

Chapter VI

Disability and Alternative Sexuality

“Disabled people are sexual beings, with the same needs and desires as anyone else.

To deny that is to deny their humanity”

-Shakespeare, *Disability Rights and Wrongs*, 2006, p.162

VI.1 Introduction

Disability and sexuality are interconnected concepts that need more discussion and attention from our society. Disability is defined as a state that affects a person’s physical, mental, or cognitive capabilities; on the other hand, sexuality is a person’s sexual orientation, needs, and behaviours. There is much debate on the connection between sexuality and disability, which might bring attention to the difficulties that people with disabilities have, in expressing their sexual orientation or sexuality. Conventional biological and societal discourses have historically ignored the sexual autonomy of persons with disabilities, portraying them as passive, unappealing, or incapable of desiring and being desired (Shakespeare). This desexualisation is a means of social control that reinforces able-bodied and heteronormative standards. Philosophical thinkers and theorists from several fields argue that disability and sexuality have a complex relationship by means of structures of power, normative standards, representation, and societal perspectives. Disability studies challenge able-bodied and heteronormative norms, redefining autonomy, relationships, and pleasure, and asserting that persons with disabilities possess various romantic desires. People with disabilities have historically faced a great deal of harsh generalisations as they are often represented either hyper sexualised or asexual entities, with little consideration paid to their preferences regarding their choices of partners and their feelings.

Individuals with disabilities who deal with humiliation over their sexual orientation may face marginalisation and discrimination owing to lack of proper representation. Notwithstanding these challenges, many individuals with disabilities are advocating for their rights to talk about their sexuality and get involved into romantic relationships. To shed light on the subtleties that have been hidden for long by traditional ideas, this chapter examines and acknowledges the complicated relationship between sexuality and disability. In the chapter an analysis of the connection between sexuality and disability and its alternative representation in English literature and theory is conducted to challenge accepted social standards via an examination of literary works such as Heidi Cullinan's *Carry the Ocean* (2015) and *Shelter the Sea* (2017) as well as Shane Burcaw's autobiography *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014). Recognising disability and sexuality as mutually constitutive elements expands opportunities for reconceptualising intimacy, agency, and embodiment beyond ableist and heteronormative ideologies. While dismantling existing prejudices and fostering the understanding of diverse human sexual orientations the chapter develops the foundation for a new discourse that celebrates the intersection of disability and sexual orientation and advocates for equity, respect for others, and empowerment for all individuals.

VI.2 Traditional Ideologies Regarding Disability and Sexuality

Religious doctrine, cultural standards, and millennia of societal views have moulded traditional notions surrounding the sexual orientation of persons with disabilities. People with disabilities have struggled with their sexuality for generations (Coussy). The views and perceptions of society have a significant impact on their lives. In ancient societies such as Greece and Rome, disability was often seen as the ultimate punishment (Shuttleworth), leading to social and romantic marginalisation and alienation. These false beliefs, which persisted throughout the Middle Ages and Renaissance, connected

disability to immorality, further separating those with impairments from building romantic bonds. Moreover, the prevailing emotions were sympathy and sorrow, which contributed to the stereotype that people with disabilities are asexual and dependent on others. Disability became “medicalised” as a consequence of the development of medical sciences in the 18th and 19th centuries (De Boer). Institutions prevented people with disabilities from forming romantic connections and controlled their sexuality. Prejudices in society were exacerbated by the emergence of the Eugenics Movements in the early to mid-20th century, which promoted the selective breeding method of eliminating infirmities (Esmail et al.). Throughout these historical eras, there has been a persistent theme of the maintenance of preconceived beliefs, such as asexuality and dependence (Shildrick). Individuals with impairments experienced marginalisation or repression, and their sexual needs were ignored.

People with disabilities who want to display their sexual orientation often face complicated and sometimes stigmatising environment because of above-mentioned views. People are still impacted by the outdated beliefs about the sexual orientation of those with disabilities. The convergence of sexual orientation and disability has been tarnished by firmly established conventional wisdom, resulting in severe prejudice and seclusion. These ideologies have not only hindered the sexual autonomy of individuals with disabilities but have also placed LGBTQ+ people with disabilities at the intersection of discrimination and exclusion from society (Cheng), giving rise to difficulties. Historically, a widespread misunderstanding was that persons with disabilities were asexual (Anderson & Kitchin). The dominant public belief that they lacked romantic and sexual urges reinforced a faulty notion that they had no personal lives. This concept, which was firmly grounded in societal unease, resulted in a dearth of discussion and representation. In Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the creature

despite not being labelled as disabled, he represents social and physical difference based on his appearance. In addition to being seen as horrible, he also longs for genuine human connection including emotional and intimate relationships, but society rejects that. In D.H. Lawrence's novel *Lady Chatterley's Love* (1928), Sir Clifford Chatterley is portrayed as paralysed after the war. On one hand, he is impotent but on the other hand, he is seen to take control over his wife's sexual needs. *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) is a novel by Ken Kesey, where Billy Bibbit struggles with a speech impairment and mental health issues, is represented as preoccupied with sexual interactions, which reflects a troublesome depiction of disability and sexuality. Benjy Compson, a character with intellectual impairment in William Faulkner's novel *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), is portrayed physically as well as emotionally childish, with no awareness of his sexual orientation. Another character Lennie Small, a character with cognitive impairments in John Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men* (1937), is deprived of decision-making ability. The fact that he accidentally kills animals and then his spouse emphasises how deadly his sexual urges are and how it must be restrained. The similar type of stereotype is exemplified in a film "The Elephant Man" (1980) through the character of Joseph Merrick, who is portrayed as devoid of erotic desires because of his severe physical deformities. These perspectives and representations are reflecting the conventional notions that individuals with disabilities are innately asexual or hypersexual.

Traditional ideologies often assume that persons with disabilities are only prone to participating in heterosexual relationships. This assumption is based on the belief that homosexuality is a choice or behavior instead of an inherent aspect of someone's identity. Moral guidelines and societal standards, which often criticises homosexuality as forbidden, inappropriate, or wicked, have strengthened this view.

For example, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radclyffe Hall, explicitly demonstrates lesbian relationships and portray homosexuality as a cause of loneliness and pain, mostly because of social disapproval. Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* (1912) portrays an elderly writer's obsession with an adolescent named Tadzio which is the subject of the narrative. Mann reflects the social disapproval of homosexuality by depicting the character's feelings with a sense of humiliation, moral struggle, and degradation. As represented through several literary works people with disabilities who identified themselves as LGBTQ+ may therefore experience double predispositions for their choice of sexuality as well as their disability. Religious and moral doctrines, alongside the asexuality preconception, exerted a substantial impact on traditional perspectives concerning sexual orientation, specifically regarding homosexuality (Asch & Fine). The stigmatisation of homosexuality as immoral, unnatural, and sinful exacerbated prejudice against LGBTQ+ people with disabilities. The presence of intersectionality gave rise to a distinct social stigma, in which prejudice stemmed from the shared experiences of disability and LGBTQ+ identity. In this framework, literary pieces such as Heidi Cullinan's *Carry the Ocean* (2015) and its second volume *Shelter the Sea* (2017) present compelling storylines. These literary works depict characters such as Emmet and Jeremy who defy conventional ideologies, thereby demonstrating that people with disabilities, irrespective of their sexual orientation, can lead intricate romantic and sexual lives happily if they receive the inclusive environment.

There is another traditional ideology that people with disabilities are not interested at all in sexual activities or they are incapable of doing so. This view often arises from the presumption that individuals with disabilities are either physically or intellectually incapable of engaging in sexual actions. This view may result in

insufficient sexual awareness and support for those with disabilities, leading to adverse outcomes such as unintended pregnancies, infections that are transmitted sexually, and sexual assault. Conventional opinions at times suggest that persons with disabilities depend on others to fulfil their sexual requirements. This assumption is based on the belief that persons with disabilities lack autonomy, hence making them incompetent of making their independent decisions about their sexual lives. This perspective may lead to the marginalisation of individuals with disabilities and their sexual autonomy, hence perpetuating sexually exploitative conduct.

LGBTQ+ people with disabilities confront two types of discrimination (Barnes), which manifests itself in a variety of ways, leading to their marginalisation in society and the construction of structural obstacles. LGBTQ+ people with disabilities regularly confront restrictive facilities in social contexts, preventing them from enjoying LGBTQ+ activities or using LGBTQ+ events (Clare). In disability-focused societies, these people face discrimination and rejection simultaneously, exacerbating their feelings of loneliness. LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities encounter significant obstacles in the realm of healthcare provision. The provision of inclusive sexual health services becomes challenging to attain due to the frequent lack of expertise and sensitivity on the part of healthcare providers regarding the requirements of this demographic (Dewsbury et al.). A transgender individual with a disability may have challenges in finding healthcare providers knowledgeable about the complexities of their condition and their sexual orientation, potentially resulting in insufficient medical care or treatment. The dual prejudicial opinions faced by LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities emphasises the urgent need for continual campaigning and social transformation. Addressing these biases, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing accessibility are essential for creating a society where all persons may live with dignity

and equality, regardless of their gender identity or disability (Ferri & Gregg). In dealing with of these hurdles, storylines like *Carry the Ocean* (2015) and *Shelter the Sea* (2017) as well as *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014) found in literature serve as powerful catalysts for change, fostering understanding and acceptance, and paving the way for a more inclusive future, showing the changing mindset of people.

VI.3 Alternative Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Disability

In contemporary society, the perspectives surrounding sexual orientation have experienced a remarkable evolution, particularly in relation to disability. Modern belief systems that differ from established traditional principles have emerged, marking the beginning of an era defined by acceptance and diversity. Redefining society's attitudes about disability and sexuality has gained significant traction in the modern era. Due to the Disability Rights Movement and advancements in assistive technology, the late 20th century saw significant changes. People with disabilities were more visible in society because of legislative changes and anti-discrimination laws that started to challenge prejudices (Shildrick). The alternative ideologies expressed through literature significantly influence the development of a culture that appreciates and celebrates diversity, while indicating the importance of such depiction in the formation of literary narratives. *The History of Sexuality* (1976) by Foucault, emphasises "Sexuality must not be thought of as a kind of natural given which power tries to hold in check... It is the name that can be given to a historical construct" (Foucault 105). He has discussed the ways in which societal norms and power structures shape perceptions of sexuality, particularly in relation to people with disabilities. His argument interrogates the desexualisation or fetishisation of individuals with disabilities as constructs of social discourse rather than as intrinsic realities. Davis in *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (1995), offers an examination of the concept of normality,

which serves as a foundation for the preconceived notions surrounding the sexualities of individuals with disabilities (Davis). He advocated for the deconstruction of these concepts to foster an appreciation for the diversity inherent in human beings and their various experiences. In a work called *Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation* (1999) Clare mentions, “We need an economy that saves both trees and people, a sexual culture that honours desire and sovereignty in all humans” (Clare 14). He has also dismissed the basic dichotomies of asexuality and hypersexuality that are often imposed on individuals with disabilities. He stood for an advanced understanding of disability and sexuality as interconnected and complex phenomena. In *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (2013), Kafer said, “Rather than imagining disabled people as the sign of a failed future, a crip futurity opens space for imagining other ways of living and desiring that do not center on able-bodied, heterosexual reproduction” (Kafer 3). He examined the complex interplay between disability and sexuality, confronting the marginalisation of people with disabilities within sexual discourse and defending their recognition as active, desiring bodies. The various ideologies offer significant and extensive implications, highlighting their role in the progression of a comprehensive society and reinforcing their impact through literary references. In literary works, modern ideologies regarding sexual orientation successfully try to dismantle enduring stereotypes associated with disability and sexuality while changing the view of the society. For example, In *A Little Life* (2015) by Hanya Yanagihara, Jude St. Francis, who grapples with persistent pain and mobility caused by an awful past. Although he faces some psychological and physical obstacles, his relationships encompassing his love and sexual aspirations are shown as essential to his persona. In modern literature, autistic protagonists who bravely embrace their sexual impulses and navigate intimate relationships are emphasised in works like Helen Hoang’s *The Kiss Quotient* (2018).

The narrative centers on Stella Lane, a lady diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and her sexual experience, depicting her discovery of intimacy and desire with profound depth and tenderness. It overcomes the preconceptions around autism and sexuality, boldly showing his desires and choices. In the anthology of essays, *The Pretty One: On Life, Pop Culture, Disability, and Other Reasons to Fall in Love with Me* (2019) by Keah Brown, a black woman with disability, articulates her interactions with intimate and sexual relationships. The book *Sitting Pretty: The View from My Ordinary Resilient Disabled Body* (2020) by Rebekah Taussig, examines the writer's life as a woman with disability, with direct discussion on her sexual orientation, connections and desires. The work functions as a compelling story of existence and affection in the context of a disability and sexuality. Such works provide important contributions to the discourse on disability and sexuality. Number of books written in the past decade showcases characters who challenge the dominant narrative surrounding individuals with disabilities, portraying them instead as intricate individuals capable of deep emotional and romantic connections. In the literary work *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017) by Jesmyn Ward, the protagonist Jojo, who has a form of disability, that navigates the complex dimensions of adolescence, including the evolution of his sexual orientation. The narrative explores the complex interplay between disability and LGBTQ+ identities, simultaneously questioning the dominant views surrounding asexuality in the context of individuals with disabilities. There are more literary works that represent characters who genuinely traverse the intricacies of interpersonal relationships and the journey of self-discovery. For instance, the main character in Tess Sharpe's *Far From You* (2014), grapples with chronic pain stemming from her disability while she embarks on an inquiry into the brutal murder of her dearest friend. The narrative delves into the character's sexual orientation and highlights her resilience, illustrating that her

disability does not hinder her capacity for falling in love or engage in a journey of self-exploration. Literary works that feature LGBTQ+ characters with disabilities in a positive and realistic light not only confront and dispel preconceived notions but also cultivate readers' empathy and comprehension. There are more examples such as, the young protagonist in *None of the Above* (2015) by I.W. Gregorio grappled with her sense of self as she confronted the reality of being intersex. The novel has thrown light on the challenges faced by intersex individuals and emphasises the importance of acceptance and understanding within the LGBTQ+ community through the protagonist's journey; it illustrated how representation can foster discussion and empathy. The emergence of numerous modern ideas in literature is an important step toward the development of a more diversified society. By questioning deeply rooted beliefs, fighting for inclusiveness, and focusing on the importance of proper representation, these ideologies promote a cultural shift that recognises and celebrates the various perspectives of people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people in this community. Literature serves as an instrument for society to identify and honour the vast range of human identities, creating an atmosphere in which each person is welcomed, accepted, and celebrated for their distinct and genuine characteristics. In reaction to past biases and double discrimination, many modern narratives have evolved as powerful instruments for change, altering cultural perspectives around disability and sexual orientation. Literary compositions such as *Carry the Ocean* (2015) and *Shelter the Sea* (2017) by Heidi Cullinan. have significantly contributed to the questioning of established ideologies as these stories not only humanise the connection between sexual orientation and disabilities but also highlight the complexity and depth of love attachments.

Inclusive education programs related to sexuality have become essential tools for strengthening persons with disabilities, alongside literary programs. Besides providing complete information about sexuality, these sorts of initiatives try to address the individual requirements of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities (Rothman). These programs foster understanding and acceptance in educational settings, therefore aiding in the formation of a better knowledgeable society. Literature can also promote cooperation and break down the boundaries within communities by acting as a medium for open discussions. Although undeniable strides have been achieved, the pursuit of inclusivity remains an ongoing endeavour (Jackson). In an ongoing effort to confront conventional wisdom, it is crucial for society to acknowledge the intersectionality of sexual orientation and disability. Sustained efforts in advocacy, education, and representation are necessary to guarantee that the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities are not only acknowledged but also commemorated (Rothman). By amplifying their voices, society may advance towards a future where all people are embraced, esteemed, and allowed to live genuinely, regardless of their sexual orientation or disabilities. By means of the narratives that undergo significant change, such as *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014), *Carry the Ocean* (2015) and *Shelter the Sea* (2017) and by supporting initiatives that foster inclusiveness, it is possible for society to rewrite the narrative surrounding sexual orientation and disability. In addition to that by acknowledging the complex and diverse experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities, society can make significant progress in fostering an environment where all individuals are valued, understood, and appreciated for their true selves.

VI.4 Exploring the Intersection of Disability and Sexuality in *Carry the Ocean*

Heidi Cullinan's work *Carry the Ocean* (2015), which examines the complex relationship between sexuality and disability, is a powerful example of this narrative's

transformative potential. Heidi Cullinan confronts long-standing cultural assumptions that had disenfranchised people with disabilities by attempting a reinterpretation of disability and sexuality. Cullinan explores the complicated landscape that emerges from the convergence of sexual urges and impairment via the narratives of Jeremy and Emmet Washington. Cullinan extensively investigates the romantic and emotional trajectories of Emmet and Jeremy, a gay couple grappling with the challenges posed by their disabilities. Written in first person narrative mode, *Carry the Ocean* (2015) starts with a nineteen-year-old boy suffering from autism spectrum disorder, Emmet David Washington who is studying at Iowa State University. He is good at computer programming and math. Emmet's passion for computer programming and mathematics questions the stereotype that individuals with autism spectrum disorder possess little passions or abilities. The story highlights that individual with impairments, like to the general populace, have a diverse array of talents and aspirations that surpass restrictive categorisations. He introduces another character in the beginning of the novel, that is Jeremy Samson who lives nearby. From the very first sight Emmet develops romantic feeling towards Jeremy, and he has crush on him, as he says, "I tried to find a logical reason why I liked Jeremy so much, but romantic feelings have nothing to do with logic" (p.2). This feeling of falling into love at first sight seems very normal like non-disabled individuals. Though Emmet has autism, there is much clear indication of his choices of love partner from the very beginning. He never met Jeremy in person, but Emmet has been very open about his feelings of sexual attraction towards him. Thinking about Jeremy he mentions, "I liked him for his smile. Sometimes I liked him because he didn't smile. Sometimes I got an erection because of the way he brushed his hair away from his face...My brain, my body, my everything wanted to be Jeremy's boyfriend" (p.2). While introducing himself Emmet proudly mentions, "I am gay" (p.4).

He says that due to his autism people treat him “differently” as if he is “stupid or dangerous” and they think he should be kept in an institution, away or excluded from mainstream society. He says it is “crap” what non-disabled people feel or think about the sexuality of people with disabilities. Most people think he should not be allowed “to be in love, not with Jeremy, not with anyone” but according to him, “everybody needs somebody to love. I’m everybody...” (p.4). While talking about societal norms and concepts of disorders, he mentions, “The word disorder means disruption of normal physical and mental functions. I understand no one is truly normal...” (p.5). People question regarding his mental capacity, but they do not actually know how his brain has photogenic memory, whatever he sees, he remembers it forever. Sometimes he thinks if he wants Jeremy to be his boyfriend, “he would have to be gay too” and he mentions about a data that around two to five percent men in America identify themselves as homosexual beings. He researches through internet and gathers advice of autistic people who have dated successfully and feels positive about his feelings towards Jeremy (p.9). On the other hand, Jeremy is suffering from “an invisible disease” which he couldn’t even understand at the early stage. At school students used to tease him and laugh at him. The doctor diagnosed him with major depressive disorder, doctor behaved as if Jeremy had only cold and he felt that the doctor “was slapping a label” on him “and offering some pills more than anything else” (p.15). His mother never took his depression seriously rather she always expected him to behave normal as per the social norms, he says, “I wasn’t the son my mom wanted” (p.18). At a community party, for the first time Jeremy meets Emmet, and he feels that “there’s something wrong with him” (p.19). Jeremy always feels ashamed of his condition but in front of Emmet he feels little bit comfortable when he talks about his disorder. Jeremy starts to think upon the fact that he can be a friend of Emmet. On the other hand, Emmet wanted to know

whether Jeremy is gay or not. However, his doctor and parents always reject this idea of asking someone directly about sexual preferences. He says,

It is something I don't understand. If it's natural and okay to be homosexual, why is it such a big deal to ask if someone is or not? Except they tell me it's because of the people on the TV and in the bad churches. Their hearts are sick, which they can fix but they usually don't want to. It's dangerous to be around them. They project hate onto people they don't understand, and it can hurt me and other gay people. Some countries kill gay people (p.31).

These words shared by Emmet, indicate how societal conventions enforce excessive criticism and uneasiness over the matters related to sexual identities, even when they are fundamentally normal. The conflict highlights the disparity between acknowledging the scientific validity of the practice of homosexuality and the enduring taboo associated with forthright talks about this. His words indicate that specific television networks and religious organisations develop homophobia. This criticism highlights the significant impact of societal and organisational discourses on the formation of collective views. The author talks about the moral deficiency of normal society in promoting empathy and comprehension. This ideology reinforces prejudice and creates challenges for those who are vulnerable. The reference to nations that kills homosexual people widens the discussion to a worldwide stage, highlighting systemic misogyny and the impacts of discriminatory legislation and attitude. These spoken words of Emmet, exposes the inequity in civil rights protections and the importance of activism for rights of LGBTQ+ people at international level. He also mentions that Iowa the place where he lives "is a good state with lots of equality. It has same-sex marriage...Iowa is a good place. Some people here still have sick hearts, but most people are okay" (p.32). This reference again shows the changing attitudes of people towards

homosexuality. Slowly they start to talk virtually. Jeremy expresses his feelings of depression and says that he feels it challenging “to be with people” on the other hand, he feels lonely if he is not with anyone. Emmet consoles him by saying, “You need people, Jeremy. Humans are social animals. We get sick without contact”. Jeremy loves the company of Emmet, and he even forgets that Emmet has autism. In a short meeting between Emmet and Jeremy’s mother, she behaves in a very rude manner. In an insensitive way she refers Emmet as “retarded boy”. Being close friend, Jeremy protests such behaviour, but his mother doesn’t accept his explanation on Emmet’s capabilities, rather she claims, “you can’t tell me that boy is normal” (p.49). While shopping in a grocery store, Jeremy feels uncomfortable with the loud music, Emmet as his true companion, takes side of Jeremy and mentions, “No one is normal. Normal is a lie. The store should be for all people, not only people who like loud music...All people should be included. They make the aisles big enough for wheelchairs. They should make the stimuli low for people who need things calmer. If our sensitivity had a chair, they’d make room for it” (p.54). In *Carry the Ocean* (2015), the significance of fully embracing integrity in interpersonal relationships has been emphasised. Here mutual respect, understanding, and tolerance for one other’s shortcomings are the foundations of Emmet and Jeremy’s love relationship which goes with abled bodied people too. Emmet decides to join college and lives in a separate apartment like any other college going students, but Jeremy is nervous about it. Emmet mentions about “independent living experience” (p.71). When Emmet comes to meet Jeremy once again at his place, they share a very intimate moment together. Emmet confesses, “I am gay” and expresses how much he is attracted towards him, Jeremy replied, “I am too” (p.83). Emmet is very much bold in expressing his sexual needs or desire for physical love as he mentions directly, “I want to kiss you in your room” and Jeremy also desires

for the same as he says, “when you kiss me, it will be my first kiss” (p.87). By depicting these intimate moments, the story tries to challenge the existing societal norms and promoted the idea that individuals with disabilities should equally have the access or right to be in relationships based on their genuine feelings and loving gestures. In the novel Emmet’s explicit expression of his feelings and aspirations exemplifies his individuality followed by Swain and French’s affirmation model of disability (2000). Both Emmet and Jeremy felt the desire for physical love, but they were not able to make it possible due to the lack of knowledge regarding it. Emmet tries to find information online, but he doesn’t find any (p.96). Although his body doesn’t move properly, Emmet takes initiative, and they share a moment of love together and he proposes Jeremy (p.98). However, Jeremy’s mother finds out them together. Before that she did not have any idea about Jeremy’s sexuality, after watching him with Emmet, her expression is, “you-what? Jeremy! Why-? What-? Oh my God” and she bursts out of anger. She even declares by herself that Jeremy is not a gay and discovering the fact that Emmet is a gay, she points towards Emmet’s mother by questioning the upbringing of Emmet, “I didn’t realize your son was or that he was so poorly controlled”. This time Jeremy takes the courage and accepts his sexual identity as gay. Jeremy’s mother is not able to accept the truth and in front of Marietta, she claims that Emmet is “an idiot” and “not normal” (p.106). Both their families were upset about the incident but Dr. North, Emmet’s doctor made his mother understood that they should have the independence of choosing their life partners. Jeremy tries to commit suicide, but Emmet saves his life and protests his mother’s attempt to prove Jeremy “normal”, she directly mentions, “you have to stop trying to make him become normal. There is no normal” (p.132). In the hospital, they share an intimate moment together like any other loving couple after overcoming a storm (p.135). In a therapy session with Dr. North,

Jeremey mentions how his mother is not able to accept Emmet as his boyfriend even after getting so much help from his family members. His mother would like to find out “a normal boyfriend” for him if he wants (p.165). Emmet tells Jeremey about his plan to move together to Roosevelt, an apartment which is called “the special needs house” and live independently (p.177). Even Emmet’s mother is not sure about their plan of moving together as couple (p.186). But Emmet sticks to his idea of independent living with Jeremey at Roosevelt.

Although everything seems confusing to Jeremey, however, he finally moves to Roosevelt and there he meets Darren, an autistic boy as his roommate. Jeremey shares his concern to Dr. North, “It’s not a home at all... we’re all the rejects nobody knows what to do with” (p.207). Dr. North mentions how the population of people with disabilities never received care or never have been given priority by the abled bodied society, how it is difficult and challenging to manage the cost of assistive services which are needed for this population. Even if these group homes cannot provide the feeling of being in a real home but these are far better than the institutions that make people with disabilities completely isolated or excluded from mainstream society. Jeremey is always a shy person even in revealing his sensual needs, but he becomes thrilled whenever Emmet takes initiative as he mentions, “Emmet always announced our make-out sessions, and it thrilled me every time. There was something delicious about him giving the order. Emmet always arranged us, initiated the kiss and introduced any new elements.” He adds that Emmet learns the new ways mostly through internet, either through watching videos or reading materials and he loves being “the recipient of his kissing research...” After coming to the group home, Jeremey also is seen to be vocal about his needs, as he asks Emmet, “Can you kiss me hard, Emmet?” (p.215). When Emmet shifts to the Roosevelt apartment, he mentions that he brought a comfortable

bed so that he can have sex with Jeremy. They start to talk about having sex, but Jeremy becomes nervous, so they decide to chat over the matter via online text messages. There is a detailed chat history between this couple where Emmet clearly mentions the ways in which he wants to make love with Jeremy (p.232). By examining these intense emotions, the novel emphasises that having a disability does not limit an individual's ability to form romantic and erotic bonds; rather, it increases the variety of human desires. Emmet mentions that his parents have always supported him with his queries about sexual needs. They allowed him to watch porn, but they mentioned that it was unrealistic. They discussed with him regarding the use of "condoms and sexually transmitted diseases and how they spread", even before moving to Roosevelt apartment, Dr. North took their samples for STD testing (p.235). He was happy as he started to live independently, he mentioned, "I felt proud of myself. Not many people would understand how difficult that had been for me...I lived independently, I had a checking account, I had sex, I made my own modifications..." (p.240). Emmet and Jeremy exemplify the concepts of the autonomy model, demonstrating their capacity to exert autonomy within love relationships. Their interactions are influenced by Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan's Sexual Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which talks about the significance of open communication, securing consent, and acknowledging wishes. It highlighted that individuals with impairments have a complex and diverse range of personal experiences. Jeremy also has questioned the traditional perception of people who don't believe that people with disabilities can have sex, he mentions that people treat them as, "puppies dressed up in people clothes. Like we weren't really boyfriends, like we were fake" (p.257). Even one of their housemates, David have asked repeatedly to Jeremy if he is really in relationship with Emmet, he keeps his view on autistic people as he says, "I mean- I thought they were all no-touchy and isolated"

(p.277). When David explains concern about his sexual performance, he says that it is impossible for him to do it again after becoming limited to a wheelchair. However, Emmet suggests him, ‘you should look on the Internet about how to have sex as a quadriplegic’, he mentions that through internet it is possible to know many things related to sex (p.315). While talking about limitations of people with disabilities, David mentions, “Everyone is limited in life. Some people are simply more aware of it than others” (p.325). Dr. North suggests Jeremy to follow “AWARE technique” which “is an acronym for a technique to walk yourself through panic attacks”, here ‘A’ stands for “Acceptance”, ‘W’ stands for “Watch and Rate”, again ‘A’ stands for “Act”, ‘R’ stands for “Repeating” the pattern of A-W-A until one can take control over his/her panic attacks, ‘E’ stands for “Expecting the best” through changing the thinking pattern of brain and to rewrite and retrain it (p.327). After following the technique for almost two months, Jeremy starts to feel happy in public spaces, as he mentions, “I was amazing. I’d conquered my fear...I realized I was always this cool. I’d just been waiting to figure it out” (p.342). While enjoying in a bar with Jeremy and David, Emmet mentions, “there is no normal, not really. Not a right and a wrong way to be. But there is belonging...” (p.347). As Emmet has done detailed research on the process of love making, he and Jeremy were well prepared with “proper precautions” as per their needs, as Emmet mentions Jeremy already “ordered a dildo from a reputable online sex store”, he discusses about his disapproval of using protections, however, he mentions about using gloves and lubricant for safe and better experience. Emmet declares himself “excellent lover” (p.350). When Jeremy looks at his journey with Emmet at Roosevelt, he feels that he has learnt here “how to be a boyfriend. How to listen to someone else, what they need, how to give it to them, what I need. How to love them” (p.353). Through a meticulous examination of their desires, longings, and

intimate relationships, Cullinan debunks the fallacy that people with disabilities are inherently asexual. Jeremy's determination to overcome depressive disorder and Emmet's enthusiasm for computer programming and mathematics serve to illustrate their multifaceted identities. At the end of this volume Emmet and Jeremy are seen to be on a trip to Chicago, sharing their lovely moments of togetherness. By examining these characters, the novel challenges and debunks preconceived notions, demonstrating that sexual desires are intrinsic and varied, regardless of an individual's cognitive or physical capabilities. The narrative of Emmet and Jeremy's voyage serves as an illustration of the profound emotional and sexual challenges that people with disabilities may confront. Notwithstanding their distinct obstacles, both protagonists demonstrate authentic romantic sentiments, thereby establishing a bond that surpasses the constraints of society.

At its core, *Carry the Ocean* (2015) presents itself as a novel that transforms the discourses around disability and sexuality. The readers are invited to see the unfathomable depth of human desires by looking at the interaction between Emmet and Jeremy. The work has shown several instances of both physical and emotional attachment between the characters, demonstrating that love may thrive in an environment of openness and acceptance. The book strongly challenges the stereotypes about the love potential and sexual urges of people with such disorders. Jeremy bravely erases the myth that emotional numbness is a symptom of depressed disorder by voicing his need for closeness in a moving moment. By explaining Jeremy's goals, Cullinan tries to eliminate misconceptions and advanced a more thorough knowledge regarding the various sexual orientations and romantic preferences that exist among the population of the community of people with disabilities. This story proves that love has no bounds and that individuals with disabilities deserve fulfilling, real relationships.

Cullinan's story challenges social standards while promoting a deeper understanding of an extensive and diverse range of human sexuality. It can be said that this work is an acknowledgment of the complex nature of feelings of love that every person experiences including people with disabilities. Cullinan's novel corresponds with the principles of the Disability Rights Movement, emphasising the need of respecting the choices and preferences of those with disabilities in romantic relationships. The book critiques the medical perspective that often redefines disability as a disease by referring to the social model of disability. Consistent with the principles of the Sexual Minority Stress Model (Meyer), Jeremy's capacity to regulate his sexual impulses despite mental health challenges exemplifies his resilience. The novel highlights the need of acknowledging the unique issues faced by LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities, hence stressing the need for empathy and support at the junction of sexual orientation and disability.

Cullinan's analysis of the characters' sexuality includes the principles of intersectionality theory, acknowledging the variety of dimensions of identity that individuals deal with. The story incorporates queer theory to question the heteronormative and ableist structures, by empowering characters such as Jeremy and Emmet to express their needs openly. Utilising the social model of disability as a framework, the sexual identities of the fictional characters are liberated from social constraints, establishing an atmosphere beneficial for the development of their true personalities. *Carry the Ocean* (2015) blended the notions of sexuality and disability, serving as an argument that successfully challenged existing societal norms. The story illustrated the independent thinking, choice, and resilience of persons with disabilities via the protagonists' love relationships and sensuous explorations.

VI.5 *Shelter the Sea*: A Triumph of Disability Rights, Advocacy, and Sexual Identity

Heidi Cullinan's *Shelter the Sea* (2017) serves as a significant examination of disability rights, activism, and the complex nature of sexual identity. In this second volume of her book series, Cullinan explores the lives of her characters, highlighting their struggle against inadequate care and their commitment to establishing a supportive community for those with disabilities. The narrative centers on the complex interaction of disability rights, sexual identity, and the quest for affection and understanding. *Shelter the Sea* (2017) starts with Jeremy and Emmet living in Roosevelt apartment. In the beginning only Emmet mentions, "Jeremy and I have been boyfriend for over two years now. We've lived together for most of that time in The Roosevelt. Neither of us is okay to function in the world alone, but together and with the help of our friends and family, and the staff at The Roosevelt, we're independent and happy...I wanted to do everything with Jeremy, forever. This is a special kind of thing between boyfriends, when you feel this way. This meant I wanted to marry Jeremy" (p.6). However, it is not easy for people with disabilities as he mentions, "the world wasn't content to let people such as Jeremy and me simply enjoy the next step in our happy ever after. Not without a lot of complications" (p.6). The world doesn't take these things positively, even Jeremy's family never liked Emmet being an autistic partner as, "they hated the autism part more than gay part" (p.7). Emmet works at Workiva, which provide "a generous salary and benefits package, including insurance" but the problem is with Jeremy's unemployment and his insurance, due to which Emmet is not able to go ahead with marriage even if he already has been a good husband to Jeremy (p.10).

In a conversation with an autistic friend Darren, Emmet mentions that Darren is panromantic asexual and he gets to know about it clearly after inquiring about it from

Darren himself and through online research. People with disabilities may have various sexual identities and it is absolutely normal. Darren mentioned to Emmet that “he’s interested in romantic relationships, with any gender identity or orientation, for companionship, affection and intimacy. However, he is not interested in sex and feels no sexual attraction whatsoever. He also does not care for most touch at all, especially not sexual touch, but he says he’s curious about kisses from a philosophical and experimental standpoint”. On the other hand, Emmet mentions he “enjoy sex a great deal. Also, I am strictly gay” (p.24). While discussing with Darren regarding asexuality, Emmet mentions that there is very little information available online on “non-binary and gray sexuality” and Darren says, “this is because the world has a decided binary” (p.24). This discourse is an insightful examination of the amalgamation of biology, social conceptions, and contemporary ethics, with relevance for interpreting gender, sexuality, and the expectations of society. Darren believes that procreation has traditionally influenced human behavior, relationships, and cultural norms. This perspective adheres to biological necessity, attributing human behavior to evolutionary instincts. In contemporary scenarios where science and technology, acceptance, and dynamic familial relationships have varied reproduction and parenting procedures, the need of a procreative emphasis is subject to debate. This argument implies that sticking to procreation as a fundamental social objective may be antiquated, indicating an inability to adjust to changing social and behavioral contexts. This criticism engages with feminist and queer theories, asserting that such prejudices exclude those who are unable or decide not to reproduce, including LGBTQ+ persons, singles, and people with disabilities. The debate encourages readers to reevaluate the beliefs that ought to influence the development of human civilisation in an era when survival is more independent of reproduction. It asks readers to critically consider the extent to

which our world is influenced by traditional ideologies and to envision a society that surpasses biological determinism in favour of inclusion, autonomy, and ethical advancement.

In *Shelter the Sea* (2017), Heidi Cullinan adeptly explores the complex terrain of disability rights and activism, highlighting the obstacles encountered by those with impairments. The tale depicts a harsh reality: the struggle against inadequate care and social bias. Here, Emmet is seen to be stressed about his friend Darren's and his boyfriend Jeremy's financial instability. According to his mother "governor was selling the poor and disabled down the river", he thinks that Darren is smart and "there should be a job for him somewhere" but he can't move or speak like Emmet that is why even after having skills Darren is unemployed. He mentions, "Normally employment for people with disabilities is granted as a favour of out of pity, if it is provided at all, and it is offered in a separate space, with a lower level of pay" (p.36). While discussing with Jeremy about the problematic situation of Darren, David mentions, "it costs a lot to live with disabilities, and nobody wants to pay for it. Nobody can pay for it, except the state, who won't...too busy saving the money for the normal people" (p.73). Talking about the abled bodied people, Jeremy mentions that abled bodied people do not have to think about the pages of history where people with disabilities were sent to gas chambers to meet death, he also talks about his double marginalisation being "Disabled and gay" and how "every aspect of the world, of the culture, made a point to tell" that he was different from the rest (p.75). Darren thinks though the world treats him as "there's something wrong with him and it needs to be fixed" but actually "the world needs to fix itself to accept him". He also wishes to have a life partner to share his life. Though "he's not interested in body parts, but he is interested in romance" (p.84).

Emmet in the novel reveals the reality of the group homes like Icarus, which relies on public funds and people who do not know the reality, they decide the things as per their convenience by avoiding the real facts. He mentions, “The problem is, a lot happens when people don’t regard you as a real person. They think they can ignore you, and worse, they think they can use you. Sometimes they think they can use you the way a staff member was using a resident on New Year’s Eve, when Darren walked in and caught the staff member assaulting” one of the female residents. In the past at Icarus (an institution for people with disabilities), four similar cases of assault had taken place. (p.105). In the text the characters’ advocacy is rooted in their bravery to confront such type of societal injustices and biases. *Shelter the Sea* (2017) highlights the perspectives of individuals with disabilities, empowering them in their struggle for their rights. The characters, fuelled by their unwavering determination, stand up not just for their own rights but additionally for the well-being of their community. Their combined efforts highlight the strength of coming together and the importance of grassroots initiatives in bringing about meaningful change in the system. The novel showcases the power of determination, highlighting how advocacy can bring about change and encouraging readers to add their voices to the movement for disability rights. The novel highlights the significance of diversity and representation in the realm of advocacy. Characters representing a range of disabilities and sexual identities are depicted with authenticity, pushing back against societal assumptions and promoting a more inclusive conversation.

Shelter the Sea (2017) offers a platform for diverse voices, promoting an expanded awareness of disability rights that goes beyond traditional narratives, and acknowledges the intricate nature of human interactions and identities. After Emmet’s discussion regarding the situation of Roosevelt, Emmet’s office manager Kaya comes

up with an idea of community service project under Workiva that is “Roosevelt Project” through which the company can help to manage necessary fund and on the other hand, Jeremy, David and Darren can get job at the company (p.113). The narrative shows how the workplace like Workiva gives preferences to the needs of the employees with disabilities (p.114). The novel depicts the characters’ efforts to build a nurturing community within the Roosevelt facility. This community serves as a welcoming space at which individuals with disabilities can openly share their requirements, desires, and ambitions. The characters work together to create a supportive atmosphere that encourages self-acceptance and respect for one another. Emmet mentions how this project offers them “a chance to not only be independent but to have agency” in their lives. Here they are not “second -class citizens” rather “contributing members of this city, this state, this country” (p.143). They ask for “the same chance as everyone else...same as the privilege of able-bodied people does every day” (p.148). Building a supportive network serves as a guiding light, highlighting the importance of inclusive communities in enabling people with disabilities to effectively stand up for their rights. Their message is “everyone deserves a chance to grow and live in the world, to have safe place” (p.173) and their moto is to “give everyone quality of life, not simply providing the bare minimum to keep people alive” (p.242).

when Jeremy’s depression takes a bad shape and Emmet tries his best to provide comfort to his partner, like any other concerned partner he says, “A relationship is about compromise. It’s my turn to compromise”. Jeremy mentions in the presence of Emmet, “I felt the warm, sheltering presence of my lover’s arms” (p.49). Emmet is desiring for a married life with Jeremy and without thinking anything he confesses to his dad, “I want to get married to Jeremy”, his dad supported this idea (p.60). Emmet expresses his love for Jeremy, through his senses of smell as he says, “I know the

colour of Jeremy's smell-a bluish green with brown and white flecks and bits of yellow, like an ocean wave coming into my shore. I know the shape and geometry of Jeremy's smell, the weight of it. I have made computer programs to express how I feel about his smell..." (p.81). Cullinan intertwines the themes of sexuality and disability beautifully within the story. The novel presents characters with varied sexual orientations in the realm of disability, pushing back against traditional stories about their romantic and sexual experiences. This intersectionality highlights that individual with disabilities, just like anyone else, have natural desires, engage in intimate relationships, and seek affection. For Emmet, Jeremy is his "safe place" where he can be just himself. On the other hand, for Jeremy, "Emmet was so beautiful, so handsome, so perfect" that he never imagined him to be someone else "other than who he was" (p.181). This bond offers Jeremy "more power and strength and love" which is endless as if till the time they are together "nothing bad would ever happen" (p.182).

The novel presents complex character portrayals that advocate for the recognition of sexual agency, challenging the asexual stereotype usually linked to disabilities. The passionate connection between Jeremy and Emmet serves as a clear example of how disability and sexual identity intersect. Their love story goes beyond the limits of disability, showcasing the richness of their feelings, aspirations, and closeness. Finally, Emmet proposes Jeremy for marriage with a pair of rings and Jeremy is overwhelmed by Emmet's such wonderful way of representing marriage proposal (p.209). Emmet mentions that not only Jeremy's parents but there are other people also who do not think they should get married, he questions again such ideologies as he mentions, "they were total strangers, faceless, and usually nameless, interjecting their thoughts and opinions on our lives and our worth as people...who decided they got to judge us?" (p.214). Towards the end of the novel, they plan to get

married at the ocean. Although their fight is not over yet, but they both find their strength being in each other's arms (p.282). This depiction confronts societal beliefs, confirming that people with disabilities can have meaningful romantic relationships and exploring their sexuality.

Jeremy's struggle with major depressive disorder highlights the frequently ignored connection between mental health and disability. Cullinan intertwines this narrative, urging readers to examine their biases and fostering a wider dialogue about mental health in the context of disability rights. Jeremy's journey reflects the larger societal effort to break down stigma, promoting understanding and compassion while highlighting the crucial role of mental health support in disability advocacy. Jeremy bravely confronts depressive disorder, highlighting the intricacies of mental health challenges. In Jeremy's story, Cullinan confronts the stigmas associated with mental health conditions, highlighting the importance of acknowledging them as disabilities. Jeremy's journey highlights the crucial role of mental health support in the wider framework of advocating for disability rights. His challenges connect deeply with readers, highlighting the frequently ignored intersection of mental health and disability. In this intricate narrative, the characters, particularly Jeremy, stand out as the supporters of transformation, exemplifying the essence of advocacy and perseverance. The overall narrative centers on the protagonists' battle against inadequate care, an experience that resonates with several persons in reality. Cullinan illuminates the horrible realities of people with disabilities via emotive narrative, underscoring the critical need for complete, affordable medical care. Readers encounter the stark reality of discriminating medical procedures and cultural attitudes that sustain ableism, underscoring the need of campaigning for decent healthcare customised to the unique needs of persons with disabilities. In *Shelter the Sea* (2017), characters with

impairments ardently promote accessible healthcare, emphasising the difficulties these folks have in acquiring competent medical treatments. Their endeavours to get sufficient healthcare resources highlights the systemic obstacles and discriminatory behaviours. By promoting accessible medical services, the characters in the novel challenge social biases and insist on equitable treatment, underscoring the intrinsic right of every person to have adequate medical care irrespective of their impairment.

The primary concept in *Shelter the Sea* (2017) is the characters' effort to create a community where individuals with disabilities can flourish. This nurturing space acts as a refuge, cultivating a feeling of community and strength. The novel highlights the importance of inclusive environments, allowing individuals with disabilities to freely express their distinct sexual identities without the worry of opinion or prejudice. Building this kind of community not only confronts cultural norms but also fosters the characters' confidence and allowing them to talk about their sexuality in a transparent and genuine way. The characters' initiatives to build the Roosevelt facility represent a shared desire for inclusive environments. In this community, people like Jeremy and Emmet discover acceptance as well as encouragement, allowing them to openly express their sexual identities as they navigate the challenges of their disabilities.

VI.6 *Laughing at My Nightmare*: Unique Exploration of Disability and Sexuality

Shane Burcaw's autobiography, *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014), presents a deeply personal account that provides readers with an intimate look at the author's experiences with disability and his candid exploration of relationships he had in past as well as his sexuality. In the text Shane is a twenty-year-old man who is on wheelchair since he was two years old, he is giving description of everyday life with its difficulties and being dependent on his brother for brushing teeth, combing hair, washing face and putting shoes on (p.9). Since he was diagnosed with the disease Spinal muscular atrophy

(SMA), the meaning of normal or normalcy “has taken on a different meaning for my family and me” as he mentioned (p.10). His life according to him had said goodbye to the societal constructed ideology of normalcy “in 1992 at the Syre Childhood Center in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania” when he was nine months old. As he couldn’t move and crawl like the babies of his same age, he was advised to visit neurological specialist (p.11). He has given a detailed analysis of the types of SMA and what are the symptoms of these types which can be found in children. In this autobiographical narrative a direct communication can be found between the writer and reader. He has shared the real pictures also in his autobiographical narrative which helps the readers to visualise the actual difficulties they face in everyday life (p.14). However, his parents never gave up on him, he said,

My parents decided that this diagnosis was not going to cripple the happy life they had imagined for themselves and their son. Life is beautiful, with or without a severely debilitating muscle-wasting disease. Before grief and sorrow even had a chance to sink their teeth in, my parents made a decision. My life would be normal. SMA was not the end, but the beginning. A bump in the road. An obstacle to rise above. And so, the journey began (p.15).

He attended “special” school made for people with physical and mental disabilities, at the early stage of life. There he started to use wheelchair. His story offers a compelling and authentic reflection of his experiences, questioning even the most careful assumptions of society regarding disabilities. Even being on continuous medications, he has always been a “happy child, constantly looking for next source of entertainment” and he never allowed his disability to restrict him for having fun (p.38). He never allowed his disability to define his personality, as he mentions, “my arms, and legs didn’t work, but my brain, personality and ability to interact with people were not at all

affected” (p.43). By sharing honest insights about his friendship, love life, Burcaw challenges societal discomfort and emphasises that having a disability should not prevent anyone from enjoying a fulfilling and normal life. At school Eddie became his best friend who chose his custom-made skateboard and “skateboarding promoted and alternative, antiestablishment lifestyle”; he never cared being an odd to others. Eddie became his close friend come assistant and their bond was based on “mutual understanding” (p.51).

Laughing at My Nightmare (2014) by Shane Burcaw explores the honest discussion on sexuality, that challenges traditional societal norms and brings alternative perspectives to the story. Through Burcaw’s open-minded sharing of his personal experiences, the autobiography takes on a powerful role in challenging stereotypes and emphasising the everyday aspects of sexual orientation within the realm of disability. He said that his “first serious crush” happened when he was in fifth grade. He has mentioned about how his friends started to feel horny and he “was no exception” but he didn’t have idea about “dating and relationship” (p.69). He talked about his bodily changes that usually occurs during puberty to a male body. He used to listen different stories of love making, shared by his friends and he used to think that he “was little late to the party” (p.70). This thorough analysis has closely examined parts from the book that highlight Burcaw’s candid exploration of sexuality and unwrap the implications of these revelations. In his work, Burcaw courageously addresses the intersection of sexuality and disability, effectively challenging the misconception that individuals with disabilities do not possess romantic desires. At school, he had crush on his friend Jenny who used to come to his house for playing games and studying, and he wanted to “ask her out” if she wanted to be his girlfriend. He thought, “if I asked Jenny to be my girlfriend, and she said yes, it would be the greatest accomplishment of

my life.” He questioned the ideologies of society that says, “Kids in wheelchairs don’t get girlfriends very easily” and he wanted to prove that he was different. On the other hand, he was thinking about the embarrassment that would come with being denied. Nevertheless, he asked Jenny, and he received negative response. Although they did not date each other, after two years this girl shared that she considered them “to be together during those few days” and Shane realised that she was his “first girlfriend” (p.74). At the middle school, he met new people, and he felt, “making friends was vitally important to my ability to function in society” (p.79).

At the high school, students assumed that Shane was “socially inept”, and he wanted to make them aware about the fact that he is “completely normal person that happened to be in a wheelchair” (p.115). After joining college his thought pattern changed as he “grew out of the mind-set” and he didn’t feel anymore that his “wheelchair was a huge social barrier.” He himself and people around him started to accept his disability as he said, “most people don’t really care that I’m in a wheelchair”, moreover he felt this realisation “was a natural outcome of maturation” (p.171). He started to write blogs on his own life, “a humorous take on a very serious disease”, he named the page as “Tumblr page: Laughing at My Nightmare!” (p.172). In his blogs he included many things as he mentions, “my story topics now included sex, my questions about God...” (p.174). Burcaw shares details about his relationship with many girls, including open conversations about physical intimacy. This openness challenges existing beliefs and shows that individuals with disabilities, like everyone else, navigate the complexities of romantic relationships. This aligns with theories in disability studies that highlight the importance of recognising diverse intimate and sensual experiences. As his blogs dealt with the theme of sexuality, he often used to receive texts from anonymous people, “can you masturbate?” He openly answered, “Before my wrists and

elbows became too weak and atrophied to reach down between my legs while lying on my back in bed, I had no trouble partaking in that form of entertainment” (p.187). Burcaw uses humour as a powerful tool to tackle the topic of sexuality, creating a narrative that is engaging and easily understood. With a witty and bold approach, he eases readers’ worries and tackles society’s controversial subjects, creating a more open conversation about sexual orientation and disability. Using humour, Burcaw enhances understanding while also serving as a means of being empowered, allowing individuals to take back control of stories that often overlook those with disabilities. On being asked by one of his girlfriends about his sexual performances, he openly shared that SMA didn’t affect his sexual needs or feelings, he mentioned, “My penis works fine...I get boners and keep them just as well as any horse (I mean person)” (p.187). Burcaw’s playful storytelling about his romantic relationships and physical intimacy experiences brings a humorous touch to topics that could otherwise feel uncomfortable. This approach not only engages readers but also challenges ableism by presenting sexual orientation and disability as subjects worthy of humour and discussion. This aligns with the approach of disability studies, which focuses on reshaping narratives through individual encounters.

Being very popular in online media, Shane used to receive thousands of e-mails from his followers, but a mysterious text caught his attention that was from Jill, who showed efforts of finding his phone number to contact him personally (p.181). They started to chat every day and developed intense conversation where “relationships were a sore subject” to talk about. Being inexperienced in relationship, Shane clearly mentioned, “I’ve never had a girlfriend, and I have a sneaking suspicion that it has to do with my disease...there are the 9000 things I need help with/can’t do, which seems to be a turn off for mode girls...” (p.182). Jill in response said, “I don’t need physical

intimacy from a relationship, because that's not what is important to me...I would enjoy being physical with you, and I don't see any reason why we couldn't be. You said yourself on your blog that everything works. We might have to do things differently, but I like different" (p.183). Shane was in awe of Jill's interest to be intimate with him, he said, "I was blinded by sexuality", and they decided to meet (p.183). As they started kissing each other, for the first time in his life Shane stopped to think about anything else around world. Throughout his life, Shane thought he would not be able to find out any girl who would love him, being not bothered by his disease and its consequences. However, he met Jill, who acted as he mentioned, "I was the sexiest, most able-bodied boy she had ever met" (p.186). They met at Shane's house in absence of his parents, and they shared very intimate moment together like any other able-bodied couple (p.188). Through open discussions about his feelings, desires, and life experiences, Burcaw exhibits his sexual autonomy. Through his disclosures, he challenges the stereotype that individuals with disabilities lack autonomy when it comes to their personal relationships and physical attractiveness. Finally, Shane asked her to be his girlfriend as he felt their deep intimacy was the natural progression of their relationship and the girl also agreed to it. After few months, Shane discovered that he was more physically attracted towards Jill rather being emotionally attached, which led him to decide with maturity that he should not continue this physical relationship. However, this relationship changed his own conventional beliefs about his disability that "having a girlfriend was impossible" for him and there are girls who really would treat him with pure love and care despite the physical differences and difficulties he has with SMA (p.190). Burcaw's story emphasises how important it is to recognise and value the autonomy of people with disabilities, which supports the idea that sexual agency is a fundamental aspect of the human experience independent of physical ability

(Gregorio). Burcaw offers accounts of his own experiences where he expressed his preferences and wishes in romantic relationships. He promotes the recognition of the agency that people with disabilities ought to have with respect to their body as well as relationships by sharing these personal experiences. This is consistent with disability studies approaches that emphasise autonomy and independence.

While working on mini documentary on Shane's life, he again fell in love with Shannon O'Connor who was from Florida. They were mostly connected through virtual media, but they developed very emotional connection while working with each other. They even were planning their future together, though it was "scary idea", but Shane was much confident as Shannon used to say, "we will figure it out-together...no matter what happens we are going to get through it together" (p.235). Shane also mentioned this relationship with Shannon, "makes me excited about our long-term future and gives me incredible comfort in dealing with my disease and everything it brings" (p.236). He realised,

There are tons of annoying, aggravating, obnoxious, and difficult things about living with SMA...Life is still fucking awesome. Every single one of us has problems. That's part of being alive. The beauty begins when you connect with other people and realise that we're all in the same boat. Once we accept that life is inherently difficult, we can move on and focus on having a good time despite the tough stuff (p.246).

Though this relationship did not work for them, but it was wonderful experience for Shane. In *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014) Burcaw by sharing his flaws, triumphs, and drawbacks, gives readers a fleeting chance to identify with him, breaking down barriers while promoting a more compassionate society that recognises the humanity of

all people. Burcaw uses personal stories such as the challenges he had using public facilities as a person with disability to shed light on the situation and build a sympathetic and relevant relationship with his audience. He humanises the experience of having an impairment via these narrations, while encouraging readers to see the world from an alternative perspective. Burcaw's description provides a forum for challenging ableist presumptions and stigmas that marginalise people with disabilities. The person's openness about his daily activities, relationships, and goals challenges the prevalent ableist discourses that often depict people with disabilities as heroes or objects of pity; instead, he promotes a more authentic and varied representation. For instance, Burcaw's thoughts on relationships, including his romantic interests, challenge the idea that individuals with impairments don't have meaningful and fulfilling relationships.

In *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014) the realistic analysis of sexuality goes beyond personal revelation and has a big impact on public opinion. Shane again fell in love with another girl, Hannah Aylward who was one of his fans. Within two weeks of chatting they decided that they were in love with each other. As a couple, they began to record their everyday activities, which they uploaded later via their YouTube account Squirmy and Grubbs. They got married even in the year 2020. Many people around the world questioned their relationship, especially they questioned about the sexual performance of Shane and many commented that Hannah is a paying nurse who works for Shane. Beside their blogs, they came up with another piece of work *Strangers Assume My Girlfriend is my Nurse* (2021), where they openly talked about their loving and intimate relationship. In his recent work *Interabled: True Stories About Love and Disability from Squirmy and Grubs and Other Interabled Couples* (2025), Burcaw says, "there were a ton of misconceptions out there about disability and dating, disability and relationships about our relationship, but also more widely in society..." (Burcaw)

therefore, to create more awareness among people, in this work Shane and his wife Hannah not only shared their personal account, rather they included the authentic stories and experiences of other couples with disabilities. Here Shane and Hannah have openly shared their deep emotional moments while dealing with the failure of the process of IVF. By sharing personal information openly through literary works or through media platforms, Burcaw contributes to a larger conversation on the relationship between sexual orientation and disability. This openness encourages empathy, dispels stereotypes, and pushes for a more inclusive and compassionate society. For example, Burcaw's discussions on sexuality have led to increased media coverage and representation of people with disabilities. Through his open and humorous reflections on his own experience with SMA, he dismantles the social anxiety around disability and fosters an atmosphere that not only accepts but actively encourages disability and sexuality related conversations. He invites readers into his inner world by openly sharing these experiences, and he urges them to see disability as an essential and natural part of life.

Burcaw's impact goes beyond individual readers; it actively contributes to cultural shifts that change how society views the connection between sexuality and people with disabilities. By encouraging diverse discussions, he acts as an agent for broader change, influencing viewpoints and challenging ingrained biases that foster a more accepting and inclusive cultural atmosphere (Jackson). For instance, Burcaw's involvement in speaking events and interviews with media helps to increase the audience's exposure to his frank conversations regarding disability and sexuality. He actively contributes to the dismantling of social taboos and the more general questioning of ableist assumptions by engaging the audience. Burcaw actively encourages a cultural shift that recognises and celebrates the complex realities of people

with disabilities by using his genuine and hilarious style to immerse readers in his world which fosters a more inclusive and compassionate society.

VI.7 Conclusion

Carry the Ocean (2015), *Shelter the Sea* (2017), and *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014) shed light on the important role that proper representations play in questioning and eradicating stereotypes therefore, fostering inclusivity while changing the mindset of people. Ensuring accurate representation within literature and media outlets is crucial because it allows people with disabilities to see themselves in their true lights and offers a genuine depiction of the variety that exists in the society (Jackson). This chapter has addressed the complicated territory of disability and sexuality in English literature and philosophy with alternative perspective. Commencing with the examination of the vital relationship between sexuality and disability and continuing with comprehensive evaluations of notable works of literature, the chapter makes an effort to question and reinterpret prevalent beliefs regarding the subject matter. As the chapter draws to a close, many significant findings and insights emerge that summarise the intricate relationship between sexuality, disability, societal views, and disability rights.

The chapter demonstrates how societal views on the sexuality of individuals with disabilities have evolved over time by looking at the historical context. It tracked the evolution of these perspectives, showing a significant change from past stigmatisation to present-day acceptance. The traditional approach clarified the causes of commonly held beliefs and laid the groundwork for understanding their long-lasting impact. This chapter examines how society's views of people with disabilities' sexual orientation have been shaped by firmly held beliefs. The revelation of the double standard of discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals with disabilities highlights

the need for an even more intersectional and inclusive approach and the exacerbating effects of societal prejudice. Stereotypes regarding people with impairments are pervasive and were found by looking at societal assumptions like hyperactive sexuality and asexuality. Through its in-depth analysis of the works *Carry the Ocean* (2015), *Shelter the Sea* (2017), and *Laughing at My Nightmare* (2014), the chapter illustrates the important role that literature plays in challenging social conventions regarding disability and sexuality. Literary provocateurs such as Emmet, Jeremy, and Shane Burcaw dispel prejudices and provide a fresh viewpoint on activism, affection, disabilities, and the intersection of sexual identities. People who identify as both LGBTQ+ and differently abled have unique challenges, which are illuminated by the examination of intersectionality between disability and LGBTQ+ identities. The importance of recognising and addressing these problems in the actual world as well as the fictional worlds of literature and culture is underlined in this chapter. The chapter shows that people with disabilities have a variety of sexual identities, experiences, and desires that make disability a complicated and nuanced experience. Therefore, It is crucial to acknowledge and celebrate this variety and to strive towards fostering a society that respects and supports each person's sexual orientation, regardless of whether they have disabilities or not. It demands for more education and guidance on the discussion of sexuality and disability. It also claims that healthcare professionals, educators, and citizens of society at large all need to understand more about the lives of those with disabilities and to treat them with respect and sensitivity. In conclusion, this chapter is more than just a straightforward academic study. It is an appeal for a paradigm shift in the way society perceives disability and sexuality. The literature covered in these pages acts as a catalyst for change rather than just a mirror reflecting social norms, challenging, reshaping, and ultimately redefining the narrative

encompassing the intersections of disability and sexuality across the rich history of English literature and theory.

VI.8 Work Cited

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