

**Male Characters Bisexuality in Andre Aciman's Call Me By Your Name**

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**Abstrak**

Penelitian ini difokuskan pada biseksualitas dalam novel *Call Me By Your Name* karya Andre Aciman. Analisis dibagi menjadi dua masalah utama. Yang pertama berbicara tentang gejala biseksualitas karakter laki-laki yang digambarkan dalam novel. Yang kedua berbicara tentang faktor-faktor yang memicu karakter laki-laki menjadi biseksual dalam novel. Tesis ini menganalisis bagaimana biseksualitas tercermin dalam karakter laki-laki dalam novel seperti Elio Perlman dan Oliver. Andre Aciman mengambil tindakan berbeda untuk memerankan karakter pria. Data diambil dari novel *Call Me By Your Name* oleh Andre Aciman dalam bentuk dialog, kutipan, frasa, dan deskripsi. Analisis menggunakan konsep seksualitas, teori orientasi seksual, konsep biseksualitas dan teori queer di mana itu terkait dengan karakter laki-laki dalam novel. Konsep seksualitas digunakan untuk menganalisis karakter laki-laki karena dijelaskan bahwa orang selalu memiliki pikiran bahwa seksualitas adalah sesuatu yang terlarang dan tabu untuk dibicarakan. Orientasi seksual dan konsep biseksualitas digunakan untuk menganalisis bahwa penting bagi seseorang untuk mengetahui lebih banyak tentang orientasi mereka atau untuk membicarakannya dengan orang lain. Teori Queer digunakan untuk menganalisis orang-orang yang memiliki orientasi seksual berbeda. Dalam *Call Me By Your Name*, karakter laki-laki memainkan peran utama dalam cerita, mereka belum tahu tentang orientasi seksual mereka dan bingung tentang apa yang mereka rasakan. Tapi, mereka akhirnya berani memberi tahu pasangannya tentang apa yang mereka rasakan meski itu masih hal yang tabu.

**Kata Kunci:** orientasi seksual, biseksualitas, queer

**Abstract**

This study focused on the bisexuality in *Call Me By Your Name* novel by Andre Aciman. The analysis is divided on two main problems. The first one talks about the symptoms of bisexuality of male characters that depicted in the novel. The second one talks about the factors that triggers male characters to become bisexual in the novel. This thesis analyzes how bisexuality reflected in male characters in the novel such as Elio Perlman and Oliver. Andre Aciman take different action to portray his male characters in the novel, he doesn't directly say that the male characters are bisexual. The data are taken from a novel *Call Me By Your Name* by Andre Aciman in the form of dialogues, quotations, phrases, and description. The analysis used concept of sexuality, sexual orientation theory, concept of bisexuality and queer theory where it is related to the male characters in the novel. Concept of sexuality is using to analyze of the male characters because it is explained that people always have a state of mind that sexuality is something forbidden and taboo to talk about. Sexual orientation and concept of bisexuality are using to analyze that it is important for a person to know more about their own orientation or to talk about it to another person. Queer theory is using to analyze the people that have different sexual orientation. In *Call Me By Your Name*, the male characters in play the major role in the stories, they do not know yet about their sexual orientation and confused about what they feel. But, they finally have a courage to tell their partner about what they feel although it is still a taboo thing.

**Keywords:** Sexual Orientation, bisexuality, queer

## INTRODUCTION

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, love is strong affection for another arising out of kinship or personal ties, or attraction based on sexual desire: affection and tenderness felt by lovers. To almost people, falling in love is the most beautiful thing that ever happened in their live, moreover if they falling in love with person they can have, or spending the rest of their life with their lovers. But to some people, falling in love is not that great. There are so many difficulties to face, for example to those people who fall in love with person they can't have, or one-sided love, or to those who has different sexual orientation. Talking about sexual orientation, there are not only men that fall in love with women, the one we called heterosexual, and vice versa, there are three most common sexual orientation that exist: a man who fall in love with man, the one we called homosexual, and or woman who fall in love with woman, the one we called lesbian. And not only those three, there are also exist a person who attracted to both men and woman, the one we called bisexual. Sexual orientation refers to the sex of those to whom one is sexually and romantically attracted (American Psychological Association, 2012). Nowadays we used the terms 'gay' or 'lesbian' or 'bisexual' but it should be noted that, although these categories continue to be widely used, sexual orientation does not always appear in such definable categories and, instead, occurs on a continuum (American Psychological Association, 2012). Sometimes a person defined as a bisexual but the truth is he or she just being comfort with a certain person, just like the main character in André Aciman's novel, *Call Me by Your Name*.

The novel has a good review from *The New York Times* reader and *The New Yorker*. Moreover, the novel also the award for Gay Fiction at the 20th Lambda Literary Awards.

*Call Me by Your Name* tell us about a boy named Elio Perlman. The story take place in Italy, on summer 1980, a professor from Columbia named Oliver stays with him and his family for the whole six weeks. At the very first moment, Elio does not like the way Oliver say "Later" to say goodbye or to express that he want to do his things alone. It shows that Oliver is already bisexual from the start, he gives Elio hints that he like Elio, in a romantic way, and at the same time he dances and kisses one of Elio's woman friend. Elio is also in some of relationship with a girl named Marzia. They did make love but in the end it is Elio who confessed his feeling first to Oliver when Oliver started to stay away from Elio. Because of Oliver is the first who feel something towards Elio, so he is kind of confused at the first but then they make out anyway. After having such a relationship with Oliver, Elio does not forget about Marzia, they still make out together, so both the relationship with Oliver and Marzia are going hand in hand. Although Oliver is the one who interested to Elio first but before they are together, Oliver had a short relationship with a girl named Chiara, and Elio thinks that Oliver will fall in love with Chiara so, he

is trying to convince Oliver to date Chiara but of course failed because from the very start Oliver is attracted to Elio. Both Elio and Oliver surely fall for each other and enjoy their short time together because Oliver will back to Columbia and it is bit hard for them to reunite. Because the gay relationship is still forbidden back then, both Elio and Oliver trying to forget the short relationship they had and move on. The story ends up with the news that Oliver will get married with a woman and having children and they reunite 20 years later in New England when Elio lived there by himself. They both still remember anything that ever happen to them 20 years ago in Italy and does not want to forget it.

Based on the background of the study, the researcher formulated the research question as: What symptoms of bisexuality do Elio and Oliver have and what factors do trigger Elio and Oliver to become bisexual in the novel?

This study is limited mainly focus on the discussion of main male characters in the novel. To prevent broad analysis, some essential theories and concept about sexuality are used and applied, such as concept of sexuality and bisexuality, sexual orientation theory and queer theory

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Based on the research questions, the researcher choose literary research method to describe the bisexuality symptoms of male characters and found out the factors that triggers the male characters in the novel to become bisexual.

Sexuality is not about who you have sex with or how often you have it. It is more about sexual feelings, thoughts, attractions and behaviors towards other people. Someone can find other people physically, sexually or emotionally attractive, and all those things are part of sexuality, according to Michel Foucault sex has not been repressed and silenced. He argues that discourse about sex has only intensified and proliferated since the eighteenth century. Priests expected confessions to leak the smallest temptation or desire, and sexual behavior became an important object of study for demographic and statistical analysis. With this intensification and proliferation of discourse, the emphasis moved from married couples to cases of sexual "perversion": child sexuality, homosexuality, etc. Someone sexuality was also thought to explain a great deal about their character, homosexuality is now a species, it is decent to talk about or to be discussed. As the first in the same-sex history, was we called sodomite now become homosexuality, they make their own group and organize it, for them sexuality is not informal action pattern anymore, it is more about the key to find their identity. Sexuality is part of our tradition and it was part of our destiny and fate, and if you want to try against it you will face many difficulties, for the society, it is like breaking the unwritten rules, but of course no matter what rules is this world, it will always keep up with the times, and the true sexuality it is what we must find at all costs (Weeks, 1989).

The term sexuality is always related to sexual orientation. According to Merriam-Webster, sexual orientation is a person's sexual identity or self-identification as a bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, and etc.: the state of being bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, etc. Sexual orientation is more than a choice, but still, environment, association, and finding true identity needs so that sexual orientation can be formed and discovered (Hamer, 1999). Bisexuality is one of the sexual orientation, most of people known that bisexuality is attraction to both gender—male and female—or attraction to more than one gender, whether in a romantic or a sexual way. Someone who has had sexual experience with or even just attractions to people of more than one gender can be described as bisexual, but may not identify that way. Anything that not in the term of heterosexual called queer. The word queer, as it appears in the dictionary, has a primary meaning of odd, peculiar, out of the ordinary. Queer theory looks at and studies and has a political critique of anything that falls into normative and deviant categories, particularly sexual activities and identities. Before we are born, the idea of what is normal is already there. All of those rules dictate who we are and have done so to every other person who has ever been born or ever will be born. Because you cannot free yourself from this web, you have to find some way to function within it. People who are identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual often experience a different treatment from the society. They face pervasive stereotype for instance when someone comes out as bisexual, people assume that he or she confused about or hiding his or her true feeling, the real sexual orientation of his or hers. This stereotype leads the discrimination toward the people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (Understanding Issues Facing Bisexual American, 2014)

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The issues of bisexuality are most visible issues depict in Andre Aciman's Call Me By Your Name. The story of love attraction and relationship are the themes that often appear in the story. Love, in the story, is not a simple thing to do or to feel, it is complicated and hard to define. The love that Elio experienced has influenced his relationship, both in a heterosexual way and homosexual way. Talking about love and affection will be close related with someone's sexual act or behaviors, in accordance with Pines in her Falling In Love, she states that romantic love is one of the most powerful emotions ever felt, people will have more comfortable with the people they are interested in (Pines, 2005:25)

Elio Perlman is the main character that appears in the story. He has been raised to be exceptionally literate, able to converse on a variety of humanistic topics. He spends his free time reading books, playing tennis, jogging, and transcribing music and he is very introvert. Elio had a feeling to avoid Oliver because his first impression to Elio is bad by "Later" but despite that, he also put an attention about Oliver appearance and body so detailed. He observes

Oliver's body unconsciously and the "... *I had almost fallen for the skin of his hand...*" make it clearly, even though Oliver's first impression is bad but his physical appearance makes Elio interest and he can resist it. He wants to avoid him but end up continue adoring him. (Aciman, 2007: 12, pdf)

At the same time, Elio also has a kind of romantic relationship with a girl named Marzia. He did enjoy his relationship by kissing and having sex. "... *A kiss on the mouth was not a prelude to a more comprehensive contact, it was already contact in its totality...*" (Aciman, 2007: 94, pdf). From the quotation above, Elio kissed Marzia consciously and it makes him passionate. He enjoys the kiss, the way Marzia touch him. His attraction to her is perfectly genuine, though it is of course unfair for him to lead her along when in reality his primary romantic feelings remain with Oliver. Still, though, Elio is an adolescent in the process of discovering his sexual identity. As such, he embraces sexual attention of any kind, and his blossoming relationship with Marzia is legitimate in and of itself because his attraction to her isn't diminished by his attraction to Oliver.

"*He stared me right in the face, as though he liked my face and wished to study it and to linger on it...*" (Aciman, 2007: 67, pdf)

The quotation above shows that Oliver indeed attracted to Elio, he studied Elio's face and touched Elio's lips, because normally, a person would not doing such a thing if not romantically attracted. "*The thing with Chiara happened so easily it was past reckoning. With Chiara he loved heading out into the deep on our twin-hulled rowboat for a gita...*" (Aciman, 2007: 37, pdf). This quotation approves that Oliver enjoying his time with Chiara. He finds it is not difficult to be with her, it just like going with the flow.

There are, indeed, some factors that have big contributions of bisexuality toward the two main male characters in Call Me By Your Name. According to Exodus Global Alliance, there are two factors that contribute bisexuality toward someone's sexual orientation. First, the internal factors that relate to biological or genetic reason and the second are the external factors that related to environmental influence, perhaps the home environment that introduce kind of behavior of sexual orientation between two different sexes or same sexes. "*Then let me say one more thing. It will clear the air. I may have come close, but I never had what you had. Something always held me back or stood in the way.*" (Aciman, 2007: 178, pdf). The quotation above prove that Mr. Perlman ever had the same thing that happen to Elio, attracted to man but he was never did like what Elio did, confess his feeling, being in same sex relationship. So from this it is clearly that genetic factor could build up someone's sexual orientation. "*It would never have entered my mind because I was still under the illusion that, barring what I'd read in books, inferred from rumors, and overheard in bawdy talk all over, no one my age had ever wanted to be both man and woman—with men and women.*" (Aciman, 2007: 23, pdf) From the quotation above it is clear that Elio is still believe with society doctrine about his sexual orientation that no one on his age will



attracted to both men and woman. It is impossible to think that he will attracted to both gender because he was raised by heterosexual family. But then again, he still finding his true self, he wants to know more than the discovery of a secret side of his desire and create a new forms of relationship that he never know before (Foucault, 1976). *"Did I want to be like him? Did I want to be him? Or did I just want to have him?"* (Aciman, 2007: 56, pdf). The quotation proves that he still does not know about his feeling to Oliver. The kind of feeling make him confuse and that's why he wants to know more about the feeling, about how he should react to it, he wants to understand the feeling, what kind of feeling is it and it makes his curiousness create a new forms of relationship, new forms of love and new forms of creation. *"How had I let him do these things to me, and how eagerly had I participated in them, and spurred them on, and then waited for him, begging him, Please don't stop."* (Aciman, 2007: 109, pdf). From the quotation above it is clearly proves that Elio is confuse with himself, his identity. He still could not find his true self even though he already make out with Oliver. The confused about his true identity make Elio even think more about his feeling toward Oliver and without he realized it, those all things trigger more and more of his bisexuality desire. Elio's family is a heterosexual family that welcomed everyone who wants spent their time with them, everyone include a couple of his parents' friends that are gay. Although the same sex relationship is still taboo in that time yet the family welcomed the couple so warm by having dinner together. It shows that both of Elio's parents do not really care about someone's sexual orientation. They welcomed everyone in their villa. This kind of thing makes Elio comfortable about discovering his feeling to Oliver. He does not find any judgement towards the couple, his parents treating anyone the same and do not judge people by their sexual orientation. *"Look," he interrupted. "You had a beautiful friendship. Maybe more than a friendship. And I envy you. In my place, most parents would hope the whole thing goes away, or pray that their sons land on their feet soon enough. But I am not such a parent."* (Aciman, 2007: 178, pdf). From the quotation it proves that Mr. Perlman knows anything about what happen between Elio and Oliver. He tells Elio that he is not such a parent that will not understand about his child feeling. He gives Elio advices about what should he doing to overcome his loss about Oliver. It is clearly that Mr. Perlman understand about Elio's sexual orientation and does not find wrong or weird about it.

One of the factor that trigger Oliver bisexuality is his curiosity about Elio and it leads to getting involved with the boy in a romantic way. Both Elio and Oliver are predominantly straight and never bisexual. Although is it Elio first that tell Oliver about his feeling first but he is not really sure about it and Oliver, although he give Elio some hints that he like the boy, he never truly tell about his feeling because Elio is only 17 years old boy and it is counted as breaking the law and included a pedophilia. But because Elio is only a teen, his curiosity take over him and do not realize that what he is doing is actually destroy him.

After he get involved with Oliver, he can't forget it and always remember it, although it is passed 20 years, and Oliver who already mature more than Elio and his curiosity about same-sex orientation is fulfilled, he can move on with his life and get married with a woman, even had two children.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis from the previous chapters, there are two main conclusion presented here. They are related to the depiction of bisexuality of the two main male characters and the factors that trigger bisexuality through the two male main characters. The two main male characters are Elio Perlman and his partner Oliver.

The main male characters in *Call Me By Your Name* written by Andre Aciman depicts the man who are bisexuals, the characters are Elio Perlman and Oliver. These characters are interested in both man and woman, even though they have a common relationship with a woman as Elio and Oliver experience it. For Elio, he has a relationship with a girl named Marzia which at the same time he also attracted to his male partner names Oliver. For Oliver, he has a short relationship with a girl named Chiara but he is the one who attracted to Elio first and at the end of the story, although Oliver is already married to a woman and become a father for two sons 20 years later yet he still remember anything about what he had with Elio back then in Italy. Two of the characters admit that the love is complicated, they love both of their lovers, the male and female partner.

Some factors that trigger the characters to become a bisexual are the genetic factor, as experienced by Elio Perlman. Indirectly his father, Mr. Perlman say that once he has the kind of feeling but does not have courage to express it and choose to buried the feeling and feel like something always hold him back but for Elio, he is able to express the feeling. The second factors is both Elio and Oliver still trying to find their true self. Elio does not sure about his feeling at first and Oliver, although he attracted to Elio but he does not sure about being together with Elio. The third factor is home environment which Elio grow and Oliver stays for six weeks. Both Mr. and Mrs. Perlman do not judge people by their sexual orientation so it makes Elio less worried about his parent opinion when they know the truth. And for Oliver, it makes him sure to be involved with Elio in a romantic way and triggers his desire to Elio even more until fifteen years later when he already married and have two sons but he still remember anything that happen between him and Elio. The last factor is the curiosity about same-sex orientation, Elio is just a teenager that still finding his true identity and being with Oliver is something new but because he is not mature enough and he feel that Oliver could be someone that he can lean on he can forget about what happened when he is with Oliver, while Oliver when his curiosity about same-sex orientation is fulfilled he can move on and married a woman, because he know that being with Elio is breaking the law.

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