

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Sex refers to the traits that define maleness and femaleness based on the appearance of external genitalia at birth, whereas gender is set of culturally-associated attitudes, feelings and behaviours to the biological sex (American Psychological Association, 2015). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003, p. 10) defines sex as biologically based categorisation that is connected with the role in reproduction, while gender is the “social elaboration of biological sex,” where the society expects individual to behave accordingly to the category of sex.

Society works along gendered performance, where everyone is linked with consequences of an action in performing or doing his/her gender (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). This derives from the concept of binary gender and sexuality and gender dichotomies, highlighting that one’s gender identity and expression are linked and have to match up with sex assigned at birth. The value has long been internalised in the society; men should have and perform masculine qualities, and women are expected to embody feminine qualities. Johnson (2005), argues that there are ‘male identified qualities’, such as control, strength, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness, decisiveness, rationality, autonomy, self-sufficiency, and control over any emotion that interferes with other core values (such as invulnerability), while women are attached to ‘feminine qualities’ such as cooperation, mutuality, sharing,

compassion, caring, vulnerability, a readiness to negotiate and compromise, emotional expressiveness, and intuitive and other nonlinear ways of thinking. In addition, each sex is also supposed to be sexually attracted to the opposite sex; men are supposed to be sexually and romantically attracted to women, and vice versa.

Though gender is built based on biological sex, there is no relevant connection between them. Gender is an exaggeration from biological difference. It works in a way that biological difference being put into irrelevant domains, and there is no biological reason behind it. Hence, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) regards gender as a social construction. While biology plays a certain role in imposing physiological constraints on male and female, the extension and elaboration of the differences between male and female, as well as among males and among females, are regarded as social.

Along with the notion, Butler (1990) argues that sexual, racial, or gender identity is “something that is performed, something we become, not something we inherently are.” Body and gender does not always form a relationship, so the body can be ‘male’, but the person does not have to conform into ‘masculine’ traits the way society expects.

Sexual orientation refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted (American Psychological Association, 2015). Categories of sexual orientation typically have included attraction to members of one's own sex (gay men or lesbians), attraction to members of the other sex (heterosexuals), and attraction to members of both sexes (bisexuals). Some people identify as pansexual

or queer in terms of their sexual orientation, which means they define their sexual orientation outside of the gender binary of "male" and "female" only, or simply they identify themselves as non-binary.

Understanding of sexual orientation is considered crucial to the construction of sexual orientation identity, which is acknowledgement and internalisation of sexual orientation (American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, 2009). Sexual orientation identity is reflected through self-exploration, self-awareness, self-recognition, group membership and affiliation, culture and self-stigma. Claiming of sexual orientation identity is pivotal to determination of relational and interpersonal decision in social sphere, since it leads to the formation of community, social support, role models, friendship and partnering.

Bisexuality, as one of sexual orientation identities, is generally regarded as having attraction to more than one gender and sex, but it is actually an umbrella term of several groups (Petford, 2003). These groups including those who are attracted to both men and women, people who are mostly attracted to one sex yet realise it is unexclusive, and people whose sexuality is fluid and changeable over time. Several number of surveys among men and women aged 14-94 years old conducted in United States (2010) found that self-identified bisexual people to be the largest population among LGB people; the statistics show that 3-5% of the population identify themselves as bisexual, compared to 1-3% as gay/lesbian. Moreover, a US study conducted by Mosher, Chandra, & Jones (2005) also found that 13% of women and 6% of men are reported to be having attraction to more

than one sex, while only 2.8% of women and 1.8% of men identify themselves as bisexual.

Despite the large amount of population, bisexual people often face discrimination and stigma from the society. Bisexuality has been acknowledged to be invisible, excluded, and silent (Hutchins, 2005), due to mainstream media, lesbian and gay communities, sex research, psychology and psychotherapy, and policy and registration (Barker & Langdridge, 2008). Furthermore, understanding of monosexuality and binary sexuality have further led bisexual people to be mistakenly assumed as homosexual when they have same-sex relationship or sexual encounter, and they are often regarded as heterosexual when it comes to opposite-sex relationship (BiUK, Bi Community News, & The Bisexual Index, 2012). Following the findings, the study also reported that bisexuality has been seen merely as a phase in the development of heterosexual or homosexual identity. In addition, historically speaking, a research conducted by Piontek (2006) found that bisexual figures in history had been interpreted as lesbian or gay, and LGBT activism is interpreted as struggles of lesbian and gay people.

Moreover, like gay men, lesbians and others who identify themselves out of heterosexuality, bisexual people are also subject to homophobia, heterosexism and heteronormativity (BiUK, Bi Community News, & The Bisexual Index, 2012). The difference is, additionally, they often face biphobia, which takes forms in negative attitudes, behaviours and structures toward people with attraction to more than one category of sex. Researches from BiUK, Bi Community News, & The Bisexual Index (2012) have grouped some common forms of biphobia into several

categories, including bisexual denial, bisexual invisibility, bisexual exclusion, bisexual marginalisation and negative stereotypes.

Consequently, many bisexual people, especially those in adolescence phase, experience sexual orientation identity crisis. This term refers to the confliction in determining one's sexual orientation and identifying sexual orientation identity. The urge of expressing sexual orientation identity is contrasted to the fear of being stigmatised and rejected by family and society, which leads into internalising self-stigma. For instance, a study conducted by Ochs (2014) included a story of a bisexual man being told that his depression is caused by his bisexuality. In addition, in case of coming out as essential part of embracing one's sexual identity, a bisexual woman was thought to be lesbian by her family and assumed to be going through identity confusion of being a heterosexual (BiUK, Bi Community News, & The Bisexual Index, 2012).

Besides those studies which use case study as research method, there have been several previous related researches conducted regarding depiction of bisexuality issue in literary works. Erickson-Schroth & Mitchell in their article entitled "Queering Queer Theory, or Why Bisexuality Matters" (2009) analysed Martin, the main character of Radcliffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* by deploying psychoanalytic and queer theory. The study found that Martin is enchanted by the presence of masculinity in Stephen and femininity in Mary; therefore, he is definitely not monosexual. The researchers concluded that less overtly queer characters like Martin has opened up complicated yet interesting representation of bisexuality.

Additionally, B.J. Epstein closely examined representation of bisexuality in several young adult (YA) books in his article ““The case of the Missing Bisexuals”: Bisexuality in Books for Young Readers” (2014) by deploying the concept of bisexual closet postulated by Dan Savage. For instance, in the analysis of David Levithan’s *Boy Meets Boy*, a bisexual main character, Kyle, is portrayed as unhappy of his sexuality, and he rejects bisexual labelling by referring it as divided sexuality. In another book, Nancy Garden’s *The Year They Burned the Books*, the characters Jamie and Terry label themselves as “maybes” due to uncertainty about their sexuality; bisexuality is not treated as option and state of confusion. The analysis suggests that there is not much recognition and acceptance of bisexuality, and bisexuality is portrayed as less of an option than other types of sexuality. Epstein further concluded that bisexuality is either invisible or portrayed negatively in young adult literature.

Furthermore, by employing post-structural conception of identity to several LGBT-themed YA books, Blackburn, Clark, & Nemeth (2015) in their article entitled “Examining Queer Elements and Ideologies in LGBT-Themed Literature: What Queer Literature Can Offer Young Adult Readers”, asserts that the presence of bisexual characters add multiplicity, variability and fluidity to sexuality in LGBT-themed books. For instance, in the analysis of Jeanette Winterson’s *Written on the Body*, the researchers found that the character Louise marries a man, but he has previously had sexual relationships with both men and women. Unfortunately, the character does not label herself as bisexual.

Nonetheless, none of the previous related studies has covered the analysis of bisexuality and sexual orientation identity crisis in another contemporary YA novel such as André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name*. Thus, this study aims to analyse the depiction of bisexuality and sexual orientation identity crisis in fictional novel *Call Me by Your Name* written by André Aciman. The novel centres around the story of Elio Perlman, a 17-year-old American-Italian Jewish boy on his sexual and romantic experience with a visiting 24-year-old American Jewish scholar, Oliver. Taking place in Italian Riviera and Rome in the 1980s and 20 years after the summer fling, the story tells the journey of Elio in experiencing sexual orientation identity crisis due to his relationship and sexual intercourse with both man and woman. The series of events indicating sexual orientation identity crisis including experiencing erotic desire toward man, first homosexual sexual encounter and intercourse, occasionally getting involved in heterosexual sex, performing sexuality toward both man and woman, and encountering confusion regarding sexual orientation.

Elio has ever wanted to “be” and “be with” both man and woman, and though he never explicitly proclaims his sexual orientation identity, it can be assumed that this thinking leads to the development of his bisexual identity. Elio continuously combines and moves between heterosexual and homosexual desire, and this eventually constructs his sexual orientation identity as a bisexual. Moreover, he also fancies the work of Cosmic Fragments by Heraclitus which says ‘some things stay the same by changing.’ One might assume that this is not merely an interest but also acts as coping mechanism toward the fear of embracing his

duality in sexuality. The issue of bisexuality and sexual orientation identity crisis will be further explored in this study.

The issue of sexual orientation identity crisis in the novel can be analysed with Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, as Elio has inner contestation resulting from sexual desire toward Oliver during the summer fling, yet his fascination toward women still grows, which affects his behaviour and mental condition at the moment and afterwards.

Freud (1964) noted that individual's mind works on three different levels of awareness, with each level has different function and purposes. The theory also suggested that human mind can be divided into three abstract categories to help understand how personality develops and works. In order to protect oneself from feeling discomfort and experiencing anxiety, human mind works through several defence mechanisms, such as repression. On the matter of repression, the theory proposed that there are certain ideas and thoughts that are being repressed and pushed out of awareness into the unconscious. Repression works to protect oneself from dangerous things, and in personality case, these things are threatening to self-esteem or feelings of comfort and pleasure. However, repressed information can express itself through behaviours, thoughts and dreams. In his attempt to cure patient who is mentally disturbed by undergoing dream interpretation, Freud found that dreams are wish fulfilment; they are the best way to know what unconscious wants. The concept of dream interpretation is deployed to the study since Elio's dreams indicate his homoeroticism. By deploying the concepts of mental life level, human internal forces and interpretation of dream, Elio's mental and behavioural

condition as the effect of his sexual orientation identity crisis is made possible to be analysed.

Complimenting Freud's theory, the writer employs life span model of sexual orientation identity development postulated by Anthony R. D'Augelli (1994). Unlike other stage models of sexual orientation identity development which put excessive emphasis on the internal processes of personal development (e.g. Cass, 1979 & Fassinger, 1996), this model focuses on specific processes of identity development within sociocultural and life span context. D'Augelli's model of sexual orientation identity development conceives identity as dynamic processes where individual experiences many social exchanges in different contexts over certain historical period. D'Augelli further asserts that sexual orientation may be fluid at one time and more fixed at others and that human growth is shaped environmentally and biologically. Cultural and socio-political contexts in which these processes occur are accounted. This model also illuminates processes as well as outcomes of identity development.

D'Augelli identifies a non-linear model of sexual orientation development and categories the process into six life span, including exiting heterosexual identity, developing a personal LGB identity status, developing an LGB social identity, becoming an LGB offspring, developing a LGB intimacy status, and entering LGB community. This is not a stage model, meaning that these processes are experienced by individual at different times, and they can occur multiple times. In this research, D'Augelli's life span model of sexual orientation identity development would be

effective to analyse the development of bisexual identity of Elio Perlman and examine the sociocultural context mediating its formation.

Beside those two theories, the writer also applies queer theory proposed by Judith Butler. The queer perspective on gender identity is crucial as it posits gender identity as socially constructed within system of power based on gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability, and other socially constructed categories. It also accounts for context of identity development and illuminates psychosocial elements of discursive context that may influence gender identity. Furthermore, queer theory accounts for structural differences in power (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005).

In her work “Gender Trouble”, Butler (1990) argues that gender always subsumes sex, or in other words, there is no sex that is not always already a gender. Everyone is gendered since the beginning of the social existence, which means cultural inscription exists before “natural body”. Therefore, rather than a noun, gender is more a verb; a “doing” rather than “being.” Butler views gender as a particular type of process, which is a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame, rather than just a process. She further asserts that gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. Thus, performativity is used as term to refer to the act that brings being into names (i.e. “masculine” man or a “feminine” woman), predetermined by language or cultural institutions. It is the discourse and language that “do” gender, and not the other way around. One’s gender is formed through repeated performative acts, and they also determine one’s personality and place within the society. By deploying Butler’s

theory of non-binary gender performativity, the writer adapts the theory into the analysis of the process of Elio Perlman in performing his sexual orientation identity.

Henceforth, several layers are going to be applied to this research. On the first layer of this study, the writer analyses mental and behavioural condition of bisexual resulting from sexual orientation identity crisis. The analysis is framed based on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory. Secondly, Anthony D'Augelli's theory on sexual orientation identity development is deployed in order to analyse bisexual identity development. Lastly, in analysing performativity of bisexual sexual orientation identity, the writer uses queer theory postulated by Judith Butler.

1.2 Research Question

How are the issue of bisexuality and sexual orientation identity crisis depicted in André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name*?

1.3 Purpose of the Study

Considering the research question above, this study is aimed to analyse the issue of bisexuality and sexual orientation identity crisis in fictional novel André Aciman *Call Me by Your Name*.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The writer limits the scope of the study on analysing plot and narration indicating the representation of bisexuality in André Aciman *Call Me by Your Name*. Deploying psychoanalytic theory proposed by Sigmund Freud, theory of sexual orientation identity development proposed by Anthony D'Augelli, and queer

theory proposed by Judith Butler, this study analyses sexual orientation identity crisis of bisexual.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The outcomes of this study are expected to contribute benefits in several aspects. From the perspective of literary studies, this study gives further understanding toward psychoanalytic theory by Sigmund Freud, theory of sexual orientation identity development by Anthony D'Augelli, and non-binary gender performativity by Judith Butler. Additionally, this study contributes to the enhancement of the amount of bisexuality studies. This study also serves as a reference for researchers in conducting future research in the sphere of gender and sexuality studies in general, and specifically in the field of bisexuality and sexual orientation identity crisis.