in the novel. Their shared mortality serves as a catalyst for their self-discovery, making their queerness an integral aspect of it rather than merely a subplot. At first, Mateo, who is reserved and introverted, finds it difficult to accept himself. He progressively lets go of his concerns and accepts his impulses on his last day with Rufus, which culminates in moments of sincere intimacy and affection. More overtly bisexual, Rufus represents a different path; he bears the weight of previous relationships, especially with Aimee, and through Mateo, he comes to embrace love in its purest, unadulterated form. Their love life transcends social norms, thriving in the intense reality of their approaching deaths rather than in spite of the limitations of the outside world. A love tale that is both universal and incredibly unique to queer experiences is reflected in the intimacy of their encounters, including their shared laughter, stolen glances, and forehead kiss before Mateo sings "Your Song." By the book's finale, Rufus's heartbroken memory of Mateo confirms the sincerity of their bond, a fleeting love that changed both of their lives.

*Character homosexual representation in chapters Mateo Torrez*

Mateo is presented as a shy and nervous figure in chapters 1-2. His hesitation to go outside is a reflection of his inability to accept himself, especially his queerness, which he has not yet come to terms with. In chapters 5-7, Mateo begins to overcome his worries as a result of his contacts with Rufus. Although he acknowledges that he is drawn to Rufus, he does not act on it right away. In chapters 8–9, in his conversation with Lidia, Mateo expresses his feelings for Rufus and says he wishes he had more time to come to terms with himself. In chapters 10–12, Mateo can show compassion for Rufus as he becomes more self-assured. When he performs "Your Song" for Rufus, it demonstrates his romantic and emotional openness. In chapters 13–15, Mateo's love for Rufus becomes a significant factor in his newly discovered bravery as the story goes on. As the last phase of accepting his LGBT identity, he plants a kiss.

#### *Rufus Emeterio*

Chapters 1-2 exhibit that Rufus publicly declares his orientation on his Last Friend profile, establishing his bisexuality. Mateo has more issues with his sexuality than he does. In Chapters 5-7, Rufus first sees Mateo as a buddy, but his sentiments change as they spend more time together. In contrast to his complicated past, he admires Mateo's generosity and innocence. In chapters 8 and 9, Rufus acknowledges Mateo's emotions but lets Mateo express them. He promotes his development by allowing Mateo to grow more at ease with who he is. In chapters 10–12, the bond reaches a painful peak when Rufus records Mateo singing, savouring the closeness they have formed. His love for Mateo is evident in the intense emotional bond and forehead kiss. In chapters 13–15, Mateo's death causes Rufus to suffer, demonstrating how profoundly their love changed him. The importance of their friendship is demonstrated by his last deed, which is to see Mateo's father.

#### *Performative Mateo and Rufus*

In Butler's analysis of performativity, Queer theory gives an understanding that homosexual identities are not fixed or inherent but instead formed through social interaction and performance. Thus, sexuality and gender are constructed via repeated acts and behaviours rather than being fixed characteristics. The identities of Mateo and Rufus in the book are not something they are born with; instead, they are formed via their interactions and experiences.

##### 1) Performativity in appearance

The main characters in this novel are biologically male, and they still generally dress as men for the whole story. In chapters 3 and 4, Mateo and Rufus do not show their homosexuality through performativity in appearance.

##### 2) Performativity of homosexual conversation

Conversation is a way to communicate our desires to others. Through conversation, people can achieve mutual understanding. The conversation between Mateo and Rufus shows their desire to understand each other. The following is an example of a data quote about the performativity of homosexual conversation:

##### Data 2

*"Finally!" Rufus says when I give him the chance to breathe, and now he kisses me. "What took you so long?" "I know, I know. I'm sorry, I know there's no time to waste, but I had to be sure you are who I thought you were. And even if I never got to kiss you, you gave me the life I always wanted." (page. 235)*

According to Butler, the act of kissing is not so much a physical act as it is a reiteration of the social norm that recognises and accepts a loving relationship between a pair of homosexual individuals. This moment shows that love and intimacy are part of a broader performativity in the gay context. Based on the data excerpt above, the conversation expresses Rufus' deep feelings and shows the experience he has been waiting for. In addition, Mateo's expression to Rufus, "I had to be sure you are who I thought you were," shows the process of identity affirmation.

Data 4

*He leans into my ear, throwing me into this weird phase where I'm relieved to be free of his gaze but also miss his eyes and the way he looks at me, like I'm good enough, and Rufus says, "I wish we had more time... I wanna ride bikes through empty streets and spend a hundred dollars at arcade and take the Staten Island ferry just to introduce you to my favorite snow cones." I lean in to his ear. "I want to go to Jones Beach and race you to the waves and play in the rain with our friends. But I want quiet nights, too, where we talk about nonsense while watching bad movies." (page. 246)*

The conversation shows they share dreams and hopes about their future and want more from their relationship. It appears that the conversation between Mateo and Rufus serves to affirm their homosexual identity through the disclosure of their shared dreams and hopes so that this interaction creates a space for them to express their desires, which contributes to the formation of their identity as a homosexual partner.

Data 6

*"Will you hate me if I want to go home? I want to rest in my bed where everything is safe and I want you to come with, but inside this time. I know I spent my life hiding there, but I did my best to live, too, and I want to share this place with you." Rufus squeezes my hand. "Take me home, Mateo." (page, 253)*

The quote above shows a sense of comfort and security in their relationship. This desire to share a private place shows the intimacy they feel with each other. The researchers believe that the quotation above serves to affirm their homosexual identity through expressions of vulnerability, desire to share, and emotional support. This interaction shows that deep communication and mutual understanding can build relationship intimacy.

Data 9

*"You were hiding from me, Mateo. I always wanted to stumble into someone like you, and it sucks that I had to find you through a stupid app." "I like the Last Friend app," I say. I get sentimental, but I wouldn't change how I met Rufus. "There I was, looking for some company, and I found you and you found me, and we chose to meet up because of gut instinct ..." (page. 258-259)*

The data shows a conversation about how they found each other through the "Last Friend" app to find friends for Deckers. However, Mateo shows acceptance of how they

met. This moment tends to show that in a queer context, deep emotional connections can be formed even in unexpected ways.

Data 10

*"I would've loved you if we had more time." I spit it out because it's what I'm feeling in this moment and was feeling the many moments, minutes, and hours before. "Maybe I already do.*

*I hope you don't hate me for saying that, but I know I'm happy."*

*"People have their timestamps on how long you should know someone before earning the right to say it, but I wouldn't lie to you no matter how little time we have... I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you." Rufus says, "Yo. You know damn well I love you too." (page. 260-261)*

Based on the data, the two characters express their love for each other despite their limited time. Their homosexual identity emphasises the expression of sincere love and confirms that love can grow strong even in a short time and under tremendous pressure in a queer context.

3) Performativity of sexual activity

Sexual activity in this context is not just a physical act but also an expression of affection and recognition of themselves as homosexual individuals. The following is an example of a data quote regarding the performativity of sexual activity:

Data 1

*I drag him off stage, and once we're behind the curtain, I look him in the eyes and he smiles like he knows what's about to go down. And he's not wrong. I kiss the guy who brought me to life on the day we're going to die. (page. 235)*

In Butler's performativity theory, the act of kissing is an affirmation of homosexual identity between the two of them. This moment creates a space to express their love and desire openly. The authors believe that kissing in this context is about physical desire and emotional depth. Mateo expresses gratitude and recognition of Rufus as the person who gave meaning to his life, which affirms their relationship.

Data 3

*The beat has only increased, but we place our hands on each other's shoulders and waist; my fingers dig into him a little, the first time I'm getting to touch someone else like this. We take it slow, and out of all the ways I've lived today, maintaining eye contact with Rufus is really hard; it's easily become the most intense intimacy ever I've ever experienced. (page. 245)*

The data excerpt reveals an intimate moment between Mateo and Rufus filled with emotional and physical tension. It appears to be courage and vulnerability in expressing their feelings. It also shows acceptance of their relationship and affirms their homosexual identity through intense physical and emotional actions.

Data 5

*I rest my forehead against his, the both of us sweating. "I have to talk to Lidia." I kiss Rufus again before we break through the crowd. (page. 246)*

The data indicate a meaningful yet straightforward intimate moment. Their actions show the existence of emotional and physical intimacy. Even though they are in a crowded situation, they still have a strong emotional connection and bond. This also emphasises their homosexual identity through physical actions.

Data 7

*I hug him because that says everything when I actually don't have anything to say. He squeezes me back before we go up the last flight of steps. (page. 255)*

The quotation shows that physical actions such as hugging can be a powerful way to convey feelings. This reflects that in homosexual relationships, non-verbal communication can often be more meaningful than words. This shows that the emotional bond between them is powerful.

Data 11

*I kiss my Last Friend because the world can't be against us if it brought us together. (page. 262)*

This data illustrates courage in the face of the stigma about homosexuals that exists in society. Even though the world does not support them, the fact that they found each other proves the strength of their love.

Data 12

*I put my glasses back on, kiss Rufus's forehead, and watch him resting. (page. 263)*

The data shows a calm and intimate moment between Mateo and Rufus. This action reflects the feelings of protection and affection formed. This affirms their homosexual identity through the acts of love and care given to each other. Based on the data above, the authors find that the performativity of homosexual conversation and the performativity of sexual activity mostly show homosexual identity in this novel. Meanwhile, the performativity of appearance does not appear in this chapter.

### *Challenges Heteronormativity*

The idea that being straight is the "correct" or default way to experience love is known as heteronormativity (Ge, L. 2020). This notion is contested in the novel as stigma and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. The researcher found out that the characters exhibit challenges heteronormativity in several ways, as follows:

1) Fear of repression and judgement

Mateo is hesitant about revealing his sexual orientation because of what society expects of him. At first, he fears what other people would think of him, so he is reluctant to admit his love for Rufus. This is consistent with the performativity thesis of Butler, which holds

that people perform their gender and sexual identity by social conventions rather than their inner truth (Wijaksono et al., 2022). The experiences of LGBTQ+ people who are raised in settings where heterosexuality is the accepted norm are reflected in Mateo's internalised dread.

## 2) Battles for public attention

Mateo is hesitant to show affection, in contrast to Rufus, who is more outspoken about his bisexuality. He shows how social conditioning affects self-expression by hesitating to kiss Rufus despite his intense affection for him. The conflict in their relationship is a reflection of the difficulties LGBTQ+ individuals encounter in settings where heteronormativity is prevalent.

## 3) Violence and threats targeting LGBTQ+ characters

This piece also illustrates the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ people to violence. Being a bisexual person of colour, Rufus faces marginalisation due to both his heritage and sexual orientation. The moment in which a former rival nearly attacks Rufus serves as a metaphor for the threats LGBTQ+ people, especially those from marginalised communities, experience in the real world.

According to Butler, repetitive acts influenced by outside forces strengthen gender and sexual identity (Wijaksono et al., 2022). This is demonstrated by Mateo's growth throughout the book; his shift from a silent, uneasy person to one who publicly declares his love for Rufus is a clear challenge to the heteronormative narrative that has been forced upon him. 'They Both Die at the End' challenges the inflexible frameworks of heteronormativity and emphasises the value of safe spaces where LGBTQ+ people can openly express who they are by highlighting their problems.

The finding aligns with the theory of performativity proposed by Judith Butler, which suggests that gender and sexual identity are constructed through a series of steps with others. In "They Both Die at the End," Mateo and Rufus' journey from insecurity to acceptance represents Butler's idea that identity comes from repetitive actions and social relations. This finding supports a previous study conducted by Khurosan (2020), which highlights the performativity of gender identity and sexuality of the characters. Additionally, the research reveals that performative utterances concerning identity are not focused on appearance, speech, and sexuality but rather on a more familiar or mundane sense, verbally and emotionally.

## 5. Conclusion

In the novel "They Both At The End" by Adam Silvera, research on the characters Mateo and Rufus through the lens of Butler's queer theory reveals some important insights. This research found that the main character, Mateo, is quiet and finds it challenging to communicate himself, especially his amorous sentiments for other guys. His hesitancy demonstrates how societal expectations have prevented him from accepting who he is. However, as the story progresses, he acquires self-assurance, and by the end, he can publicly express his love for Rufus, including by kissing him for the first time. Conversely, Rufus feels more at ease with his bisexuality. Although he does not have as many identity issues, he still has to deal with a society that believes heterosexual

relationships are the norm. This makes Mateo feel secure enough to embrace his identity because of his part in the narrative.

Furthermore, the story depicts the stigma and discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals, emphasising Mateo's internal conflicts with societal norms and his fear of being suppressed. The different ways of how he and Rufus show affection underscore the more significant difficulties that LGBTQ+ individuals face in a heteronormative world. The novel also confronts the genuine dangers of violence and marginalisation that characters like Rufus endure, highlighting the critical need for safe spaces for self-expression. This research could be helpful in respecting differences and reducing stigma towards sexual identities.

Based on the discussion presented, the researchers suggest some recommendations for further research. First, future research might analyse the whole part of this novel so that the analysis might give the readers more insights into how the author depicts the characters' homosexual identity and how they challenge heteronormativity. Second, the analysis might utilise other theories and perspectives, such as the perspective of Carl Gustav Jung's psychology, to understand more deeply the influence of each character's personality on their journey of self-acceptance. However, this research is expected to serve as a reference and provide insights into the study of queer theory in literature.

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