

HOMOSEXUALITY IN ANDRÉ ACIMAN'S *CALL ME BY YOUR NAME*

Ari Windriani

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya
Email: 12edelnuna21@gmail.com

Tri Pramesti

Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya
Email: tripramesti@untag-sby.ac.id

ARTICLE INFORMATION:

Received: 08 June 2021

Accepted: 30 July 2021

Published: 31 July 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30996/anaphora.v4i1.5250>

Abstract. This study discusses Elio's homosexuality in André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name*. Elio is the main character in the novel. The objective of this study is to answer three points: the cause of Elio's homosexuality, the effect of Elio's homosexuality, and how homosexuality is presented in the novel. This study applies intrinsic and extrinsic approaches. The extrinsic approach used is the psychological approach as the literary approach. The psychological approach is applied in the causes and effects of homosexuality as a psychological issue. The data source of this study is *Call Me by Your Name* novel by André Aciman. Descriptive qualitative is used in analyzing the data that derive from the quotations. The study found that Elio's homosexuality is caused by Elio's hormones and Elio's family life. Elio's desire and lust bring him to the wild imagination and fantasy. It can be concluded that the causes of Elio's homosexuality bring him to the taboo thing in which not everybody accepts that sexual orientation. It can be said that the novelist, André Aciman wants to present that homosexuality is a natural thing.

Keywords: *queer criticism, sexual orientation, homosexuality*

INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality encompasses a phenomenon related to sexual orientation. Although it focuses mainly on sexual acts and attractions between persons of the same biological sex, homosexuality also refers to patterns of same-sex romantic and emotional bonding, identities and communities based on same-sex desires and relationships, and the shared culture created by those communities (Herek, 2000:1). Moreover, Rudy (2016) also said that homosexuality has become a particular social issue, that can carries misunderstandings about its definition.

Homosexuality is usually understood as the counterpart to

heterosexuality. Such labels, however, represent an oversimplification. Not all people display consistency among their sexual feelings, behaviors, and identity; some experience considerable fluidity in their sexuality throughout their lives (Herek, 2000:1).

Call Me by Your Name by André Aciman is one of the novels that talking about Homosexuality. Written in 2007 *Call Me by Your Name* exposed the main character named Elio, a high school student who admired his father assistant name, Oliver. Oliver lives in Elio's house for six weeks, revising a book manuscript, and helping Elio's father, a professor, with his academic paperwork. In this novel, the

author wants to say that homosexuality is a natural thing. It is not because of environmental influences but because of hormones though it is still a problematic issue and a taboo aspect in societies.

People believe that love is between males and females, while André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* talks about the other side of a relationship and sexual orientation. As Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker stated that queer theory aims to provide readings that at once subvert sameness and celebrate otherness (2005: 258). This paper aims to give an understanding of the sexual orientation that is homosexuality.

Homosexuality involves sexual relationships between individuals of the same sex (Worchel and Goethals, 1985: 330). According to the American psychological association (2001) as cited in Diane E. Papalia (2007: 319) Homosexuality is the attraction to individuals of one's own gender. Homosexual orientation is not limited to a particular type of person. Gay men and lesbians are of all ages, cultural backgrounds, races, religions, and nationalities.

There is a lot of research that discusses homosexuality. First, Rudy (2016) finds that homosexuality issues often appear in American movies. He finds that there are 32 movies gay-themed in American movies. His findings show that there is two representation of gay people shown in the movies, they are minority and pessimisms. Besides it is discussed in the movie, homosexuality issues are also found in some novels. There are two kinds of research that discuss homosexuality or gay

in the novel from some of the researches. Rahayu (2017) discusses depiction signs of gays or lesbians in *The Great Gatsby*. She reveals that there are eight signs of lesbians and seven signs of gays. Gading and Marsih (2019) discuss gay representation in Becky Albertalli's *Simon VS The Homo Sapiens Agenda* which they want to reveal gay habitus in the novel. The finding shows that the gay habitus in the novel is having no attraction to the opposite sex, adoring the same sex, obsessing and fantasizing about the same sex, feeling jealous and cynical to the suspected competitors, and falling in love with the same sex. Moreover, they also find that the character's social life affects the habitus.

The last is homosexuality is discussed in the newspaper. Afdholy et.al (2019) find that homosexuality marginalization, especially lesbian, is constructed by the process of paralleling in *Surabaya Pagi* newspaper. The results of the construction of homosexuality marginalization construct the newspaper reader's opinion into lesbians a bad image and source of social problems.

In short, the researchers are interested in analyzing André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* because a gay issue is reflected in the novel. Homosexuality is still a problematic issue and a taboo aspect in societies. People believe that love is just between males and females, while André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* talks about the other side of a relationship and sexual orientation.

In this research, the writer wants to discuss a depiction of a gay's life in one

of the specific characters in *Call Me by Your Name* by André Aciman. The main character, Elio has big sexual desire and wild imagination for Oliver, his father's guest. Oliver lives in Elio's house for six weeks, revising a book manuscript, and helping Elio's father, a professor, with his academic paperwork. The interactions of this character are complex because it was forbidden by society. This forbidden love has another side, and not all people can understand and open their minds about this side. That is why it needs to be examined. The writer hopes it can help the readers more open their minds about homosexuality problems in social life.

METHOD

By applying close reading this text is scrutinized. Using a qualitative method, André Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* is analyzed and written descriptively.

To analyze the psychological issue of homosexuality in the novel, As Rahayu (2017) explains that to find out about the psychological issue of homosexuality, the research uses a psychological approach. Moreover, the Queer theory is used to reveal the characteristics of homosexuality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. An overview of *Call Me by Your Name*

The main character, Elio Perlman is 17 years old Jewish-American-Italian boy. He lives with his family in northern Italian. He is the only child in his family. He is described as a young, handsome, bibliophile, and reliable musician. He is a music prodigy who can transcribe music by

himself and plays the music in various versions, like the Busoni version or Liszt version. He is also good at playing piano and guitar.

"Elio is an introverted person. He prefers to do his activities alone than interact with a large group of the people. Elio also loves writing in the form of diary. In his diary he wrote all his thoughts and feelings, especially his feeling to Oliver "I was hoping you'd persuade me of the opposite—and you did, for a while. Why won't I believe it tomorrow morning?" (Aciman, 2007: 13).

"He also expresses his worry, fear and hate in his diary "I was exaggerating when I said I thought you hated the piece. What I meant to say was: I thought you hated me"(Aciman,2007:14)

Elio is a young man who is attracted to Oliver physically and sexually. His first impression on Oliver's physical appearance is written in his diary "the color on the palms of his hands was the same as the pale, soft skin of his soles, of his throat, of the bottom of his forearms, which hadn't really been exposed to much sun. Almost a light pink, as glistening and smooth as the underside of a lizard's belly. Private, chaste, unfledged, like a blush on an athlete's face or an instance of dawn on stormy night.".(Aciman 2007:5). Oliver is the man that he is dreamt of. On the other side, Olio is also not known why he is interested in Oliver "I never knew to ask. (Aciman, 2007: 05). His fascination with Oliver is a question he couldn't answer.

His suppressed desire appeared in his dream. In his sleeping, Elio dreamed of having sexual intercourse with Oliver. His dream makes him want to be touched by Oliver. This haunted him and makes him panic Oliver was close to him.

He is like a virgin who is touched for the first time by a man. Oliver's touch brings a sensation that Olio dreams of ". that produce far, far more disturbing pleasures than they are used to on their own. (Aciman, 2007: 16).

In addition to physical attraction, Olio also tries to get closer to Oliver by following Oliver's hobby, namely fishing. He begins to love jogging because Oliver loves it and begins to love the octopus, Heraclitus, and Tristan. It is all about Oliver. What Oliver loves, he will try to love and learn it because he wants to learn about Oliver and do the same activities with Oliver.

"The summer I learned to love fishing. Because he did it. To love jogging. Because he did. To love octopus, Heralitus, Tristian." (Aciman, 2007: 18).

Elio always observes Oliver, about Oliver's toes, ankles, knees. He wants to kiss every inch of Oliver's body. He always looks at the way Oliver moves, what Oliver wears, and loves Oliver's foot in the water. He has an erotic fantasy about Oliver. That foot in the water—I could have kissed every toe on it. Then kissed his ankles and his knees. How often had I stared at his bathing suit while his hat was covering his face? (Aciman 2007: 27) Again "He couldn't possibly have known" (2007: 27) he

always pays attention and has a desire for Oliver and dreams of him.

B. The Cause of Elio's Homosexuality

Elio's Hormone

As a smart young man, Olio always asks questions to himself about the reason why he has wild lust for Oliver. Unfortunately he "couldn't possibly have known" (Aciman. 2007: 27). Olio doesn't know that it's his hormones that make him attracted to the same sex. As a young man, Olio's hormones have changed drastically. According to Granger, Schwartz, Booth, and Arentz, (1999) as cited in Tackett, Herzhoff, Harden, Page-Gould, and Josephs (235: 2014) although hormone-behavior relationships in humans have been most frequently investigated in adults, it is in fact during adolescence that the largest and most dramatic hormonal changes occur—most notably, changes in sex steroid concentrations. Olio's ignorance about the hormonal changes he is going through is one of the reasons for his liking the same sex.

Elio is so fond of Oliver. He wants Oliver to be naked with him. He removes his bathing suit and then wears Oliver's bathing suit. He wants to come in Oliver's bathing suit. His lust makes him do something sensual thing on Oliver's things and leave the evidence for Oliver to find there. Olio adores Oliver so much that it makes him want him to be a part of his life physically and mentally.

Olio's erotic dreams with Oliver haunt him almost every night. In his dream, he finally learns about what his body must

have known from the first day when he meets Oliver. The more he hides his desire to Oliver the more he imagines and fantasizes about him

Elio's Surrounding: his parents

Elio has open-minded parents. LGBT is not a problem for Elio's parents. They have LGBT friends and they accept them, keep being kind, still be good friends and not judge their sexual orientation. Mr. Perlman gives Elio advice to accept other people without considering their social and economic background and their sexual orientation as well. They teach Elio to be a good person for them. Elio's parents have their own opinion on the LGBT cause. Elio's parents have gay friends, and they become regular guests in Elio's house for dinner. Although they are gay, Elio's parents accept them and do their best to entertain them. They do not judge them and do not do bad things. Sexual orientation is a private matter.

"At dinner, our guests were a semi-employed adjunct professor of music and a gay couple from Chicago who insisted on speaking terrible Italian. The two men sat next to each other, facing my mother and me. One of them decided to recite some verses by pascoli, to which Mafalda, catching my look, made her usual smorfia meant to elicit a giggle from me. My father had warned me not to misbehave in the presence of the scholars from Chicago. I said I would wear the purple shirt given me by a distant cousin from

Uruguay. My father laughed it off, saying I was too old not to accept people as they were. (Aciman, 2007: 125)."

C. The Effect of Elio's Homosexuality

Elio's relationship with his parents

Elio tries to hide his sexual attraction to Oliver from his surroundings and his parents. As an introverted person, it is not easy to speak up about his feeling to other people. He expresses his feeling in his diary such as his attraction to Oliver. He knows it is taboo to admire the same sex.

As a highly educated and open-minded person, Elio's father, Professor Perlman, knows Elio's attraction to Oliver. Instead of punishing him, professor Perlman talks to Elio personally. He does not judge him, is not angry with him even he does not punish his son. He says to Elio that he is "too smart not to know how rare, how special, what you two had was." (Aciman, 2007: 223).

Mr. Perlman opens the topic with good words. He tries to make Elio sure that he can understand his feeling. 'I am here is the best word to make sure other people if we will by their side in the many situations. Whatever the situation, Mr. Perlman will always be on Elio's side. He knows if Elio may be doubtful to tell about his feeling to him.

"Fear not. It will come. At least I hope it does. And when you least expect it. Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spot. Just remember: I am here. Right now you may not want to feel anything. Perhaps you never wished to feel

anything. And perhaps it's not with me that you'll want to speak about these things. But feel something you did." (Aciman, 2007: 224).

He overcomes Elio's pain, and although he does not ask Elio to confirm that he has a relationship with Oliver, he does let Elio know that what he has with Oliver is rare and special and makes him not shut himself after this experience. He wants Elio to open and share his feeling with him. He does not want to become a terrible father. He has his own way to show his role as a parent.

"We may never speak about this again. But I hope you'll never hold it against me that we did. I will have been a terrible father if, one day, you'd want to speak to me and felt that the door was shut or not sufficiently open." (Aciman, 2007: 225).

Similarly, Elio's mother will do the same thing as his father. She accepts him as he is. Mrs. Perlman is an open-minded person too. She will give Elio advice like Mr. Perlman's. She will help and support Elio to pass his pain and sorrow. Because Mr. and Mrs. Perlman know that Oliver and Elio's relationship is a difficult relationship. She will not discriminate against her son. "But even if she did, I am sure her attitude would be no different than mine. (Aciman, 2007: 225).

Elio's Friend

Vimini is Elio's friend. Vimini and Elio have the same birthday, though she is ten years old. Vimini is also a genius. Vimini

knows about Elio's feelings. she knows if Elio likes Oliver. She asks Elio about his feeling for Oliver. She knows because Oliver tells about his relationship with Elio to Vimini. Vimini understands if Elio likes Oliver. She does not judge and discriminates against them when she knows about his feeling. Vimini is also an open-minded person. She accepts them and still be a good friend to them.

"You like him, don't you?"

"Yes," I said.

"He likes you too—more than you do, I think."

Was this her impression?

No, it was Oliver's.

When had he told her?

A while ago. (Aciman, 2007: 91).

The next person who knows Elio and Oliver's relationship is Marzia. Marzia is Elio's friend. From her conversation with Elio, she knows about Elio's feelings for Oliver. Marzia loves Elio, although she knows that Elio loves Oliver and is interested in him, she keeps her admiration for Elio. She asks Elio, whether he gets angry with Chiara because Chiara becomes close to Oliver? Elio just answers her with shook his head. As an open-minded person, Marzia does not judge or discriminate against Elio.

"You're not with me because you're angry with Chiara?"

"Why am I angry with Chiara?"

"Because of him."

I shook my head, feigning a puzzled look meant to show that I couldn't begin to guess where she'd fished such a notion from. (Aciman, 2007: 50).

D. Homosexuality portrayed in *Call Me by Your Name*

The author, André Aciman, has his own point of view about homosexuality. In *Call Me by Your Name* he characterized a teenage boy falling in love with the same sex. He is described as a young, smart, good looking who admired his father's assistant.

The author wants to show the readers about the homosexual relationship in his novel. How rare it is, how difficult it is, how hidden it is, and how taboo it is. He described the beautiful relationship between Elio and Oliver. He has a unique concept in his story. He can express homosexuality through Elio's side. Elio has a big desire, his young hormone makes him become passionate.

Aciman brings us to understand love and relationship. No matter your sexual orientation, love is a pure thing. Love is not only for those who have different sex but it is also for the same sex as well. Love cannot choose with whom, with the gender, with the religion, and with others. Elio and Oliver's love are grown from the deep of their souls. This is a romance of six weeks duration, and an experience that marks them for a lifetime. In the end, Oliver and Elio cannot be together, because Oliver chooses to marry a girl. Although Oliver has already married, he still loves Elio in his own way and Elio still loves Oliver in his own way. They still keep in touch though they choose their own way.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the problems in the previous part, it can be concluded that the cause of Elio's homosexuality is from his hormone and his family life. Elio is 17 years old. He is a teenager in the maturity process. Elio's lust and desire bring him to a sensual feelings and love stories. His desire and lust bring him to wild imaginations and fantasy. His hidden desire brings him to sensual and erotic dreams. His hormone makes him have big desires. He wants to do something sensual and intimate moment with Oliver. He cannot choose with whom he would fall in love. Oliver, the man who can make Elio feels different. He is interested in Oliver; his physical appearance, his intelligence and how he treats him differently. Moreover, Oliver is Elio's dream of adulthood.

In addition, Elio's family and her surrounding make him familiar with the homosexual. Elio's parents are open-minded and intelligent persons. They do not judge or discriminate against people because of their sexual orientation. Elio's father, Mr. Perlman, gives him advice to accept every person as he/she is. They do not judge a person from his/her orientation. They taught Elio about good work and good deeds, so appearance, background, and other aspect are not important. Elio's friends also understand his interest in the same-sex person. They do not discriminate, hate or judge him.

From the previous discussion, it can be concluded that André Aciman, the author, presents homosexuality in the different way. He shows the readers those who have same-sex orientation are also

suffering. Aciman brings us to understand homosexuality and love. He wants to present that homosexuality is not only about sexual orientation, it is also about love which is pure and unconditional.

REFERENCES

- Aciman, A. (2007). *Call Me by Your Name*. U.S.A: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Afdholi, N. Andalas, E F. Irawan, D. & Rochmaniyah, F. (2019) Lesbian Marginalization Construction in *Surabaya Pagi* Daily Newspaper. *Anaphora*. *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, 2(2), 96-101.
- Bárta, P. (2013). The Theme of (Homo)sexuality in The Fiction of Michael Cunningham. Unpublish journal. Prague: Departement of language and literature, Charles University
- Dastmard, F, Razmjoo, T & Salehi, V. (2012). The Relationship between Psychology and Literature. Unpublish journal. Iran: Department of Literature, Payam Noor University.
- Freud, S. (1970). *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. London: Basic book.
- Gading, I. & Marsih, L. (2019). Gay Representation in Becky Albertalli's *Simon vs The Homo Sapiens Agenda*. *Anaphora: Journal of Language, Literary, and Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 37-48.
- Herek, G M. (2000). *Homosexuality*. Unpublish Journal. Davis: Departement of Psychology, University of California.
- Mc Mahon, J W & Frank, B. (1986). *Psychology: The Hybrid Science Fifth Edition*. U.S.A: The Dorsey Press.
- Papalia, D E, Harvey L S, Feldman, R D, & Camp, C J. (2007). *Adult Development and Aging*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rudy, R. (2016). THE DEPICTION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN AMERICAN MOVIES. *Humaniora*, 28(1), 59-68. /*doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.22146/jh.11502*/
- Santrock, J W. (2006). *Human Adjustment*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Samelius, L & Wagberg, L. (2005). *Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Issues in Development*. Swedia: Sida.
- Selden, R, Widdowson, P, & Brooker, P. (2005). *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. Fifth Edition. Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- The American Psychological Association. (2008). *Answer to Your Questions for a Better Understanding of Sexual Orientation and Homosexuality*. Washington DC

Tackett, H, Harden, P G, and Josephs.
(2014). Personality x Hormone
Interaction in Adolescent
Externalizing Psychopathology.
Washington DC. The American
Psychological Association.

Ufil Rahayu, A. (2017). Psychoanalysis of
Lesbians and Gays in the Great
Gatsby Novel. *PIONEER: Journal Of
Language And Literature*, 9(2), 85 -
94. doi:10.36841/pioneer.v9i2.450

Weinberg, M S & Williams, C.J. (1974). *Male
Homosexual*. New York: Oxford
University Press.

Wellek, R & Warren, A. (1956). *Theory of
Literature*. New York: Hartcourt,
Brace and World Inc.

Whorcel, S & Goethals, G R. (1985).
*Adjustment Pathways to Personal
Growth*. U.S.A: Prentice-Hall.