

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter elaborates the introduction of the study. This chapter consists of the background of the study, statement of the research question, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and scope and limitations of the study. All sub-chapters of the introduction of this study are needed as a basis of this study.

1.1 Background of the Study

Sexual identity is a never-ending topic to discuss until now. It can be challenging for some people because of the stigmatization they receive if their sexuality is considered something “unnatural” by the existing norms. Campo-Arias (2010, p.179) states that sexual identity is a multidimensional construct. It includes sex identity (based on biological traits like male and female), gender identity (how a person feels about their gender), socio-sexual identity (how they express their sexual orientation in society), and erotic identity (their sexual desire and attraction).

According to Campo-Arias (2010, p. 179), sexual identity is shaped by multiple factors that reflect the diverse and personal nature of human sexuality. Various elements come together to form an individual’s sexual identity, which refers to the ways someone expresses their sexuality or sexual practice. It is important to understand that sexual identity is different from sexual activity, which involves the actual behaviors or patterns of sexual behavior. This distinction is important for public health, particularly when dealing with issues like sexually transmitted infections, discrimination, or social exclusion.

This issue is also captured by novelists to convey the idea of the major theme of literary work. In this study, the novel *Call Me By Your Name* is used as the primary source of data to explore how its theme reflects the complexities of sexual identity construction. Written by Italian-American author André Aciman and published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux in 2007, the novel, which belongs to the

coming-of-age genre, was later adapted into a film that won the Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay awards in 2018. The novel has a good review from The New York Times reader and The New Yorker. Moreover, the novel also won the award for Gay Fiction at the 20th Lambda Literary Awards.

Call Me By Your Name tells the story of Elio and Oliver, two young men who fall in love during a summer in Italy. Seventeen-year-old Elio spends the summer with his family at their villa, where Oliver, a 24-year-old American scholar, stays to assist Elio's father. At first, Elio feels unsure about Oliver, who seems distant, but as they spend more time together, Elio admires Oliver's confidence, and they bond over shared interests. Elio's feelings for Oliver become romantic, but he struggles to express them. As their relationship develops, both face challenges in understanding their emotions and sexual identities. Despite these struggles, they share a passionate romance that deeply impacts Elio. When the summer ends, Oliver returns to the U.S., and Elio reflects on their time together, which helps him better understand his sexuality. Years later, they meet again, and the summer they shared remains a transformative experience for Elio, shaping his views on love and identity.

In this study, the topic of sexual identity construction has become a major topic increasingly relevant in today's society since it emerged as a taboo subject. Sexual identity construction refers to an individual's self-perception and understanding of their romantic or sexual attraction towards others. As stated by Cass (1979, pp. 221- 234), sexual identity is not a fixed or simple process, but rather a dynamic and evolving journey that involves stages such as identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity pride, and acceptance and integration where individuals fully integrate their sexual identity into their self-concept.

There are several reasons why the writer is interested in analyzing this novel. First, the writer considers that analyzing this novel through sexual identity construction theory is an interesting challenge to do. Second, the novel *Call Me By Your Name* raises an interesting issue about the long journey of a person

understanding their romantic or sexual attraction toward others. Another reason is that there is a change in the story's sexual identity when the main characters start to become confused about their sexual attraction due to previous experiences from their interactions and environment.

This study combines Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity and Vivienne Cass's (1979) model of homosexual identity formation to explore sexual identity as both a social construct and a personal experience. While Butler (1990) explains how identity is shaped by social discourse and repeated performance, Cass (1979) offers a psychological framework for understanding the individual's internal process of accepting their sexuality. This dual-theoretical approach allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the characters in *Call Me By Your Name*.

This study aims to explore how the sexual identity constructed and formed is portrayed by the main characters (Oliver and Elio) in the novel *Call Me By Your Name*. The writer wants to see how sexual identity, which is still a subject of discussion, is reflected in a literary work, specifically a novel. The writer is interested in analyzing sexual identity construction because the phenomenon of LGBTQ and also sexual identity is certainly increasing from time to time and leaves pros and cons in society.

There are several previous studies that relate to this study based on data and theory. The first previous study is by William J. Hall, Hayden C. Waves, and Nina Plocek (2021), entitled *Sexual Orientation Identity Development Milestones Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer People: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*. The study explores the development milestones of sexual identity among lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals. The second previous study is by Andi Saputro (2015). The title is *Homosexual Identity Development in Edwardian England as Reflected in E. M. Forster's Mauric*. The study analyzes the stages of homosexual identity development experienced by the protagonist, Maurice Hall. The third previous study is *Male Characters Bisexuality in André Aciman's Call Me By Your Name* by Erisa Mirani (2019). The study analyzes the

symptoms and factors that trigger male characters to become bisexual in the novel *Call Me By Your Name*. Next, the fourth previous study is *The Queer Performativity and Sexual Orientation in Christopher Isherwood's A Single Man* by Fadila Ramadhani & Ali Mustofa (2021). The study aims to reveal the signs of homosexuality by the protagonist George in the novel *A Single Man* by Christopher Isherwood.

The fifth previous study is by Agnes S. Hariningsih (2022). The title is *The Sexuality Construction of the Main Character, Puang Saidi, as a Bissu in Pepi Al-Bayqunie's Calabai: Perempuan Dalam Tubuh Lelaki (2016) – A Queer Analysis*. The study aims to analyze how the main character's sexuality is constructed as a bissu, the gender-neutral in the novel *Perempuan Dalam Tubuh Lelaki (2016)*. Then, the sixth previous study is *An Analysis of Cloud Atlas from the Perspective of Queer Theory* by Yingwei Deng (2024). The study explores the oppression and resistance of homosexuals in the heterosexual hegemony in the novel *Cloud Atlas*. The last previous study is a thesis by Almira L. Humaira (2020). The title is *Queer Perspective in Saleem Haddad's Guapa*. The thesis analyzes the portrayal of homosexuality in the novel *Guapa* by Saleem Haddad.

1.2 Research Question

Based on the background of the study, this study discusses about male characters' journey to decide their sexual identity as described in André Aciman's novel *Call Me By Your Name*. Then, the issue is established as the following questions, they are:

1. How is Oliver's sexual identity constructed in the novel *Call Me By Your Name*?
2. How is Elio's sexual identity constructed in the novel *Call Me By Your Name*?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of writing this thesis is to find out the construction of Oliver's and Elio's sexual identity:

1. To examine how Oliver's sexual identity construction occurs in the novel *Call Me By Your Name*.
2. To examine how Elio's sexual identity construction occurs in the novel *Call Me By Your Name*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical significance. From a theoretical perspective, the result of this study supports the existence of gender performativity theory proposed by Judith Butler (1990) and homosexual identity formation model by Cass (1979). As for the practical significance, the writer hopes this study can deepen readers' understanding and knowledge of the complex issues explored in the novel *Call Me By Your Name* by André Aciman. The writer uses both theories to analyze this novel, so the writer hopes that every reader who reads this study can get more information about the theory of gender performativity proposed by Judith Butler (1990) in her book entitled *Gender Trouble* and Homosexual Identity Formation model by Cass (1979).

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study uses gender performativity theory by Judith Butler (1990) and Cass's (1979) model of homosexual identity formation as the main focus for analysis. The writer considers the scope and limitations to make it more focused and structured so that it does not go beyond the scope of the discussion. The scope of this study is the construction of sexual identity in literature. The limitation of this study is in analyzing the characters' utterances and the author's narration in *Call Me By Your Name*, focusing on how the characters' sexual identity is constructed and formed are portrayed and the confusion involved in their decisions.