

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Human is born and grows with distinction. The fundamental differences that can be seen are gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and others. But the difference is not only about what is physically visible, but also psychologically. The two examples of it are gender and sexual orientation. Many people are still confused, but sex and gender are two different things. Unlike sex, gender is not something we are born with, but rather something formed – something we perform (Butler, 1990). Meanwhile, sexual orientation is an individual's emotional and sexual attraction to other individuals. Some types of sexual orientation include heterosexuality, homosexuality, bisexuality, and asexuality. Heterosexuality is the most commonplace sexual orientation which is a fascination of the opposite sex, male and female. Heterosexual is well known as 'straight' people. Thus, it became the sexual orientation of most of the world's society; therefore it is referred to as the majority orientation.

In contrast to heterosexuality, homosexuality is a sexual orientation for those who have a sexual attraction to the same sex. People who practice homosexuality are called homosexuals. This idea is similar to what Sullivan (2002:3) has stated in his book entitled *A Critical Introduction to Queer*

*Theory*, which defines homosexuals as same-sex practices. Men and women, both of them can be homosexual (Julian and Kornblum, 1986:84). Gay is a term widely used to refer to homosexual men, while lesbian refers to homosexual women. Nowadays, homosexuals are no longer new but it remains taboo to talk about, especially for those living in conservative environments. The controversial thing is that those with this sexual orientation are considered unnatural. The majority of people labeled them abnormal because they are considered to violate social norms.

So far there have been 22 countries supporting gay rights by legalizing same-sex marriage. As reported by National Public Radio (NPR), in the United States of America, the Supreme Court has officially legalized same-sex relationships in June 2015. However, in reality, homosexual groups are not necessarily accepted as commonplace. Taking refuge behind human rights laws does not make them get the equality they deserve. They still have to fight over the discrimination given by society. For instance, the data gained from a survey designed by NPR, Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health, and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2017), it is reported that LGBT adults had experienced interpersonal discriminations, including 57 percent slur, 53 percent microaggressions, 51 percent both sexual harassment and violence and 34 percent harassment when they are using a public bathroom.

After all, our ideas of gender and sexuality have been socially constructed. Our society recognizes that there are only 2 types of gender in this world, male and female. Men are expected to grow up with their

masculinity and women with their femininity. These gender roles define what they are supposed to behave. Masculinity refers to a social construction about social roles and characteristics that are associated and considered appropriate to men. Thus, masculinity has its own standards. According to O'Neil, a man must hide their emotions and not show them to others; they must be successful; should work; and cannot love other men (O'Neil, 1981).

The existence of gender roles further makes men struggle over their life, especially for those who live in an environment with heterocentric communities. Those who do not follow the norms will be considered different in a bad way. Men who have affection for the same sex and therefore their sexual orientation become different are considered as people who break the ideology of masculinity in society. Men who break traditional gender roles are referred to as gay men. The common perception that will be attached to gay men is that they are not masculine (Kite and Deaux, 1987). Research conducted by Bettinsoli, Suppes, and Napier (2019) from New York University proved that lesbians are more acceptable in society than gays. Gay men are judged more negatively than lesbians. They stated that people's attitude towards sexual minorities is closely related to beliefs about the gender system.

Homosexual communities are known as LGBT which stands for *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender*. Homosexuals are not only perceived as sexual deviants but also denounced for violating religious norms. They are judged as a crime or the worst is as a sin (Davies and

Rentzel, 1993:189). As a minority group, homosexuals often experience oppression and discrimination. Ill-treatment of gay, lesbian, and sexual orientation, including physical and verbal abuse, considers that homosexuals are unnatural and sin is called heterosexism (Herek, 1995). In a simple way, heterosexism refers to the belief or expectation that everyone is or should be heterosexual. The adverse treatment of the homosexual group then bore the term homophobia, which means dislike or hatred towards the same sex-loving group. The word is also referred to as a fear showed by heterosexuals of being close to homosexuals (Shidlo, 1994:177). It is not uncommon that this form of discrimination results in depression and can even lead to suicide. That is the impact of the negative stigma of society that rates them 'different'.

The existence of the LGBT group comes under pressure from the society, especially the heterosexual community. This oppression makes the LGBT community unable to express their feelings freely, cannot show who they really are, and has to live as someone else. Then homosexuals became marginalized by heterosexuals. This is all because of a norm that has been a doctrine since in Victorian era and still continues to this day. The norm is called heteronormativity. Heteronormativity is a social construction used to legitimate heterosexual relationships as being normal and fundamental in society. This is similar to what was expressed by Gayle Rubin, the assumption that heterosexuals are the only sexual relationships justified in accordance with the norm referring to heteronormativity (Rubin, 1984).

This study used the theory of heteronormativity proposed by Gayle Rubin. In her writing entitled *Thinking Sex*, she stated that heteronormativity that exists in society creates a sex hierarchy that grades sexual orientation into 2 types, “good sex” and “bad sex”. According to Rubin, society judged the sexual practices of heterosexuals to be characterized as “good sex”, while other deviant sexual practices fell under “bad sex” (Rubin, 1984).

People who hold heteronormative values believe that there are only 2 sexualities, which means there are only 2 genders (Coston and Kimel, 2012). Heteronormativity closely relates to the concept of gender and sexuality. The values embraced by this belief are that a person's gender identity must align with his or her sexual identity. If a person is born biologically as a male, then he should be masculine. No matter what happens to women, they must be feminine (Ickes, 1978). People who are not aligned with this sexual orientation are considered abnormal. This hereditary social construction makes homosexuals choose to keep their sexual orientation secret. Living in an unsupportive environment of sexual orientation, the homosexual group then seeks to find ways in which they should negotiate with the heteronormative values that exist in their society.

The portrait of homosexuals is presented in some aspects of our lives, including music and movies. Although it creates many pros and cons, the movie with the homosexual theme in fact is quite popular and well-liked. In America, the first gay theme movie was released in 1970, titled *The Boys in The Band*. The movie tells how frankly it looks to be gay in the middle of

American society. The movie successfully gained many critiques by reinforcing anti-gay stereotypes and failing to deal with LGBT rights. Since then, many movies with the gay theme are produced, popular among them; *Call Me by Your Name* (2017), *Moonlight* (2016), *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), *Pride* (2014), etc. Movies or films are great media to describe the social circumstances around us. They express complex feelings, values, and ideas through symbols and myths (Cawelti, 1976:27). In addition, the power of movies can reach many social segments and has great potential in herding public views and opinions. A movie is also one of the most in-demand entertainment media by featuring various interesting stories with modern visualization. They had become popular culture. On this basis, the writer chose the movie as the study material in this study.

The movie that became the object of the study was *Love, Simon*. *Love, Simon* (2018) is a 20th Century Fox gay-teen romance movie adapted from the original novel *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* by an American writer, Becky Albertalli, which was published in 2015. The movie gave a sweet and heart-warming vibe about the thrilling ride of falling in love and finding your true identity.

The movie tells the story of Simon Spier, a 16-years-old high school teenager who has a perfectly normal life; unless he has one big secret that he is gay. Simon has an online relationship with an anonymous man called "Blue". The relationship began when Blue posted a statement that he is gay on their school's site. The incident prompted Simon to get to know Blue

better by emailing a message under the username "Jacques". All goes well until Simon's friend, Martin learns that Simon is gay and threatens to spread the secret that he is messaging Blue, unless Simon is willing to set him up with Abby, one of Simon's best friends. At the end of the story, after having faced many struggles and complicated coming out process, Simon is finally able to freely declare to his family and friends that he is gay. In an attempt to hide his true identity and the complicated process of coming out, Simon is confronted with the values of heteronormativity applied in his environment.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problems**

According to the background to the study above, this study can be formulated into two problem statements.

1. How is heteronormativity represented in *Love, Simon*?
2. How does the main character, Simon Spier, negotiate heteronormativity built in his society?

## **1.3 Objective of the Study**

This study aims to answer several objectives based on the statements of the problem. These are the two objectives proposed in this study.

1. To discover and describe the representation of heteronormativity in *Love, Simon* movie.
2. To analyze the main character's struggle to negotiate the heteronormativity he experienced.

## **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The general intent of the study is to identify the representation of heteronormativity and the main character's struggles to negotiate on heterosexuality values applied in his society portrayed in *Love, Simon* written by Becky Albertalli. It will focus on the main character, Simon Spier as the gay representation in the movie who experienced the struggle of being gay in the middle of heterosexual society.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The goal of this study is to find the representation of heteronormativity and Simon's negotiation on heteronormativity in *Love, Simon* movie written by Becky Albertalli. Taking the concept of the social construct of the homosexual community, this study hoped that people could change their perception towards LGBT people and also would help to eliminate discrimination and homophobia. The final result of this study is expected to be useful academic reading for students of Universitas Stikubank Semarang with concern in literature as well as for the public in providing an understanding of the queer study, especially gay issues against heteronormativity.

### **1.6 Approach to the Study**

This study applied a queer approach. *According to Cohen (1997), the main point of queer theory is to analyze the way in which power is unequally deployed among and within the sexual categories rather than only focus on the cultural construction of sexuality. To put it another way, queer theory*



*concerns problematizing the normal.* In this study, the writer used the theory of heteronormativity and homosexuality by Gayle Rubin to interpret the data.

There are two kinds of data sources used in this study, primary data source and secondary data source. The primary data is *Love, Simon* movie that the writer had downloaded from the internet. As for data collecting, the writer watched the movie several times and listened to it more thoroughly as well as read the movie transcript for deeper understanding. The secondary data is gained by reading the books, articles, and journals which contain the information related to the study. Secondary data as supporting data is needed in order to strengthen the arguments of the writer.

In order to gain meaning and develop the issue, the writer had done several steps in this study. The first step is the writer elaborated heteronormativity theory by Gayle Rubin. Then, the writer described the form of heteronormativity in which Simon had experienced. By using Rubin's theory, the function is to point out how heteronormativity is represented by society. The movie is analyzed by focusing on the characters and their circumstances that consist of any scenes, utterances, monologues, and actions which indicates the portrait of heteronormativity. The next step is explaining the main character's negotiation on heteronormativity. The last step is to relate all the data and analysis then make the final conclusion.

## **1.7 Organization of the Paper**

The paper consists of five chapters, namely introduction, synopsis and biography of the author, literature review, analysis and discussion, and conclusion. Chapter One, the introduction contains several sub-chapters, namely background to the study, statement of the problem, objective of the study, significance of the study, scope of the study, approach to the study, and organization of the paper.

Chapter two contains two sub-chapters. It provided the exposure of a synopsis of the research object and biography of the author.

Chapter three is literature review. This chapter presents the theory and previous findings. This chapter is further divided into three sub-chapters, namely previous studies, popular culture, and queer theory.

Chapter four presents analysis and discussion according to the data and approach that has been done. This chapter is divided into two sub-chapters as well as answering the statement of the problem that has been formulated in chapter one. The first sub-chapter is a descriptive analysis of the representation of heteronormativity found in the story. The second sub-chapter is an analysis of how the main character is negotiating with existing heteronormativity in his society.

Chapter five is the final chapter. This chapter contains the conclusion and suggestions obtained from the research conducted.