

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The postwar era that started right after the end of World War II was an era of rebuilding a better tomorrow. In America, unlike any other country, the economy was already in better condition due to its homeland being untouched by the destruction of the war. In the postwar era, most Americans' daily lives focused around economic prosperity and consumption, to support the recovery of the nation. In addition, the American people also focus on family life and community. The postwar years were the most affluent in American history. Salaries rose in the 1950s, and by 1960, the Gross National Product had more than doubled in comparison to 1940 (Carlisle, 2009). With the growing economic prosperity, people race to achieve what is called the American dream. Dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with the opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement (Adams, 1931).

However, not everyone in America participated equally in this race towards the American dream. In the 1950s, the sense of uniformity was very much present in America. Young and old alike accepted group norms rather than breaking out on their own, resulting in a high level of conformity. Furthermore, America was a socially conservative and materialistic country. Social groups often penalize individuals who deviate from accepted norms, even when deviations are relatively minor (Bernheim, 1994). Consequently, many subcultures were excluded from experiencing the American dream, including homosexuality.

Homosexuality has been part of American society for the past hundred years ago, however, they were not always accepted. In 1923, the New York state legislature legalized specific homosexual solicitation; those who in public places soliciting men for the purpose of committing crime against nature or other lewdness, as a form of disorderly conduct. The new disorderly- conduct statute became the first law in the state's history to verge on specifying male homosexual conduct as a criminal offense (Chauncey, 1994). While homosexual in America has experienced many forms of intolerance before, the American Psychiatrist Association (APA) made it official when they classified homosexual as a mental illness in 1950. APA labeled them as abnormal, pathological, and deviant. It is not until 1973 where homosexuality in America is no longer regarded as a mental illness anymore. The mental health between heterosexual and homosexual are the same, the only thing that differentiates them is their homosexual status (Hooker 1957). Nevertheless, although it is no longer considered as an illness, people still treat homosexuals differently. In our society, homosexual is regarded as a marginalized group alongside lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ).

The history of homosexuals in America is not something that the country is proud of. In 1942, the US military working with psychiatrist develops a guideline to identify and excluded gay men from the service. In 1947, the sex perversion elimination act was created under Truman's presidency which led to the massive discharge of state department officials whose allegedly homosexual. By 1955, more than 1,200 people lose their jobs in the federal government due to the anti-gay witch hunt or dubbed as the lavender scare. Without a doubt, people at that time still

perceive homosexual as a threat to their society. With the image of the State of Department tainted by homosexual, employees and officials reacted defensively. Male diplomats averted being seen in pairs in public as they began to feel self-conscious about their appearance. Some service officers felt compelled to demonstrated their heterosexuality (Johnson, 2004).

Nonetheless, in recent years, there is a significant increase in the percentage of adults who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender in United States. The research conducted by Gallup shows a quite increase in the percentage of LGBT people from 4.1% in 2016 up to 4.5% in 2017. In general, 5.1% of women identified as LGBT, compared to men with only 3.9% of them identified as LGBT in 2017. The research also indicates that women are more likely to identify as LGBT than men. An LGBT demographic expert, Dr. Gary Gates stated in his report “a variety of factors can affect the willingness of adults to identify as LGBT. Thus, it is possible that those in the younger generation who are LGBT are feeling increasingly comfortable over time with their sexual orientation, and thus are more likely to identify as such.” Regardless of the increase of LGBT in America, we cannot deny the fact that not everyone has the same privilege to define themselves and not to be judged. People who are slightly different tend to be discriminated against by society (Newport, 2018).

When we are talking about homosexuality, it cannot be separated from heteronormativity and sexual repression. These two terms usually overlap with each other. Sexual orientation is also a result of complex interaction or social conflicts, historical pressures, and cultural prohibitions. For some people, talking about their

homosexuality openly can be uncomfortable due to the backlash and discrimination they will receive from society. This can be regarded as the outcome of heteronormativity which has rooted in our society for so long. Heteronormativity is dangerous and harmful to society and especially for the homosexual community because it normalizes behavior and the societal expectation that are tied to the presumption of heterosexuality and forced them to obey the strict gender binary. Heteronormativity is not only about the privilege of heterosexuality but it is a force related to social oppression (Marchia & Sommer, 2017). Heteronormativity can be caused by social conditions, politics, strong religious influence, laws, etc. The society with strong heteronormativity perceives homosexuals as a deviation against their heteronormative culture.

Consequently, this is where sexual repression takes place. Sexual repression is the state where an individual is prevented from expressing their sexuality freely. Repression does not free us from anything; on the contrary, its roots go deeper into the subconscious and we are trapped even more deeply. In the very effort to suppress sex, humankind has become bound and trapped by it (Osho 2002). In this case, the homosexual had to hide their sexuality and to pretend as if they are straight in order to avoid rejection and discrimination. The sexual repression can make homosexuals go to an extent where they are in a relationship with a heterosexual partner and live their life in pretense to avoid shame. Shame is a feeling that creates a need to hide or cover up (McClintock 2001). The consequences of sexual repression happen later in life. When homosexual lives in constant hiding for so long, it could reduce their quality of life, such as poor self-esteem, depression,

aggression, insomnia, and it can lead to alienation from their surroundings. Any rejection, internalized homophobia, and low self-esteem can lead to self-destruction. In addition, gay is likely to use substance abuse to deal with their depression (Hardin et al., 2001). In this case, one of the literary works containing the issue of heteronormativity is Andrew Sean Greer's novel entitled *The Story of a Marriage*.

The novel is Andrew Sean Greer's fourth work. Published in 2008, *The Story of a Marriage* talks about the chronicle of a marriage between Pearlie Cook and Holland Cook, and their relationship with a stranger named Buzz Drummer. It is set in 1953 and Pearlie, a dutiful housewife, cares not only for her husband's fragile heart but also her son who is afflicted with polio. One day, a stranger, Buzz, comes knocking on her doorstep, and everything changes. Buzz's disclosure about his relationship with Holland overturns all certain things in which Pearlie thought she knew. Set in a climate of fear and oppression sexual, and racial, *The Story of a Marriage* portrays three people trapped by the confines of their era. The novel mentions significant events that happened during the 1950s in America, including the Korean War, cold war, the execution of the Rosenbergs, etc. All these tensions abroad and at home that happened at difficult times help to shape their current life and decisions.

*The Story of a Marriage* was dubbed by *The New York Times* as thoughtful, complex, and exquisitely written. Andrew Sean Greer has won several awards, such California Book Award for his work, *The Confessions of Max Tivoli*, which named as the books of 2004 by the San Francisco Chronicle. Greer also receives Pulitzer

Prize for Fiction for his novel *Less* in 2018. Born in Washington D.C, Greer is the son of scientists and a brother to his twins. Throughout his career, Greer has taught at various places, including the Iowa Writers Workshop, a New York Public Library Cullman Center Fellow, and also a judge for the National Book Award. (Roberts, 2020).

In analyzing Andrew Sean Greer's, *The Story of a Marriage*, this study uses queer theory. Queer theory is a new addition to gay and lesbian studies. Although this study is relatively new, it deals with the more stable and recognizable, categories of gay and lesbian (Jagose 1996). This study focuses on heteronormativity issues which Gayle Rubin Proposed. According to Gayle Rubin, there is a sex hierarchy in our society. It is to categorize who are heterosexual and who are not and the reward of sex hierarchy is having more privilege in the society. Those who are not fit the category, in this case, homosexual, will be oppressed and discriminated. To simply put, the sex hierarchy will define how society treat us. By using heteronormativity theory, this study analyzes the works of heteronormativity in America during the 1950s and Holland and buzz negotiation on heteronormativity that happened where they lived.

The issue of heteronormativity in this novel can be seen from how eventually the character unconsciously suffers from the effect of the heteronormativity in his society. Not being able to express his sexuality due to the condition of postwar America, he distant himself from his family, especially his wife. However, albeit he shows little emotional connection, he still does his duty as a father and a husband which is to provide for his family. One can stay silent about

their sexuality, yet it does say a lot about their sexual preferences (Harned & Sedgwick, 1992).

In doing this analysis, there are several related studies about the issue of the study, which is heteronormativity. A thesis by Annisa (2012) discovers that in a heteronormativity society, people are expected to act based on the norm. However, the character in her study, Heteronormativity Towards Lesbian-Butch in Character in “Boys Don’t Cry” Film: Queer Study, chooses to be a transgender and to be in love with a woman, thus makes him discriminated. A study by Martínez (2019) reveals that heteronormativity and gender binary restricted vision of identity. The main character in his study is forced to conceal his true identity and try to mimic the stereotypes in order to be accepted by society. In Walczak (2014) study, she found that gay characters are usually still in the boundaries of heteronormativity. Thus, as long as they follow the stereotype characterization, they are still acceptable.

## 1.2 Statements of the Problem

After reading the novel and determining the topic of the study, there are two major questions:

1. How does heteronormativity affect the life of Holland and Buzz during postwar America in *The Story of a Marriage* by Andrew Sean Greer?
2. How does Holland and Buzz deal with the heteronormativity they experienced?

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aims to answer several questions regarding the statement of the problems, these are the objectives purposed in this study:

1. To reveal how heteronormativity during postwar America affects Holland and Buzz.
2. To understand how Holland and Buzz deal with the heteronormativity they suffer.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will help readers to understand the effect of heteronormativity on gay men as well as how they cope up with it. The study is designed to give insights about heteronormativity to the student as well as to the general public. In analyzing *The Story of a Marriage*, the author hopes the reader is aware that heteronormativity is harmful and dangerous to society. Specifically, to queer communities in which they do not have the freedom to express their sexual identity as the result of heteronormativity that has been embedded in the society itself. Moreover, by understanding the danger of heteronormativity, the readers can be more tolerant of each other. Additionally, the study aims to give a contribution to literary fiction for the English Department Universitas Airlangga. The study also expected to become a stepping-stone for future research related to queer history and heteronormativity.

## 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

1. Heteronormativity: A belief that heterosexual attraction is the norm in society. It is rooted in a linked essential, dichotomous understanding of sexuality (a person is either heterosexual or homosexual) and gender (a person is either a man or a woman) and the perception that these things are fixed and unchanging (Barker, 2014).
2. Heterosexual: An attraction physically, emotionally, and sexually towards the opposite gender. It is largely defined as attraction to the opposite sex, although the most rigid definitions of the word demand an attraction to the opposite gender as well (Manning, 2009).
3. Homosexual: An attraction physically, emotionally, and sexually towards same-sex. Homosexual men have predominantly erotic attraction to others of the same sex. Their sexual fantasies are either entirely or almost entirely directed toward other men (Isay, 2010).
4. Gender Binary: A classification of female and male based on the rigid binary; femininity and masculinity. Gender binary refers to the binary system whereby gender is assumed or considered as being a woman or man only. Therefore, gender non-binary is defined as genders outside of the woman and man binary (Rushton et al., 2019).
5. Sexual Repression: A state where an individual is being prevented from expressing their sexuality. Repression primarily targets “wishes” (the ideational representative of instinctual drives), whose satisfaction is

believed to lead to danger. Repression acts to inhibit the offending wish, preventing it from being known and acted upon (Boag, 2006).