

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Homosexuality is no longer considered as mental illness by American Psychological Association (APA) since 1975. There are theories claiming that homosexuality is rooted on nature. Simon LeVay (1991) found that a heterosexual individual's hypothalamus part on brain which connected directly to sexual drive and function has twice bigger size than a homosexual individual. Dean Hamer (1993) also argues that there is a certain gene on chromosome X inherited by the mother affects on homosexuality. Many people believe that homosexuality is biologically determined, therefore it is unchangeable.

On the other hand, there are theories testifying that homosexuality is affected by nurture. Byne and Parson (1993) argue that sexual orientation is affected by the first-four years of child's experiences. In addition, Greenson (1968) argues that boy must be able to separates himself from his mother or mother figure and starts to identify himself with his father. Siegelman (1974) also claims that the most frequently noted pattern for homosexuals includes a close-binding, controlling, and dominant mother and a detached, rejecting father. These arguments show that the root of homosexuality whether it is nature or nurture is still debatable by researchers.

Many psychological researchers believe that homosexuality roots from a combination of biological and environmental factors. As Whitehead and Whitehead states, “Human behavior is determined by both nature and nurture. Without genes, you cannot act in the environment at all. But without the environment your genes have nothing on which to act.” (1999, p. 10). The possibility of homosexuality development is not only determined by genetic aspects, but also the influence of environment contributes to homosexuality.

Sexual orientation is considered as the attraction of persons to one or both sexes romantically and sexually. *American Psychological Association* (APA) (2008) categorizes sexual orientation as three types. The first type is heterosexual, a term for the attraction to the opposite sex member. The second type is homosexual, a term for the attraction to the same sex member. The third type is bisexual, a term for the attraction to both of sex member. In the United States, people use two terms to label homosexuals. For women who attracted with other women are labeled as lesbian/gay women and for men who attracted with other men are labeled as gay men.

To determine sexual orientation, a person has to understand his/her sexual identity first. Sexual identity is considered as the matter of self-definition, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2005) states that “sexual identity is the understanding of your own gender, biological sex and the traits related, the desire within self toward your preferred partner and his/her gender, biological sex and the traits related, and also your performances reflecting your sexuality.” In order to define

the sexual identity, a person has to understand both physically and mentally of his/her self. A person can physically identify his/her sexual identity based on his/her genital which is assigned from birth. Meanwhile, mental identification of sexual identity can be acquired through his/her traits.

However, the term sex cannot be separated from gender. Sexual identity is different with gender identity, since gender is socially constructed and sex is assigned from birth. Judith Butler in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* argues that "... gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo." (1988, p. 520). Society has the power to construct any norms, to decide which is right or wrong, and to punish whoever does not follow the norms. People who are not being able to perform their gender as their sex based on heteronormativity will receive social punishment such as being bullied, discriminated, and/or even death treat.

Teenage gay tends to not admitting their sexual orientation to their family. A research conducted by Maria Britta Widyadhari in 2015 shows that one out four teenage homosexuals hides his sexual identity from the family. The other three admit their sexual identity to their family, but they are being rejected. Sedgwick (2005) argues that family rejection of homosexuals happened because the heterosexual society has created family as a heterosexual institute. The fear of rejection from the family makes gay teen keep their sexual identity until they are adults. Even if a gay teen confesses to his family, the lack of knowledge about homosexuality and miscommunication between his parents and him will lead into family conflict. Many gay teens forced out of their home after they make the

confession to their family. This will make gay teens feel more isolated due to lack of family support.

Gay teens also experience rejection from their society, especially from school. A national study of school climate reports that 91.5% of LGBT youth reported hearing homophobic remarks in their school frequently or often (Kosciw, 2004). One of the reasons of rejection from society is the prohibition of homosexuality in religion. In Catholic and Protestant, it is clearly stated on the Bible that homosexuals are considered as sinners and will not be able to go to heaven. The prohibition leads the society to homophobia—any negative feelings or attitudes toward homosexuals. Homophobes often express their hatred toward homosexuals by discriminating, harassing, and/or physically abuse them. Moreover, homophobia exists because homosexuals violate heteronormativity.

The rejection from family and society become obstacles for gay teens. On one hand, they want to express their sexual identity; on the other hand, they are afraid of God's condemnation and being rejected by family and society. Many gay teens choose to repress their curiosity and hide their sexual identity to avoid external conflicts. A research conducted by Maria Britta Widyadhari in 2015 shows that all of the four homosexual teen respondents are rejected by their family due to religious view. As the mainstream society claims that homosexuality is taboo and forbidden, gay teens are afraid to find information to help them understand their sexuality. Even though they get such information, they usually

deny the fact that they are homosexuals since it is forbidden to express their sexuality.

The confusion of wanting to express their sexuality yet it is forbidden to do so then leads gay teens to experience sexual identity crisis. Sexual identity crisis is a process of questioning and understanding someone's sexual identity. Many gay teens experiencing sexual identity crisis refuse to accept their sexual identity. A research conducted by Maria Britta Widyadhari in 2015 shows that two out of four homosexual teens denies their sexual identity by having a romantic relationship with the opposite sex. Internal conflicts between the prohibition of homosexuality, the fear of homophobia, and the curiosity of his sexual identity might be the causes of sexual identity crisis happened to a gay teen.

To analyze sexual identity crisis, Sedgwick (1990 & 1993) suggests three terms, which are homosocial desire, homosexual panic, and closet. Homosocial desire is the social bonding between men without judgment. Homosexual panic is a defense strategy for a man accused of being gay to prevent anti-gay violence. Homosexual panic is related to bullying and homophobia. Closet is an analogy for the place homosexual used to hide their sexual identity which related to the state of being in the closet and coming out of the closet. Being in the closet means that a gay man hides his sexual identity from other and coming out of the closet means that a gay man declares his sexual identity to other people.

Even though sexually attracted to men, not all gay people identify their gender as feminine. In fact, there are many gay men identify their gender as

masculine and perform their masculinity. Performing attributes of gender representation is called performativity. Judith Butler in *Bodies that Matter* (1993, p. 12) argues that performativity is not a singular act for it is always a repetition of a norm or set of norms. Borrowing Butler's explanation of performativity, wearing trouser which is an attribute representing masculinity makes a man "maned".

Butler argues that gender performativity has three stages, which are action, repetition, and performance. The notion of gender is created by various acts of the gender itself (Butler, 1988, p. 522). The acts that represent the gender are being taught by parents who adopt the society norms. These acts must be performed repeatedly, amended, and fortified through time in order to be agreed by the society. The agreed acts of gender create social norms that must be performed well in order to be accepted. The fear of being rejected for performing feminine acts make a gay teen forces him to perform his masculinity and hide their femininity.

Sexual identity crisis on teenagers can be found in young adult literature. One of the young adult literature author that explores LGBT theme is Alex Sanchez, the author of *Rainbow Boys*, *The God Box* and *So Hard to Say*. He explains that his books mostly based on his experience. Alex Sanchez's *So Hard to Say* was published on 2004 by Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers. It wins Lambda Literary Award 2004 and awarded as New York Public Library 2005 "Book for the Teen Age". Told by two narrators, the novel is about Frederick, the new student in California, who questions his sexual identity. From Xio's and

Frederick's narration, the reader is invited to see how Frederick struggles to find out his sexual identity with the help of Xio's feeling towards him.

This novel is unique compared to other Sanchez's books. In this novel, the main character experiences sexual identity crisis is an American thirteen-year-old boy. He also comes from an intact family, which his parents are not divorced. Sanchez's works which have the same issue have different background. The main characters experience sexual identity crisis usually comes from Mexican broken family. In addition, the main characters usually experience sexual identity crisis at the age of sixteen. Hence, this novel breaks the stereotypes of gay teen comes from a broken family.

The novel sets in California on 2000s, which was the first state that legalized same-sex marriage in USA. When Frederick moved from Wisconsin to a Mexican neighborhood in California, he easily becomes friends with Xio and friends. However, Xio wants to be more than friends. Frederick questions himself for not being able to feel the same excitement as Xio when they hold hands. Instead, he finds himself thinking more and more about Victor, the captain of the soccer team. Whenever Victor embraces him, he experiences homosocial desire as he feels the excitement that supposed to be felt when he is with Xio. When Carmen, Xio's friend, asks him whether he is gay or not, Frederick snaps and denies it since he sees Iggy, a boy he always curious about, being called "*maricon*" or "fag" by almost everyone, including Iggy's older brother. Frederick's anger is the action he takes to defend himself when being accused as gay as he experiences homosexual panic.

On one hand, he is curious about Iggy's sexual identity and he also cannot deny his feeling towards Victor. On the other hand, he is afraid that everyone will find out and start calling him names like Iggy and Xio will make a distance with him. Frederick chooses to hide in the 'closet' to avoid any rejection and performs his masculinity to cover his femininity and his sexual identity. He finally determines his sexual orientation as gay after he asks Iggy about his sexuality and confesses to Xio. Frederick experiences the stage of coming out of closet even though only few people know about his sexuality.

Based on Frederick's condition, it can be inferred that Frederick is being gay by nurture. This position is congruent with Sedgwick's argument that homosexuality is rooted on nurture. Sedgwick (1993, p. 43) argues that if gay is produced by hormone or gene, AIDS cannot be prevented. This argument is supported by Butler's claiming that gender is socially constructed (1999, p. 78). Both Sedgwick and Butler's arguments imply that being a homosexual is rooted by nurture.

Previously there are two studies that investigate sexual orientation of gay teen in young-adult literature field and one case study of homosexual adolescences in psychological field. The first study is *Sexual Identity Crisis in Alex Sanchez's The God Box* by Anne Anggraeni Fathana in 2012. This research analyzes sexual identity crisis of Paul as gay using concepts of homosexuality by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. This research resulted in Paul finally expresses his sexual identity and accepts himself as homosexual.

The second study is *Here, But Not Entirely Queer: Constructions of Gay Male Identity in 21st Century Trade Fiction for Teens* by Nathan Muscato in 2014. This research analyzes the constructions of gay male in Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys* trilogy, David Levithan's *Boys Meet Boys*, and Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club*, using Cart's and Jenkins' queer consciousness/community label and Esther Saxey's *Homoplot* concept. The results of this research are the authors of the novels describe homosexuality happens by nature. However, the authors present father-absence issue in the novel.

The third study is *Gambaran Identitas Seksual dan Proses Coming Out Remaja Akhir pada Kelompok Minoritas Seksual di Jakarta* by Maria Britta Widyadhari in 2015. This study analyzes how sexual identity crisis and process of coming out among late adolescence are depicted on a case study of four homosexuals in Jakarta. This research uses Measure of Sexual Identity Exploration and Commitment (MoSIEC) by Worthington, Savoy, Navarro, and Hampton to determine the respondents; and Coming Out theories by Manning (2015) and MacLean, Beatty, and Clair (2005) to determine the type of the respondents' coming out process. The results of this study are all of the four respondents realize their sexual identity as homosexuals from young age but they deny their sexual identity at first; two of them try to explore their sexual identity by having romantic relationship with their opposite-sex member; they finally accept their sexual identity; all of the four respondents already come out to their friends, but only three of them already come out to their family; and all of the respondents' family cannot accept their sexual identity due to their religion views.

The first research has the same issue, yet it does not cover how the main character performs his gender regarding his sexual identity. The second study discusses the same issue with different approach. Even so, the result of this research shows that gay is rooted on nature contradicts with father-absence issue which shows gay is rooted on nurture. The third study discusses the same issue with this study. However, since it is being discussed in the field of psychology case study, it cannot be applied in literature field. Yet, it is a deeper analysis on the issue. It gives a better understanding on how a teenager goes through the process of coming out.

From the previous studies above, the writer determines to analyze the phenomena of homosexuality on teenage boy from different perspective. Thus, the writer combines concepts of homosexuality by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick to analyze how Frederick finds his sexual identity and performativity theory by Judith Butler to analyze how Frederick performs his masculinity to cover his sexual identity in this study. Therefore, this study can get a deeper analysis of homosexuality of the main character and can cover the gaps of researches mentioned above.

1.2 Research questions

Based on the background of the study above, the writer constructs the research questions as:

- How is sexual identity crisis portrayed in *So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez?

- How does Frederick perform his gender regarding his sexual identity in *So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez?

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the sexual identity crisis Frederick experienced and his performativity in order to hide his sexual identity from his family and peers in *So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez.

1.4 Scope of the study

This study focuses on analyzing Frederick's sexual identity crisis in *So Hard to Say* by Alex Sanchez through the narration from both Xio and Frederick using concepts of homosexuality by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and performativity theory by Judith Butler.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study is expected to be beneficial for the readers who want to extend their knowledge about concepts of homosexuality and performativity theory. Hopefully, this study is useful for the readers who want to know how the theories are applied in analyzing literary works.