

## Gender Performativity in Becky Albertalli's *Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*

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### ABSTRACT

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This article analyzes Becky Albertalli's *Simon Vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) through the lens of gender performativity issues. The performativity experiences of a homosexual person are known to question American society's established beliefs about how individuals should perceive, respond to, and experience gender and sexuality. This research illustrates how gender and sexual identity, as well as cultural constructions of gender and attitudes toward specific sexual orientations, are viewed in the novel's notion of performativity. The article's discussion is framed using Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity. Through the thematic analysis of the work, it was discovered that societal norms governed gender through a series of performativity. The book's main character, Simon, discovers that it is challenging to express his identity as a homosexual because of the pressure from cultural norms that view people by using sexual orientations other than those of commoners as deviants. However, the main character changes the social perspective so that the idea of having a different sexual orientation is accepted through a series of events.

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### Introduction

American young adult author and former psychologist Becky Albertalli is the author of *Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. The book won multiple accolades after its publication in 2015, including the German International Youth Fiction Prize, the William C. Morris Award from the American Library Association, and the Once-a-Year Honorarium for Young Adult Literature. The Wall Street Journal listed this novel as one of the top young adult books of 2015 and indexed on the Long List of National Book Awards. The novel's popularity led to its adaptation in 2018 to the *Love Simon* movie. The LGBTQIAP+ children and teens are the primary subjects of the coming-of-age novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. The story's primary character, a teenager named Simon, is about growing up, coming out, falling in love, renegotiating

friendships, and recognizing the pleasure of being a messy-haired blond boy with a sexual orientation different from the majority.

The premise of Albertalli's debut novel is the process of discovering one's gender identity as a young child. Teenagers may utilize this young adult literature created for youth between 12 and 20 to help them discover who they are. Young Adult Literature (YAL) can be used in the classrooms to teach complete intercourse education by providing opportunities for the students to learn about gender, sexuality, and healthy relationship in literary and fitness classes (Palmer et al., 2022). Teenagers no longer need to feel isolated if they struggle with identification only because their gender restricts their conduct. Using adult literature by the students can help them explore their identity and develop a feeling of agency (Savitz, 2021; Palmer et al., 2022). However, adults frequently read this book because maturation is a universal process shared by people of all ages as they approach adulthood (Kitchener, 2017). In addition, to inspire children, this book may also serve as motivation for adults who feel excluded from society due to gender norms.

In general, a teenage boy who experiences a different sexual orientation than males is the primary conflict in *Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda*. Because not everyone can be open-minded and consider it taboo, he encountered difficulties while exposing his identity to the others around him. Since he was a little child, Simon has had a typical life free from outside pressure. He has a loving, supportive family, wonderful friends, and pleasant surroundings.

Simon's life was going well until Martin Addison, a young lad, discovered that he was exchanging emails with a mystery guy who made it clear that he was gay. When Martin threatened to spread Simon's sexual orientation in public if he did not let him approach Abby, Simon's best friend, it gave him the most substantial reason to be afraid. He was in captivity because of Martin's blackmail which made it more challenging for him to come out as gay because he was plagued with concern. This apprehension stems from how society views those whose sexual inclination differs from the majority. In violation of the appropriate gender norms, society actively engages in gender stigmatization (Dietrich et al., 2020).

*Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* adheres to Judith Butler's (1990) idea of gender performativity, which holds that gender is not a person but rather what a person does. The idea of gender is equivalent to sex, which is a product of cultural production (Butler, 1990). Consequently, sex is a cultural norm since intercourse is not treated as something that is decided using the law (Butler, 1986). Because performative gender roles rely on repetition to establish identity, they are unstable (Butler, 1986; Cinar, 2015). The performativity of gender is depicted in this book with the premise that gender and all of its behavior adhere to the performativity that has developed in society.

By applying the idea of gender performativity to the main character in *Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli, this article explores how society responds to the pattern of gender norms. Access to gender norms frequently leads to inequality in the distribution of resources and rights between men and women. It affects a person's sense of self, voice, and authority (Cislaghi and others, 2020). The topic of gender and performativity in novels has been covered in several studies before. To name a few, Reczek (2020), Jacobson (2018), Bista (2021), and Slezek (2018) made arguments on gender identity and sexuality. Meanwhile, the performativity of gender identity has been redefined by Asl (2019), Sadjadi (2019), Wu (2021), and Tuo (2022).

Bölükbaş (2019), Gratzke (2020), and Garcia-Rabines (2021), on the other hand, also explored the sexual tension in a gay sexual relationship in further research. Previous analyses of the novel *Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015), to be more specific, have focused on several topics, including the habits and features of homosexual people. These may include how a gay finds his partners, how to identify other gay (they examine the stages of a person's development into a gay), and how to come out as gay in society, such as those done by Gading et al. (2019), and Marwenti (2020).

According to earlier research, although gender identity does not always indicate a person's sexual orientation, there are still numerous injustices causing people to see different sorts of sex with prejudices (Moleiro & Pinto, 2015). If women are predominantly feminine, it does not mean that all women, gay or transgender are also predominantly feminine. They are not constrained by a particular gender identification and can choose whatever they wish to accomplish (*Human Rights and Gender Identity* (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2009)).

An in-depth discussion of the novel's concept of performativity, how society perceptions of various sexual orientations affect people's gender, and how gender and sexual identity are perceived in these conceptions are all covered in this article. The male characters in the novel receive much of the essay's attention. Gender performativity in this book has been the subject of very little earlier research. In particular, the study seeks to change public perception concerning gender identity discrimination among young people who are still developing this understanding.

## Method

This study applies textual literary analysis qualitatively and a full description of the novel as the study's subject. It examines the character and narrator's expression and narration in the novel under discussion to attain the intended research focus. This will also include the examination of the protagonist's interaction with himself psychologically and his environment, how other characters view him, how the public views the problems the protagonist encounters,

and how the protagonist overcomes each problem by himself and with the help of the other characters in the novel. They are all essential vibes to discuss.

The novel *Simon Vs. Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli, which examines the main character's anxieties regarding his sexual orientation, is the subject of this study. This study employs the deconstructive work method and draws on Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) to examine the idea of gender performativity. This is accomplished because Judith Buttler's study on gender performativity follows the deconstructive reading procedures involving the following steps: 1) identifying the binary contrasts, such as male and female, man and woman, normal and abnormal, 2) reversing the binaries, 3) providing comments on the binaries, 4) dismantling the pre-existing ideas, 5) and discovering "the undecidable" meaning in the text: the last meaning to be accepted and acknowledged. The purpose of this last procedure is to explain the conduct and viewpoint regarding the issue of homosexuality in the novel. Once the meaning has been established, the problem analysis based on textual evidence from the novel is then reinforced by expert theories and earlier findings on gender and performativity to understand gender and performativity in the novel better.

## Discussion

### 1. Sexual Orientation as Indefinite Things

The social conceptions of sex, gender, and sexual orientation are fluid, artificial, and dynamic (Butler, 1990). This demonstrates the ambiguity surrounding a specific gender. When examined more closely, the idea of binary opposition in *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* was suggested in heterosexuality and homosexuality, where people are created with two sexes, male and female, which are complementary to one another. Their sexual orientation determines whether they like the same sex or the other sex. In binary opposition, the phrases related to the positive and negative, lack precise latitude, and each linguistic unit has a meaning interpreted as what it is not (Buttler, 1990).

In contrast to hetero-normative, which is seen as a positive connotation or, in other words, the only correct sexual orientation, the community's unfavorable perception of homosexuality is based on the notion that it is tied to other sexual orientation abnormalities that were created previously. A homosexual was denied the freedom to express his sexual orientation due to the principle of hetero normativity, which holds that straight people have historically ruled society. When faced with issues that take the shape of "coming out stuff," Simon, in this book, becomes perplexed.

*"I don't know how people do this. How Blue did this. Two words. Two freaking words, and I'm not the same Simon anymore. My hand is over my mouth, and I stare straight ahead"* (Albertalli, 2015, p. 131)

And,

*"That's the thing people wouldn't understand. This coming out thing. 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 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. Leah loves gay guys, so she'd probably be freaking thrilled" (Albertalli, 2015, p. 48)*

A few difficulties arise because of the differences between homosexuals and heterosexuals in social circles, including "coming out items." The word "coming out" describes how LGBTQ individuals become conscious of their feelings for the same sex by informing others about it (American Psychological Association/APA, 2008). Since humans are supposed to have always loved the other sex, there is no need to confuse a heterosexual phase. The environment does make a difference in a person's chance of exposing or discovering his identity. However, it cannot be stated that being in a homosexual atmosphere cause someone to be gay. The environment only offers a means for people to exercise their free will.

Coming out and identifying oneself is unnecessary for those who are heterosexual from birth. Since they sense nothing is wrong and do not think it has to be rectified immediately, they will feel confident in what they do. In contrast to Simon, who is a youngster preoccupied with figuring out who he was, at one time, he felt a strong affinity with a man who, at first, he thought was unusual. Because all he did was mimic other people attracted to the other sex, he was previously unable to grasp what he was feeling.

*"I don't even know when I figured it out. It was a bunch of little things. Like this weird dream I had about Daniel Radcliffe. Or how I was obsessed with Passion Pit in middle school, and then I realized it wasn't really about the music" (Albertalli, 2015, p.14)*

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), the people's primary interest in developing patterns of sexual orientation occurs between middle childhood and early adolescence. Without prior awareness of sex, the patterns like emotional attraction, romance, and sexual attraction can develop (APA, 2008). When Simon was in middle school, there were some clues that he not only adored his idol as a fan but also had a sexual desire for him, which perplexed him and added to his anguish.

*It is 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 (Albertalli, 2015, p. 119)*

Homosexuals might not go through the "coming out" process if the human mind has accepted it as an everyday occurrence. However, heteronormativity is used as a societal benchmark to make judgments, stereotypes, expectations, and presumptions (Ward & Schneider, 2009). Consequently, the perception of normal and pathological sexuality is produced. The result

is that heterosexuality is viewed as the norm, while alternative sexual orientations, including homosexuality or bisexuality, are seen as abnormal. The public determines that any sexual orientation other than heterosexuality is a divergence from the norm in sexual relations. Some forms of sexual behavior, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) relationships, are seen as non-normative.

The conclusion on sexual orientation must begin with examining the precise definition of gender, which relates to the social roles connected to gender identity. Gender identity and socio-cultural background are intimately related. Even the definition of sexual attraction, such as homosexuality, will vary depending on the context and society in which it is interpreted (Asl, 2019; Sadjadi, 2019; Dietrich et al., 2020; Wu, 2021; and Tuo, 2022). Butler (1990), on the other hand, stresses that as cultural circumstances shape both concepts, sex should not be considered a type of gender. However, since sex, by definition, will eventually reveal itself to be gender, there is no alternative way for the body not always to be understood in terms of cultural connotations (Butler, 1986; 1990; Heinämaa, 1997). Sex and gender are inextricably linked, considering the intimate relationship. Following the resistance, people would classify sex and gender as a shape of the female and male genders. As a result, it is crucial to understand social identity and sexual orientation in their cultural context. A person's culture can influence the perception of gender identity (Tomar, 2017).

Humans are typically heterosexual. Thus, continually mimicking such behavior has a theatrical quality (Buttler, 1990). The novel's main character, Simon, imitates something typical individuals often do in their surroundings by adoring the sex opposite, as everyone did in the past. However, he finds it odd that he feels an attraction to guys, even though he does not sense the resonance for women, "... *Honestly, though? I think the real reason I had girlfriends was because I didn't one hundred percent believe I was gay. Or maybe I didn't think it was permanent*" (Albertali, 2015, p. 17).

Because it grows naturally without self-consent, it demonstrates that sexual orientation is part of a person's identity. Without recognizing his sexual orientation, Simon has a natural affinity for guys. Scientists have not yet agreed on the causes of heterosexuality, bisexuality, homosexuality, or lesbianism. Although many studies have connected genetic, hormonal, social, and cultural impacts on sexual orientation, it cannot be said that specific elements determine sexual orientation (Tomar, 2017; Asl, 2019; Sadjadi, 2019; Dietrich et al., 2020; Wu, 2021; Tuo, 2022). People have grown more accepting of heterosexuality since, up until now, behavior has been based on imitation and repetition to avoid being labeled as abnormal. The idea that heterosexuality is the only sexual orientation that must be practiced cannot be supported.



*I'm the only one? That's definitely kind of awesome. I'm really honored, Jacques. If it's funny, because I don't really email, either. And I never talk about this stuff with anyone. (Albertali, 2015, p. 15).*

Blue's response to Jacques, Simon's alias, demonstrates that getting out of trouble is not always straightforward. Many people hold off because they don't want to run into the danger of encountering prejudice and discrimination. The others decide to keep it a secret, some decide to carry it out under carefully controlled circumstances, and some even decide to do it in an openly visible manner.

The need to 'coming out' arises from the fact that it is a crucial LGBTQ+ step in the psychological stage (APA, 2008). This is confirmed by some studies that show that having a sexual orientation is associated with incredible feelings and when practiced in daily life, enhances both one's mental and physical health (Jacobson, 2018; Gading, 2019; Asl, 2019; Sadjadi, 2019; Dietrich et al., 2020; and Tuo, 2022). It can be reached out by affirming the stage of coming out. Bram also recounts his story of things coming out at this point, using Blue or a fictitious name. He was relieved since he felt he had nothing more to conceal, and his mother had sensibly accepted it without any adverse reaction. Blue further demonstrates that this phase of life is one of the most crucial since it has opted to take significant risks.

*Jacques, I did it. I told her. I almost can't believe it. I'm still feeling so wild and jittery and not myself. I don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight. I think she took it well. She didn't bring Jesus into it at all. She was pretty calm about the whole thing. (Albertalli, 2015, p. 103)*

And,

*I don't even know what to say. I'm so proud of you, too. This is momentous, isn't it? I'm guessing this is the kind of thing we remember for the rest of our lives, I know exactly what you mean about crossing the border. I think this is the kind of process that moves in one direction. Once you come out, you can't really go back in. (Albertalli, 2015, p. 105).*

The actions of homosexuals, such as coming out, are not always seen negatively by society, as this novel demonstrates. Even Bram's mother, known to be quite pious in this setting, may respect her son's choice. For many individuals, this may serve as a reminder that being homosexual is nothing to be ashamed of and that coming out is not something to be avoided (Gading, 2019; Gratzke, 2020; Dietrich et al., 2020; Wu, 2021). Because truth does not always simply exist from one perspective, folks can follow their feelings without caring about what other people think. A similar thing happened to Simon, who first faced homophobic slurs from individuals due to Martin's negligence in disclosing his identity, but by that time, Simon's friends had overcome this.

Identity is an illusion that thinks of itself as gendered before acting (Buttler, 1990; Buttler, 2004). During the identity-formation process, a person gets persuaded of the object of belief;

societal stigmas and taboos impose this conviction. Simon and Bram are terrified of the vibrations that naturally emanate from them, just as they are terrified that people would perceive them as abnormal. The word 'norma;' constraints the individual's claim to liberty and existence. Butler fights for the rights of oppressed people, including gays and lesbians, to claim their own identities by exposing the manufactured, illegal, and performative character of gender identification (Buttler, 1986; 1990; 2004). The subject of why someone could be gay, or lesbian is not addressed in a scientific study explaining the origin of sexual orientation. There is no conclusive evidence that the social environment significantly impacts during this period because most known environmental impacts appear in the womb (Tomar, 2017; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Christopher, 2021).

## 2. Gender is Socially Constructed

People are compelled to follow the rules in line with gender norms (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). Society perceives males as innately macho, and women are naturally feminine, just as in this novel. A series of events that have frequently occurred since antiquity causes this to deviate from the social norm. This way of thinking restricts people's freedom to do as they like. In addition to these factors, the characters in the novel are influenced to follow their wishes by their fear of apparent deviance. However, because gender reality is performative, it remains as straightforward as ever. Gender is a social invention unconnected to the human body's actual qualities (Butler, 1990; 2004). No essential aspect of gender demonstrates that it has objective values since gender is an act that generates notions about gender; without this act, gender would not exist at all (Butler, 1990; 2004). It suggests that the genesis of gender is performative rather than physical and that the body acquires gender through a series of actions that may be updated, rectified, and unified through time (Butler, 1990:274).

The idea of binary opposition, or a manner of viewing the world in different ways, where one is greater than the other, is considered a means to categorize men and women depending on gender expression (Buttler, 2004; Tyson, 2006:100). The gender bender day custom, which forces pupils at his school to behave and dress like the opposite sex, is held every year, as experienced by Simon in this story. It is necessary for males to behave manly and for women to appear feminine. Men and women are categorized as having one certain behavior when they just act performatively, e.g., the phrase "behave like the other sex" is used, "... *Wednesday is Gender Bender Day, which basically amounts to southern straight people cross-dressing. It is definitely not my favorite.*" (Albertalli, 2015, p. 54)

Because he does not want his gender identity or sexual orientation to be known to everyone, Simon has mental upheaval. He feels uneasy when he is compelled to look like a woman. The stigma everyone associated with his actions due to his sexual orientation makes it



unpleasant, even if it will be unknown simply because he dresses like a lady. Nowadays, guys who dress femininely are stigmatized as gay because of the notion that straight individuals are associated with femininity. Similarly, a tomboyish woman could be mistaken for a lesbian solely because of how she dresses (Buttler, 1990; 2004). It can be seen from the following excerpt:

*So, here's the thing. I would have left the god forsaken industrial-strength hair clips in Alice's drawer where I found them if I thought I could get away with it. But everyone knows I participate in this kind of crap. Ironically, of course. But still. It would be weirdly conspicuous if I didn't cross-dress at least a little bit today. It's funny how it ends up being the straightest, preppiest, most athletic guys who go all out for Gender Bender. I guess they feel secure enough in their masculinity that they don't care (Albertalli, 2015, p. 55)*

And,

*I actually hate when people say that. I mean, I feel secure in my masculinity, too. Being secure in your masculinity isn't the same as being straight (Albertalli, 2015, p. 55)*

Simon still prefers to dress and acts like a man despite being gay. Additionally, this cannot be applied to all homosexuals or males. Both men and women have the freedom to select how they wish to dress. One of Simon's closest friends, Leah, does not dress in an especially feminine manner. She also performs on the drums, typically played by boys at the school talent event. With Simon's best buddy, Abby, who often dresses up and acts femininely, it is different. On purpose, Leah wore overly feminine attire on the gender bender day, "... Leah looks at her and shrugs without explaining. Dressing extra feminine for gender Bender is just something Leah doe. It's her way of being subversive. (Albertalli, 2015, p. 55)

Leah's deviation from the norm by dressing in overtly feminine attire did not produce the negative consequences that were anticipated. Women and men can utilize or behave like the other sex as long as it does not hurt anybody else. This custom also demonstrates that it is not inherently incorrect for men to dress femininely and women to dress in a masculine way. It demonstrates that along with the mental openness of people, gender norms have up to now been imposed on society may be loosened (Buttler, 1990; 2004; Gading, 2019; Asl, 2020; Gratzke, 2020; Dietrich et al., 2020; Bista, 2021; and Wu, 2021) because other people who thought that no one was to blame for human decisions gradually gave room for humans who previously required it.

The behaviors of sex kinds have long shaped the social conception of gender. Gender is a result of performance and imitation through time (Buttler, 1990; 2004). As a result, anytime there is a homosexual or gay, it is already assumed that they are female. He will be categorized as feminine since he adheres to societal norms. It may be deduced from many factors that some individuals feel uncomfortable wearing feminine clothing, like Simon, and that some homosexual people who are considered feminine or trans-sexual feel comfortable being that way.

Simon believes that he only prefers to dress for his gender at birth, despite the fact that gender can alter over time. When he was younger, Simon was curious to attempt things like feminine things.

*I guess the one thing that's weird for me is dressing like a girl. No one knows, even Blue, that 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. I always knew I was a boy, and I've never wanted to be anything but a boy. But when I was younger, I used to wake up at night in April dreaming of Halloween. I would try my costume on a dozen times each October, and all through November, I obsessively fantasized about pulling it out of my closet one more time. But I never crossed that line. (Albertali, 2015, p. 56)*

A homosexual individual has a different urge for clothing (Noh et al., 2015). It is referred to in this story as being connected to the distinctions in Bram's (also known as Blue) and Simon's (also known as Jacques) attire. Simon objects, but Bram does not mind dressing in women's clothing on Gender Bender Day.

*I can't believe Bram Greenfeld dressed up. Bram from my lunch table. He's this quiet black kid who's supposed to be really smart, but I've never heard him speak unless he's forced to. He leans way back into the corner of the couch, shuffling the toe of one foot against the other, and I never noticed it before, but he's actually kind of adorable. (Albertali, 2015, p. 55)*

The fact that human behavior may vary throughout time proves that gender is not a fixed concept. Even a traditionally macho Simon had experimented with femininity. Not only Simon, but also Leah and Simon's sister enjoy manly stuff. Therefore, gender is something we make rather than something we are born with or without (West & Zimmerman, 1987), and behavior we engage in (Butler, 1990). There is no other way for the fundamental and unrealized sex or gender to be conveyed by the gender show if gender reality is created by the performance itself (Butler, 1990). Therefore, the sex of transvestites is just as genuine as that of anybody whose performance complies with social expectations.

According to Butler's idea, transgender who is classified as feminine does not imitate women; instead, they grow organically. The capacity to create naturalized effects is known as the reality effect (Butler, 1993: 129). Feminine men and women do not demonstrate that one gender is the only source of femininity. Because there isn't an actual original version, transgender does not copy it. After all, the performance is just layered to give the impression that the result is organic. Bram, Leah, Abby, and Simon all have the freedom to dress whatever they like without regard to traditional gender roles. Women may be macho, and men can be feminine. In this instance, it may be said that gender representation is not accurate, gender identity is not what drives gender expression. Gender is a continuous process of imitation, repetition, and performance.

### 3. Being Gay is normal

Gender norms are social rules specifying gender behaviors, whether committed by men or women and sanctioned by the community. The materialization of "sex," expressed by those standards, happens due to the forced repetition of regulatory laws (Butler, 1990). Through social interactions, they are ingrained in the psyche and passed down from one generation to the next. Because of this, women and men frequently have uneven access to resources and freedoms, which affects their ability to speak up for themselves, use their power, and feel confident (Bölükbaş, 2019; Cislighi et al., 2020; Cislighi & Heise, 2020). Normative heterosexuals force others to follow the dominant heterosexual identification standard (Butler, 1990; 2004; Burrel et al., 2019; Bölükbaş, 2019; Cislighi et al., 2020; Cislighi & Heise, 2020). The novel, *Simon vs. Homo Sapiens Agenda*, depicts how men and women are classified according to gender conventions. Males and females must like each other for sexual fulfillment, which is dictated by gender standards that call for men to be macho and women to be feminine. However, the novel also illustrates the existence of a person who chooses the gender most comfortable to him, as well as a gay. People come to terms with the variations because of several journeys over time.

Society does not automatically accept decisions concerning gender in a society that deviate from the majority (Burrel et al., 2019; Bölükbaş, 2019; Cislighi et al., 2020; Cislighi & Heise, 2020). This generalization is illustrated in Simon's story by the numerous challenges he faces as a minority while going through the coming-out process. Like the strange behavior of those close to him, bullying, prejudice, and other abnormalities. The novel depicts Simon's criticism of being homosexual in Georgia in this context. It is challenging to compare LGBT life in Georgia to that in New York. However, there are regional differences in unwritten social standards or social codes.

*Maybe it would be different if we lived in New York, but I don't know how to be gay in Georgia. We're right outside Atlanta, so I know it could be worse. But Shady Creek isn't exactly a progressive paradise. At school, one or two guys are out, and people definitely give them crap. Not like violent crap. But the word "fag" isn't exactly uncommon. And I guess there are few lesbian and bisexual girls, but I think it's different for girls. Maybe it's easier. If there's one thing the Tumblr has taught me, it's that a lot of guys consider it hot when a girl is a lesbian. (Albertali, 2015, p. 21)*

Social convention and stigma restrict a person's ability to live there. Being gay causes difficulties for Simon, who resides in Georgia since many people fail to recognize their differences from most people. Even among lesbians and homosexuals, a lesbian will be seen as exceptional. Man is more than simply a body; in a crucial sense, a person uses their body differently than their contemporaries and the people who came before them to become their successors (Butler, 1990; 2004). This gender norm's implementation has noticeable effects, such as elevating one gender's subjectivity.

If the recipient of the norm does not abide by these gender norms, terrible things may result. A person will face ridicule, mockery, and disdain from others if they disobey the rules established by the government (Burrel et al., 2019; Bölükbaş, 2019; Cislaghi et al., 2020; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020). In violation of the appropriate gender norms, society actively engages in gender stigmatization (Dietrich et al., 2021). A similar phenomenon occurred to Simon when people discovered he was homosexual because of a post by Martin, who had coerced Simon into giving him what he wanted.

*As I'm walking into the language arts wing, this football guy I hardly recognize almost runs directly into me coming down the stairs. I step back to steady myself, but he puts his hand on my shoulder and looks me right in the eye. Then he grabs me by the cheeks and pulls my face in like he's going to kiss me. "Mwah! He grins, and his face is so close I can feel the heat of his breath. And all around me, people laugh like fucking Elmo.*

*I yank my body away from him, cheeks burning. "Where are you going, Spier? Someone says. "McGregor wants a turn." And 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. (Albertali, 2015, p. 150)*

Bullying motivated by sexual arousal is one experience heterosexuals never have (Burrel et al., 2019; Bölükbaş, 2019; Cislaghi et al., 2020; Cislaghi & Heise, 2020; Dietrich et al., 2021). Simon has evolved into a subtle jab at the kids at his school because his gay orientation is widely known. Simon appears to have had to endure different forms of bullying from homophobes who felt superior since they felt normal at the time, although there is already a particular statute on the protection of human rights.

Although gender is a significant issue for minorities like the LGBTQ+ community in America, the country is recognized for its freedom to tolerate all variations. In 2018, there were over 20 transgender fatalities in the US (Nazish, 2018). LGBTQ+ persons, even in certain nations, are afraid to display their sexual orientation for fear of social shame. This is due to the perception of LGBTQ+ persons as ill, irrational, and filthy (Burrel et al., 2019). The number of transgender individuals killed in homicides increased by 350 people worldwide in 2020 (Wareham, 2020).

Simon's experiences paint a little portrait of how society continues to perceive homosexuality as an inappropriate phenomenon. Additionally, gays are given distinct labels from other people because of the minority level. There was a time when a heterosexual tormented Simon because he felt superior.

*"I follow Abby's gaze to the back of the auditorium. And there's this pair of random dudes in front of the double helixes who look a little familiar. One of them is wearing a hoodie and fake glasses and a skirt over his khakis, and they're both holding giant poster board signs. The first guy's sign says, "How u doin' Simon?" And the other guy in the skirt's sign says, WHAT WHAT-IN THA BUTT! The guys are grinding and some other people peek through the doorway laughing." (Albertalli, 2015, p. 151-152)*

And,

*Right, because things aren't shitty enough. People at school think I'm a joke, and there's a boy I can't seem to stop being in love with, and he just might be someone I can't stand. And I'm pretty sure I'm going to puke tonight. (Albertali, 2015, p. 190)*

They bullied Simon by wearing women's accessories because the stigma of being gay was associated with being called a sissy or a man who wore feminine clothes. Though, someone's clothes are not related to their sexual orientation (Noh, et al, 2015). This is expressed by Simon who is comfortable with his masculinity (Albertalli, 55). Furthermore, the existence of feminine gays does not imply that all of them are like that. However, performatives—actions that have been done repeatedly over a long period by many individuals—have an impact on why gay people are stigmatized.

Simon is facing yet another hurdle in his life since a friend is blackmailing him. Since Martin does not want anyone to know who he is, he is willing to take a life-threatening danger to extort Simon. Simon thinks that overcoming challenges involves effort on his behalf rather than being forced to do so by others. However, unhappily, Simon is forced to comply with Martin's demands since he is scared of all the threats he has not considered.

*He's really careful about a thing. Obviously, he's more careful than I am. Basically, if Blue finds out that Martin Addison has screenshots of our emails, I'm pretty sure he'll freak out. But he'll freak out in a totally Blue way. Meaning, he'll stop emailing me. (Albertali, 2015, p. 19).*

And,

*I mean, I get it. Just because I was careless doesn't mean it's fair to push you into revealing yourself before you're ready. (Albertali, 2015, p. 165)*

When facing so many difficulties, Simon's homosexuality is unpleasant. A gay must contend with the possibility of facing societal prejudice, coming out, receiving the risks in life after coming out, and not mentioning the issue to the family who has a different perspective to Simon.

*My mom is halfway up the stairs, but she turns around to catch my eye. "No you won't, And speaking of Nick. Your father and I discussed this and we want to sit down with you and brainstorm about how we're going to handle him spending all night. I'm not worried about tonight, since the girls will be there, but thinking ahead—". (Albertali, 2015, p. 140)*

All of Simon's problems from when he came out as gay undoubtedly did not last long as everyone recognized that they did not comprehend things as others did. Simon and Bram can live together as a heterosexual couple, although there are gender differences; homosexuals and heterosexuals share the same sexual drive. Simon as a gay, goes about his daily business like everyone else. The first thing that distinguishes homosexuality is the stigma of a society that is unaccustomed to dealing with minorities.

Gender, however, may also be a means of dissecting and denaturalizing language (Buttler, 1990; Buttler, 2004; Howson, 2005). The process by which stereotypes of men and women are formed and accepted is called gender (Butler, 1986). However, the perception of heteronormativity or the status of heterosexuality as a natural and social norm reinforces the idea that gender exhibits constraints, stability, and reconstruction. It means that by flipping gender roles and making a new show, this persistent, antiquated, and linked type of gender might be eliminated.

The life of a gay may first be perceived as a deviant issue, as it was in Simon's case, but with time, this viewpoint may alter and gay may instead be perceived as having a regular societal problem. The current study also confirms that the under-discussed novel is valuable as teaching material at schools and universities to introduce students to the idea of gender and performativity, which is in line with Kitchener (2017), Savitz (2021), and Palmer et al. (2022) related to the exclusive remarks over young adult literature for educational purposes. This will lighten the idea that teaching children to learn about and recognize their identities is how reading gender works.

## Conclusion

By utilizing Buttler's gender and performativity theory and understanding the content of each argument made during the discussion of *Simon Vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015), Becky Albertalli helps the reader understand that there is another reality than what is frequently perceived as gender and sexual orientation. Sexual orientation, usually perceived in terms of heterosexuality, can make readers doubt if homosexuality is true and common. By looking at it from a different angle through the deconstruction reading method, all discrepancies in how society views a particular gender may be resolved.

Although initially quite rigid, society and the younger generation's views on gender have now loosened. They become more compromised to the gender and performativity phenomena. They genuinely want to be accepted by the public but many gays are seen differently. Thus, discussing the truest thing ultimately has unclear meaning. Because the truth is subjective and depends on who and how people ask about it, based on the research findings, having a sexual orientation different from most individuals is not abnormal but rather an everyday experience that anybody may have. Therefore, there is no need to be unsure of what to do if someone like Simon is going through an identity crisis.

This research has not yet progressed to the point where society in *Simon vs. Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) progressively accepts homosexuality as an alternative because Simon, the protagonist of the novel, still believes that homosexuality is a taboo subject that should be kept secret from his family and the wider community. Simon still feels uneasy with his new persona.



Therefore, he must continue to conceal his identity and that of his homosexual companion. However, Simon feels that by embracing his otherness, he has found his identity and is at peace with himself and homosexuals in general, including his family. This study recommends future researchers concentrate more on the possibility of public acceptance, especially in the novels, as well as how society should behave towards homosexuality to prevent unexpected things from happening, such as giving negative stigma and demeaning minorities as well as avoiding LGBTQ+ people, giving unilateral judgments against homosexuals, and doing other behaviors that hurt homosexuals. Due to the novel's representation of society, the comparable event may occur in society, and it will be able to shed more light on potential consequences of people's understanding of issues related to gender, performativity, sexuality, and homosexuality.

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