

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### A. Background of the Study

The representation of the LGBTQ+ phenomenon in literary works has evolved, reflecting changing societal attitudes and the ongoing struggle for equal rights. Literature has played a crucial role in shaping and reflecting the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community.

Literary criticism serves as a vital discourse that evaluates, interprets, and analyzes literary works. Broadly, literary criticism is a field that runs parallel to the examination of fundamental principles in literature and the exploration of literary history. Specifically, it involves the process of identifying and assessing literary aspects, focusing on authors and their works through a particular set of critical criteria (Li, 2018).

Bressler C. E. (2011) provides a comprehensive exploration of various approaches to literary criticism, some approaches to literary criticism found in the book include psychoanalytic criticism, feminism, postcolonialism, Marxism, queer theory, and others. This research specifically focuses on psychoanalysis and queer approaches, these perspectives are applied to reveal depictions of female homosexuality and female friendship in the novel as literary works.

Psychoanalysis serves as a therapeutic approach dedicated to addressing mental disorders by delving into the interplay between conscious and unconscious elements within the mind, as articulated by the Concise Oxford Dictionary. Based

on Freudian principles, psychoanalysis describes a branch of psychology that focuses on three main areas: the development of the psyche and how early experiences affect adult mental states; the nature and purposes of unconscious mental processes; and the creation and use of psychoanalytic therapy, which focuses on the dynamics of transference and countertransference (Bateman & Holmes, 1995).

In the context of adolescence, psychoanalysis broadens its scope to explain the complexity of identity development during this critical stage of life. Bateman & Holmes (1995) continue that psychoanalysis with adolescents is difficult since it represents their worst fears of being odd or abnormal. During this phase, individuals start forming their sexual identity. This may be seen during adolescence when young women frequently decide to set aside their own beliefs, feelings, and desires in favor of the opinions, feelings, and desires of the culture, their classmates, the authorities, and the men in their immediate surroundings (Bedard & Marks, 2010)

Friendships support female spiritual, emotional, and psychological development and aid in the development of identity (Siraj, 2018). Female teenagers require a relationship that can inspire them and transform all of life's negative personalities, like friendship (Damayanti & Pramesti, 2020).

The purpose of this study is to analyze how female homosexuality and female friendship are portrayed in Kristen Zimmer's book "*The Gravity Between Us*." The story revolves around the close relationship between two young women, Kendall, and Payton whose bond originated in early adolescence and has since

matured into a profound connection. As their friendship evolves, they grapple with their feelings for each other and navigate the complexities of their identities.

The novel delves into the emotional and romantic connections between the two protagonists, providing a nuanced portrayal of love, self-discovery, and the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. It offers valuable insights into the study of lesbian relationships and the significance of female friendships within the context of sexuality and identity.

In the “*The Gravity Between Us*” by Kristen Zimmer, female homosexuality has been discussed often, such as the realization of the main character:

‘All the pieces of the puzzle have finally come together: why I never really connected with the guys I dated, how I always felt like some inexplicable thing was missing. Now I know it wasn’t them; it was me. *Shit*. “I think I’m gay.”’ (Page 188).

This preliminary data suggests a significant moment of self-discovery and self-acceptance for the individual. They have gained a deeper understanding of their own identity and are beginning to grapple with what this means for their future relationships and sense of self. It's important to approach this statement with empathy and support, as it represents a significant step in the individual's journey toward self-acceptance and self-realization.

In addition, female friendship takes center stage as a primary theme in this novel. The preliminary data within the narrative, exemplified by Kendall, the main character, sheds light on the significance of such connections. Kendall's poignant reflection

"The only reason I came home this weekend is because I was afraid I was forgetting what my best friend looks like." (Page 8).

The text highlights the enduring quality of these connections, presenting them as an essential source of comfort, identity, and emotional support for the story's characters. Essentially, Kendall's contemplation is a moving example of the novel's emphasis on significant female relationships.

This research applied Cass's theory on the stages of the formation of homosexual identity to the portrayal of female homosexuality in a novel and conditions for female friendship theory by Raymond. Cass's theory outlines a six-stage model of homosexual identity formation, while the conditions for female friendship theory explores the complex and multifaceted nature of female friendships.

### **B. Problem of the Study**

1. What are the stages of the homosexual identity formation of the two characters in the novel?
2. How is the condition of female friendship between the two characters in the novel?
3. Why do close female friendships have the potential to turn into lesbian relationships?

### **C. Objective of the Study**

1. To find out the stages of homosexual identity formation from the two characters in the novel

2. To explain the condition of female friendship between the two characters in the novel
3. To elaborate close female friendships have the potential to turn into lesbian relationships

#### **D. Scope of the Study**

This research centers on exploring lesbian identity and female friendship in the novel, employing the theory of formation stages of homosexual identity by Cass and conditions for female friendship theory by Raymond. The study's focus is restricted to the two main characters (Kendall Bettencourt, and Payton Taylor) dialogue and narrations related to lesbian identity and female friendship.

#### **E. Significance of the Study**

Regarding the study's objectives, it was anticipated that the research would provide theoretical and practical contributions.

1. Theoretically, it was hoped that the results of the research would further knowledge in the area and provide insightful readings for students of literature who were curious about subjects like female homosexuality and female friendship.
2. Practically, as a starting point for further research, the study's conclusions were anticipated to be beneficial and applicable for scholars who were interested in examining female homosexuality and female friendship in novels or other literary works. This study may provide a springboard for the creation of more studies on related subjects.