

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

The coming-out process of gay people is a hard thing to do toward their society. While in this era, talking about the topic of gay is not something new. Around the world, gay people already have their own places and rights. Many common people fully support them as part of human rights to the point there is what so-called 'Pride Month' celebrated annually in June. However, many countries still have a grudge for these gay people. They assume that they violate their nature of different-sex love. In the USA, they have their freedom to express their sexuality publicly. The USA is the last two countries to acknowledge the rights of gay people due to its liberal view. They are fighting for the rights of gay people, most people in the USA support them. However, many of which still contrast to the idea of gay people's rights and the reasons are varied. Different from gay in the USA, some gay in Mexican-American border experience a total contrast. Some of them feel they do not belong to them. They face difficulties in confessing about their sexual orientation to their family because their heterosexual environment acts as a barrier to them (Connally, Wedemeyer and Smith 2013, 44). For Latino, if the behaviour is masculine, dominant, strong, etc., people consider a gay person as a straight man – a real man (*macho*), even he has had sex with a man he is not considered gay. On the other hand, the ones being penetrated are those who considered gay. As long as a man who acts as a penetrator, the one who puts it in, then he is not considered as a gay, even when he has a slim body (Tyson 2015, 314).

For gay Chicano, the process of coming-out about their sexual identity is one thing. He is sure he is gay and wants to tell the truth to the people around, he might face the trouble of being rejected. Thus, they will remain silent and sometimes it makes them have internal issues that cause anger issues or low self-esteem. He believes that his existence in this world is useless and that he has a view about the world negatively. Instead of having fun like any other people, they end up by themselves and mourn all day long. They know that they have a love interest in the same sex, but they oppress their feelings to the point that they think it is impossible for them to love a person who has the same sex as them. Thus, the problem of coming-out as a gay person for some Chicano is the issue related to the novel chosen as the object of the study.

The issue that is being analysed in the novel is the coming-out problem experienced by Ari, as the main character, towards his environment. It is related to the problem of Chicano gay people have. Ari has a negative view of the world and he suffers from self-doubt. He keeps asking the same question about why he is in this world and keeps on questioning his existence. Moreover, he has a hard time expressing words which makes it difficult to show what he feels. Ari built a wall around him which keeps him from the outside world, and he has a lot in mind since he rarely talks to his father..

In a study conducted by Dalton Connally, Rose Wedemeyer, and Scott J. Smith entitled *Cultural Practice Considerations: The Coming-Out Process for Chicanos along the Rural Mexico-US Border*. They argue that as the rise of the Chicano population continues, the difficulties and painfulness of revealing their

sexualities are found more often. The Latino heterosexuals act as a barrier for them and their family who live in the US border.

There has been a study conducted by Ralph J. Poole entitled *Boys Kissing in the Desert: Benjamin Alire Saenz's Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* which mainly discussing the transition from youth to adulthood experienced by Ari since he is a Chicano who lives in a Mexican-American border, New Mexico. This transition refers to his emotional condition in which he has the tension of the two cultures. In addition, Poole argues that the problem experienced by Ari is due to his denial of his feelings toward his best friend, Dante, who is more open about his feelings.

There are some related studies in this novel. In a study conducted by G. Miguel Arciniega, Thomas C. Anderson, Zoila G. Tovar-Blank, and Terence J. G. Tracey entitled *Toward a Fuller Conception of Machismo: Development of a Traditional Machismo and Caballerismo Scale* mainly discusses about the better representative for the composition of machismo and understanding its relation with psychological functioning. The two different composition of machismo, positive one which has a connection to family and chivalry (nurturance, protection of the family and its honour, dignity, wisdom, hard work, responsibility, spirituality, and emotional connectedness) and negative one which refers to hyper masculinity (violent, aggressive, and sexualized behaviours) as a different aspects Mexican American men's male sex role behaviour (G. Miguel Arciniega 2008, 20). In a thesis written by Rininta Amelia entitled *The Complexity of Coming Out in Julie Anne Peters*, she examines the struggle of the main character, Holland, experienced

in order to come out of the closet in *Keeping You a Secret* by Julie Anne Peters. Holland stuck in the first stage of coming out for a longer period of time due to the oppression done by the heterosexual society around her; the condition outside the closet prevent her to come out sooner.

The reason for choosing the novel entitled *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* by Benjamin Alire Saenz to become an object of this study is because it shows the stages of coming out for gay people. It portrays the real problem faced by gay people who want to tell the people around them about their sexual identity. Moreover, this novel has won many awards which makes this novel is a good source to be analysed, they are: *Michel L. Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature* for best book written for teens, *Stonewall Book Award* for exceptional merit relating to gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender experience, *Pura Belpre Award* for Latino/Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays, affirms and celebrates the Latino cultural experience in outstanding work of literature for children and youth and *Lambda Literary Award* for published works which celebrate or explore LGBT themes. Moreover, the author of this novel, Benjamin Alire Saenz is the winner of *Pen/Faulkner Award* for the author of the year's best works of fiction by living American citizens.

The problem in this novel is close to the problem gay people have in real life. They have a problem with words which makes them hard to express their feelings which resulted in the problem of coming-out. Ari in this novel has a problem in expressing words and also has a lot in mind. He often thinks about his existence in this world and always thinks about his imprisoned brother. The

problem he is having makes him even more difficult in defining his sexual orientation. When he first met Dante, his best friend, he does not feel anything in particular. As time goes by, he starts to feel a certain feeling towards him, yet he refuses to dig deeper into his feeling assuming that it is just a common feeling between best friends. When he found out that this certain feeling he has toward his best friend grows stronger as Dante moves to Chicago for one year, he finally realises that he is in love with him yet still refuses it. It was not until his parents tell him the truth about his family, his gay aunt who he had been living with when he was a child and his brother who killed a trans-prostitute using bare-hand. That's when he realizes that his parents fully support his sexual orientation and realize he has deeply in love with his best friend. Thus, he is not afraid of accepting his sexual identity and the fact that he is a Chicano gay. After accepting his true identity, the secrets of the universe are unfolded and his life becomes more interesting and he starts to think about the world differently than before. He has very supportive parents and someone he really loves whose parents just like his. He feels the best feeling in the world when he succeeded in overcoming his problem in coming-out with his sexual orientation and identity. He is not afraid of saying that he is gay because he has a very supportive family, thus the secrets of the universe are revealed by his own existence.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

From the background above, the writer proposes the statement of the problem as following:

How is the process of Ari's coming-out in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*?

## 1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the question above, the writer determines the objective that is going to be obtained is:

To reveal how the main character's process of coming-out within his social environment in *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe*.

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

First, this study will examine the struggle of telling the truth about the sexual identity of the main character in the novel. Therefore, this research will be useful to the readers to understand more about gay issues within society. It is not merely about the love of two people of the same sex and affair between them, but more about their daily problem about their sexual identity. Many of them still have a problem in confessing or telling the truth about their sexuality to their surroundings, particularly to their family. Moreover, issues about gay people have become one of the main topics in society today.

Second, by understanding more about gay issues, people will not easily judge them saying they are not meant to be and the like. They already have their

own problem within their self and their surroundings, do not easily judge people who openly confess to people they are gay, because it may be one of their biggest achievement to finally tell people about their sexual identity.

Also, by conducting this study, the writer expects that this study will be the contributor for the next study. Particularly in the English Department of Universitas Airlangga. Moreover, the writer hopes that this study is expected to give some insights into the problem of gay people have.

### 1.5 Definition of Key Terms

Considering some of the terms used in this study might not be familiar with the reader, below is the definition of each term:

- Chicano : The descendants of Mexican who live and grow in the USA, especially a man or a boy.
- Coming out : A metaphor used to describe when a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender (LGBT) person deliberately reveal their sexual orientation (Sedgwick 1990).
- The closet : a product of oppression done by heterosexual society to homosexual people (Sedgwick 1990).
- Heteronormativity : A belief of heterosexual, gender binary, is the normal sexuality which involve two different sex (Sedgwick 1990).

Homosexuality : A sexual attraction or sexual desire towards the same sex, experiencing the romantic, emotion, and sexual attraction (Sedgwick 1990).