

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

LGBT, an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, is known as a minor sexual orientation group. LGBT can also be used as an umbrella term for referring to a certain gender and sexual identity topics. At first, this minor group was called homosexual in the 1960s. However, it was replaced with the term 'gay' because homosexuality only belongs to certain group and is not accurate to represent all of the queer gender and sexual identity. In the past, LGBT already existed, but people were very strict to LGBT. One example of how strict and harsh people to a homosexual individual is a Sodomy Case by Richard Cornish in 1625. He was reported on charges of sodomizing a male ship steward and was sentenced to hang (Crompton 1976, 288). This case becomes the example of discrimination towards homosexual in former days.

There have been many issues and cases about the acceptance of LGBT issues in society, such as hate speech, discrimination, and negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals. The negative treatment makes the minor individuals hard to express themselves in society and causes them to experience mental health problems and difficulties in accepting themselves as they are. In the 1920s, The Society for Human Rights was formed by Henry Gerber in Chicago as the first formal organization in the United States that support gay rights (Elliot 2015). The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) was created in 1980 by activist Steve Endean as a

political organization to support and promote equality of LGBT individuals and other LGBT communities. It was also known as the wealthiest national gay and lesbian civil rights faction in Washington D.C., United States. Another community to support LGBT was the Independent Gay Forum (IGF), an online writer and activists' group which focused on expanding gay and lesbian legal equality. In 1968, a man named Frank Kameny made a slogan "Gay is Good" to counter the social stigma and showed that being gay is a positive moral good (Ball 2010). In 1969, a riot arose between the LGBT crowd and police officers. This uproar was known as The Stonewall Riots. The riots became the stepping-stone for LGBT individuals to obtain their rights. From here on, there were many promotions and parades to bring awareness and help LGBT people so that they could come out from their "closet". Since then, the radical politics of gay pride have increasingly wanted to be "out and proud" in all contexts.

The concept of gay pride makes an explicit shift from shame to pride. LGBT is no longer afraid to embrace their sexuality in public. A year after the riots, activists began to organize an event to commemorate the incident. On June 28, 1980, the Christopher Street Liberation Day March was held to celebrate the first anniversary of the Stonewall uprising (Solomon 2019). Eventually, June is chosen to commemorate the Stonewall Riots by celebrating LGBT Pride Month every year to recognize the impact of the riots for LGBT which people have received. The philosophy of gay pride assumes that sexuality not only *is* but also *should be* the primary source of identification, community, and self-esteem (Connell 2015, 24).

The corollary concept of “out and proud” links pride to self-disclosure, so that coming out and pride become nearly synonymous.

In the 21st century, the acceptance of LGBT has spread all around the world. A new study conducted by Andrew R. Flores (2019) called Global Acceptance Index ranked 141 countries around the world regarding the relative level of social acceptance of LGBT rights and individuals. Eighty (80) countries have increased the recognition of LGBT rights for individuals. Meanwhile, forty-six (46) countries declined the acceptance, and fifteen (15) countries have not experienced changes (Dowd 2018). This number shows that there is a massive change regarding LGBT acceptance among people all over the globe. Same-sex desire, once the “love that dare not speak its name,” is increasingly accepted and celebrated in many parts of the United States and the world. In Georgia, for example, since November 23rd 1998, same-sex sexual activity has been legalizing by *Powell v. The State*, Supreme Court of Georgia (EQUALDEX n.d.). While it is stated by *The New York Times* (2015) that New York has the largest gay populations in size with 756.000 people, identify themselves as gay, lesbian, lesbian, or transgender.

According to *USAToday.com* (2019), there are more than ten cities that celebrate “LGBT Pride Parade”, which is a ceremonial against violence and mainly about discrimination towards the LGBT individual to promote their equality rights and celebrate gender variance and sexual diversity. Even until 2019, LGBT Pride Month was still held all around the world in many ways. People were holding a parade in many big cities in the United States or promote it through social media. It shows enough how postmodern society has been quite receptive to support

LGBT. This condition is supported by the increasing number of adults which are identified as LGBT (Cohen, et al. 2018, 8). It is because these millennial might be found in government or other important positions within the society. Thus, their existence is influential to the development of LGBT acceptance by bringing awareness to a larger mass. One of the influences brought by the development of LGBT is shifting from heteronormative society to homonormative society. Heteronormativity is about privilege as the right and normal sexual norms. This norm became the standard that is valid within society. It is mostly about sexual interaction between the opposite sex, man and woman, as the normal one (Berlant and Warner 1998). This heteronormative norm is rooted in society's mind, which causes people to judge others sexuality as good and bad one based on this normativity. This norm somehow cannot cover a group of people outside heterosexuals, such as homosexual individuals. The existence of heteronormativity norms is often used to discriminate non-heteronormative because they are different from the standards. They are considered as peculiar because they do not act the way heterosexuals believe. Discrimination, negative, and harmful treatments towards the non-heteronormative are the ways for heteronormative people to criticize LGBT individuals.

Society has become more accepting, especially people in America, which leads to a change in how people react and treat homosexual individuals. LGBT people are no longer seen as a group of people who should be alienated from society. This is due to the uprising of Neoliberalism in United States which creating many social movements including gay liberation. Begin in 1930s, The New Deal

was sought as a response to the needs to recovery and relief from the Great Depression, developed by the Roosevelt administration (Wei 2014). However, it was ended up being torn down as it created a new vision of national and world order. This vision of inequality, public austerity, competition, and “law and order” are known as Neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is developed as a response to global changes that happened in the Western institutions and aimed to take over the limited states welfare state to increase corporate profit rates. The profit was taken from other social uses, which ended up increasing economic inequality. This everyday capitalism led to the supportive towards upward redistribution. However, it also led to an increase of inequalities in many sectors. It then become the core of many civil rights movement and equality politics. The expanding of the social movements caused by neoliberalism aimed to improve the inequality and injustice conditions in the United States. These movements were creating innovative critiques to broaden human’s constraints. These movements are civil right and black nationalist insurgencies, anti-racist and anti-imperialist mobilizations, radical labor activism, the women’s liberation movement, lesbian feminism, black feminism, and gay liberations.

A few years later, the social movement caused by neoliberalism leads to the establishment of a new term called Homonormativity. This term views homosexual as something normal and has been accepted among society. This norm adopts heteronormativity values in which what heterosexual individual gets can be applied to the homosexual individual. It is applicable to make same sex marriage possible. From the survey conducted by Cohen and team (2018), the public has supported

marriage equality, including for LGBT couples as one of LGBT rights movements. In 2015, same sex couples had a fundamental right to marriage from the Supreme Court. These conditions show a good signal for LGBT individuals to start having a relationship and being open with it since most of the society has become to see their relationship acceptable within the society in the same way as heterosexual couple and their relationship. Homosexuality issue can reach its current condition as the result of LGBT movements in which this movement is also possible due to the development of neoliberalism. One of the acts to bring awareness about LGBT among society is through literary works. Literary works can be the way to voice out and also subtly give others knowledge about LGBT issue (Blackburn, Clark and Nemeth 2015). In this context, as homonormativity can be considered as a new advancement, literary works can help to deliver the values contained by homonormativity. Homonormativity as a new theme for cultural productions might help in promoting LGBT. By using homonormativity as its theme, it can be an insight for people who read the literature enlightenment of the new attitudes and perspective towards LGBT. It can be a good example to practice it in real life. This changes can be a huge advantage to homosexual individual, especially the young one to come out to public without having to be afraid anymore.

There have been many novels released related the issue of LGBT such as *Middlesex* (2002) by Jeffrey Eugenides, *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman, *Simon vs. Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli, and *What If It's Us* (2018) by Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera. This recurring theme in the literature shows that awareness about LGBT has increased in literature. One novel

that brings up a topic about homonormativity is *What If It's Us* (2018) by Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera. It was released on October 09 2018. It was a story about Arthur Seuss and Ben Alejo. Arthur moved out to do an internship at his mother's law firm in New York. There, the universe set him to meet a boy named Ben but then they got separated. However, the universe played with them and once again played its role and united them. In the novel, the other characters surround them were supportive of the two main characters. They did not see Arthur and Ben as a peculiar individual that should be excluded from society. Instead, their surroundings treated them as to how they were supposed to be treated, a normal individual.

What If It's Us (2018) is categorized as a Young Adult literature as it talks about two teenage boys and the aim readers is teenager. Young adult literature theme is becoming an important genre in literature as it increasing the adolescent literacy value. Addressing the teenage interests and needs in the literature, it might attract the readers by made it relevance and valuable to the lives of its readers, specifically during their coming of age period. Coming of age is a term used to describe a child transition becoming an adult in which teenagers are seeking for a place in society (Millard 2007, 15). Thus, Young adult literature is important 'asset' to the development of their physical emotion, as 'asset' means a factor to promoting the positivity in the development of a teenager in their coming of age period. Promoting the empathy, compassion, and understanding of the teenage by portraying their exterior and interior lives, young adult giving to them an image of role models, develop their personal philosophy of being, frame of references of the

world they inhabit, and to determine that is right and wrong (Cart 2008). A young adult novel discussing homosexuality and Homonormativity may give the readers the essence of affirmation and reassurance during their coming of age. Teenagers during the search of their place among the society may find this theme helpful as it can also encourage them to not only find their place, but also to understand who they are. It would eventually lead them to admit who they are.

What If It's Us (2018) is the fourth book of both Albertalli and Silvera. Albertalli received two awards for her first book, *Simon vs. Homo Sapiens Agenda*: American Library Association's William C. Morris Award in 2015 as the first-time author writing for teenagers (Hetter 2016), and in 2017 German Youth Literature Prize for a brilliant debut (Baker 2016). Meanwhile, Silvera, known as the *New York Times* best-selling author of *They Both Die at the End* (2017) got an award from ALA (American Library Association) in 2016 in the category Young Adult Fiction.

In this book, Albertalli and Silvera portrayed such a supportive environment for Arthur and Ben for being homosexuals. Thus, this study is important to investigate the shifting from heteronormativity to homonormativity. This study uses a theory by Lisa Duggan about the new homonormativity. In her book *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (2003). This analysis can also be considered as gay criticism since the main characters are gay. Gay criticism does not only focus on the effort to define homosexuality. The study of gay criticism often put the attention that falls to the subheading of gay sensibility, which influences the way one sees the world, oneself and others. It also

includes awareness of being different from the dominant or major group and complex feeling from the ongoing social oppression (Tyson 2015, 314).

There has not been any adequate study analyzing homonormativity issues, especially in literature. However, there is a journal by Julian Carter titled *Gay Marriage and Pulp Fiction: Homonormativity, Disidentification, and Affect in Ann Bannon's Lesbian Novels* (2009). This journal explores the ways in which lesbian character in Bannon's novel identified as "homonormative" or "normative lesbians". This journal seeks to meddle discussion about homonormativity by investigating its imaginative and affective dimensions. Most lesbians in Bannon's novel obey the dominant culture that expects them as a normal woman ought to be and do. Marriage here works as a strategy for a backup plan so that white queer's can survive without being judged for their actual identity. In contrary, this study discusses about a gay couple and aims to point out a more developed society in which they treat homosexual individual without any hidden intention. Rather than being a "mask", homonormativity in the novel is considered as the improvement of the LGBT movement. Therefore, the existence of *What If It's Us* (2018) brings a new insight towards LGBT issues. There is a very few analysis and journal article that discuss about this issue in this object as it was only recently published. Specifically, in Universitas Airlangga, there has not been any analysis and journal article that discussing this issue in this object. In addition, this study attempts to bring awareness of homonormativity portrayed in the novel.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

According to the background of the study, this study analyzes Arthur Seuss and Ben Alejo as the main characters in the novel *What If It's Us* by Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera. There is one main question proposed in this study.

1. How is homonormativity presented in *What If It's Us* (2018)?

1.3 Objective of the Study

This study aims to get one objective answered. The objective is answered according to the statement of the problem. This is one main objective proposed in this study.

1. To examine homonormativity presented in *What If It's Us* (2018).

1.4 Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to depict homonormativity represented in literature and the reaction of both the main characters and society through homonormativity in Becky Albertalli and Adam Silvera's novel titled *What If It's Us*. This study aims to show to society that homosexuality is no longer an odd issue to be discussed in daily conversation. In further action, this study is expected to be able to bring sexuality awareness to the readers, especially for young-adult readers. Young-adult readers are the aim readers as this novel might promoting the positivity in the development of teenager's characters and gives an image role models. This study can contribute to the analysis of homosexuality issue to gender studies, especially in literature. Specifically, to academics in English Department

Universitas Airlangga, this study can be the start for homonormativity discussion since this study initiates this issue for the first time in Universitas Airlangga scope. Hopefully, this can be an insightful perspective for readers and perceive wisely the message that this novel wants to deliver.

1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1. Heteronormativity: The concept and belief that being heterosexual is the norm; considered as normal and natural within society; a sexual interaction between man and women, outside that is considered as unnatural or wrong (Berlang 2012).
2. Homonormativity: The beliefs which does not compete with heteronormative assumptions and institution, but sustain heteronormative. It beliefs the possibility of gay demobilized privatized and constituency in consumption and domesticity (Duggan 2003).
3. Homosexuality: Refers to sexual relationship between people with the same sex. Also relate to one's sexual desire, same-sex behaviors and how they define themselves (Cardoso and Werner 2003).
4. Queer Study: A study that includes both analysis connected with gender and sexuality (Beasley 2005).