

QUEER REPRESENTATIONS: COMING OUT AND HOMOPHOBIA IN SELECTED YOUNG ADULT NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

As the progressive movements of the LGBTQ+ community and the realization of the importance of queer representation in the media, many authors have taken parts in it. For instance, in the literature field, over the last decade, many works have been written that include queer representations, especially in young adult novels. In this thesis, I seek to analyze the queer representations, specifically in terms of coming out and homophobia, as these topics are the most relatable to queer people. By doing so, I focus on each of the main characters in the selected works that are: 1) *The Dangerous Art Of Blending In* (2018) by Angelo Surlmelis, 2) *Brave Face* (2019) by Shaun David Hutchinson, 3) *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli, and 4) *Call Me By Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman. I use the queer approach and the Cass' Model of Identity Development to examine the coming out process, and the responses/attitudes toward it and see the correlation between coming out and homophobia. The results of my analysis show that the queer representations have evolved in terms of complexity and homophobia affects the process of coming out by inhibiting to come to terms of self-acceptance and identity synthesis.

Keywords: *Queer, Representation, Coming Out, Homophobia, Young Adult.*

ABSTRAK

*Seiring dengan gerakan progresif komunitas LGBTQ+ dan kesadaran akan pentingnya representasi queer di media, banyak penulis yang ikut mengambil peran di dalamnya. Misalnya, di bidang sastra, selama satu dekade terakhir, banyak karya telah ditulis yang menyertakan representasi queer, terutama dalam novel young adult. Dalam tesis ini, saya mencoba menganalisis representasi queer, khususnya dalam hal coming out dan homofobia, karena topik-topik ini paling berelasi dekat dengan orang-orang queer. Dengan begitu, saya fokus pada masing-masing karakter utama dalam karya terpilih yaitu: 1) *The Dangerous Art Of Blending In* (2018) oleh Angelo Surlmelis, 2) *Brave Face* (2019) oleh Shaun David Hutchinson, 3) *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) oleh Becky Albertalli, dan 4) *Call Me By Your Name* (2007) oleh André Aciman.*

Saya menggunakan pendekatan queer dan Model Pengembangan Identitas Cass untuk memeriksa proses coming out, dan tanggapan / sikap terhadapnya serta melihat korelasi antara proses coming out dan homofobia. Hasil analisis saya menunjukkan bahwa representasi queer telah berkembang dalam hal kompleksitas dan homofobia memengaruhi proses coming out dengan menghambat penerimaan diri dan sintesis identitas.

Kata Kunci: *Queer, Representasi, Coming Out, Homofobia, Young Adult.*

A. INTRODUCTION

The past couple of decades have been a great time for the LGBTQ+ community as their movements are making significant progress. One of these movements is called identity politics also known as queer politics, which according to Cohen is “the idea of fighting for rights on the basis of singular identity [or the most marginalized in the society]” (3).

Some of the successful examples are the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act [commonly known as ‘Matthew Shepard Act’ or ‘Shepard/Byrd Act’] as the response to a murder of a gay American student who was beaten and tortured to death. The act serves as an expansion of the U.S. federal hate crime law by adding amendments for crimes based on sexual orientation or gender identity and President Barack Obama signed the legislation into law on October 28th, 2009 (“Obama signs hate-crimes law rooted in crimes of 1998” 1).

The U.S. Military’s Anti-Discrimination Policy. They added sexual orientation and listed it under the Army Equal Opportunity Program as protection, meaning the members cannot be discriminated against because of their sexual orientation (Kime 1). Later in 2021, President Joe Biden signed the executive order that overturned a controversial ban by his predecessor on transgender individuals serving in the U.S. military (Liebermann 1). Another move cheered by LGBTQ+ advocates that fulfills a campaign promise.

The demand for the legalization of same-sex marriage. It is also known as the ‘Marriage Equality Act’, and this topic is widely discussed in countries all around the world. The Netherlands was the first to legalize it in 2000, followed by others such as the United Kingdom in 2013, the United States in 2015, and the most recent, Australia in 2017 (Donnelly-Alex 1). These are a few examples of the progressive movements in politics.

As in academic discipline, there is a study that developed since the 1990s called Queer Theory. This is the development of gay and lesbian studies, a movement that seeks to make desire or sexual orientation central to critical analysis and understanding. It includes literary criticism that has political and social goals to work against homophobia and heterosexual privilege as it takes all subject of sexual topics that are considered abnormal or odd—in other words, queer—by the mainstream in to challenge the traditional views of sexual identities (Dobie 109-110).

Evidently, these movements have impacts and manifest in literary works. After all of those announcements, studies, and other signs of progress that the community has

made in different fields, many authors are more open and have the courage to write stories that represent LGBTQ+ characters explicitly in their works. For instance, in popular fiction like Cassandra Clare's fantasy novels *the Shadowhunter Chronicles*, Pierce Brown's sci-fi novels *the Red Rising Series*, also many contemporary novels written by popular authors such as David Levithan, John Green, Benjamin Alire Sáenz, and most recent debut author Adam Silvera, Casey McQuiston and Bill Konigsberg.

Some of these works are even successfully adapted into movies. For example, *Love, Simon* (2018) from a novel written by Becky Albertalli entitled *Simon vs. The Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015). It tells a story about a closeted gay high school senior named Simon who is trying to keep up relationships with his friends, his family, while simultaneously attempting to discover the identity of the anonymous classmate with whom he has fallen in love online and eventually he finds the courage to come out. This movie is very impactful among the LGBTQ+ community because it depicted the common struggles that the LGBTQ+ youths have to deal with in terms of figuring out their sexuality, coming out, homophobia, and relationships between their friends and family, also the first studio teen film that hits the mainstream. It is arguably considered as one of the most groundbreaking LGBTQ+ movies in the 21st century.

Besides literature, other media nowadays also start to give a better representation in their works as in TV shows, music industry, news, advertisement, etc. It is very important for the media to represent the LGBTQ+ community in the right ways because representations matter. It affects how non—queer—people see them queer—people as well as how they see themselves. By giving them the right representation, the media is taking part in reducing discrimination, violence, and negative stereotypes against the members of the community, leading people to show less hate and self-hatred because of better understanding, giving opportunities to teach tolerance, acceptance, and starting a conversation with friends and family.

Although the community has made some progress as shown in most western countries, some people are still against it, and the people who are part of the community still get discrimination and violence just for being themselves. Even some legal institutions do not acknowledge their basic human rights. The worst example is in 13 countries [Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Iran, etc.], being gay or bisexual is punishable by death (Byrnes 1). In this case, Indonesia is not the best, yet not the worst either. By far, Indonesia national law does not criminalize homosexuality. However, the law does not protect the community against discrimination and hate crime either, also different region has different ways of dealing with this topic.

The points mentioned before are the reasons why the researcher is interested to discuss this topic that is surrounding the LGBTQ+ community which is their representations and how they are represented in literary works. Furthermore, the topic that the researcher will take a look closely at is queer representation especially in terms of coming out and homophobia. The researcher also chooses the type of literary work in young adult novels, as its genre covers some stories that depict the various topics mentioned before as its major theme.

In choosing the objects, the researcher has read some young adult queer-themed novels that released in the last couple of decades and ended up choosing four, they are *The Dangerous Art Of Blending In* (2018) by Angelo Surmelis, *Brave Face* (2019) by

Shaun David Hutchinson, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli, and *Call Me By Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman.

The reasons why the researcher chooses these novels are because firstly, besides of course these are queer-themed novels that the main characters are queer and the main plot is focusing on them, the characters from each novel have different ways of discovering and showing their identities, also how they see it and the responses toward it. Secondly, the authors of these novels are also openly gay/queer or ally, even some of them are memoir and own voice, meaning these novels are based on their real-life experiences, which the representations in these novels are more likely to be accurate in real life. Thirdly, in similarity, each novel has the same topic around the term ‘coming out’ yet also shows different experiences and outcomes that the characters have to deal with, especially the issue of homophobia in the story. Therefore, these works are suitable for the topic discussion of this research.

Based on the background of the study, the researcher decides to analyze queer characters in the interest of seeing how the selected works represent queer identity especially in terms of coming out and homophobia. Therefore, the researcher formulates research questions as first, how are the ‘coming out’ processes of the queer characters presented in the selected novels? And second, how are the responses or attitudes toward the queer characters in terms of homophobia? This research has a purpose to find answers for the research questions, which according to the research questions, it is going to find out the representation of the queer characters by going through the coming out process in the selected novels and how are the responses of other characters toward the queer characters, their queerness, and the coming out itself in terms of homophobia.

B. RELATED LITERATURE

1. Young Adult

Young adult is a genre that is generally aimed at teenagers, adolescents aged between twelve-to-eighteen, or those who think they are too old to be children but too young to be adults. The central theme of most young adult fiction is “becoming an adult, finding the answer to the questions —who am I and what am I going to do about it?” (Nilsen and Donelson 4). The term of young adult as a genre in literature itself might be relatively new in Indonesia. But in other countries like the U.S., literary critics and educational practitioners have agreed on its definition. From the perspective of reading interest, Reid states that young adult literature as “books that adolescents would probably like and be able to relate to” (3). And although this genre is aimed at teenagers and adolescents, many older readers also read this kind of genre because of the variety within the genre as well as great messages that are put in the novels.

Bushman and Haas identify some common characteristics of YA Literature, its “conflicts are often consistent with the young adult’s experience, themes are often of interest to young people, protagonists and most characters are young adults, and the language parallels that of young people” (2). In terms of its content, YA Literature is broad and diverse in scope, as Aronson observes, “up for grabs for the modern YA

novel are matters of ethnicity and race, issues of faith and religion, markers of gender and sexuality, problems of home and society, choices of politics and belief, concerns about money and the future. In short, the YA genre now engages the most profound, deepest, and richest issues that we face as a nation“ (36). Moreover, Purves, Rogers, and Soter claim that the theme and subject matter of YA Literature match issues in adolescents‘ personal, social, intellectual, and cognitive development, saying that it is possible, through YA Literature, to connect them with contemporary issues, such as gender and sexual identity, coming out and homophobia (32).

In conclusion, it is fair to say that YA literature is an essential lens through which to examine cultural shifts as it is, in many ways, for society. Because YA books are geared toward up and coming generations, what is changing in YA reflects what is changing in our world — and the treatment of queer people is no exception. Which is suitable for the topic of this research.

2. Character and Characterization

According to Abrams, “Character is people who are appeared in narrative prose or novel and it is interpreted by the reader as a person who has a moral quality and certain tendency such as being expressed in what they say and what they do” (76). Characters in fiction can be divided into some categories, they are major and minor, flat and round, and/or static and dynamic.

The major character is sometimes called a protagonist whose conflict with an antagonist may spark the story. Supporting the major character is minor or secondary character whose function is partly to illuminate the major characters (DiYanni 55-56). Meaning that the major character is an important figure because they are being at the center of the story or theme, and minor characters or also known as secondary characters are the ones who surround the major character and have a function as supporting characters to the major character.

The minor characters are often static and unchanging that remain the same from the beginning to the end of the story. On the opposite, the major character is usually dynamic, exhibits change in attitude, purpose, behavior as the story progresses. Another category in which characters can be divided is flat and round. Flat characters or simple characters only have one or two personality traits and recognizable as stereotypes, while round characters have many more traits than just those associated with their general type. Because it takes time to develop round characters convincingly, they are more often found in longer works than in shorter ones. (Griffith 60-61).

According to Griffith as well, characterization is the author’s presentation and development of the traits of characters (60). This definition also in line with “a character is defined as a verbal representation of human being through action, speech, description, and documentary, authors portrayed characters that worth caring about, rooting for, or even love” (Eagleton 2). This concludes that characterization is the tool that could make the readers understand the character and the story.

Meanwhile, characterization is how the character is made up through the words of each character to define who they are (Gill 127). This definition lines with characterization according to Boggs and Petrie, a process in which the author created characters that influence people's responses (60). There are the classifications of characterization as follows:

1) Appearance

The first assessment in reading the characteristics of the character is through appearance. Boggs and Petrie stated that we make certain assumptions about them because of their facial features, dress, physical build, and mannerism. Our first visual impression may be proven erroneous as the story progress, but it is certainly an important means of establishing characters (60).

2) Action

How the characters act could shape their characteristics. Characterization through action is divided into two types. They are internal and external, while external action is pretty self-explanatory [can be seen visually], internal action needs more explanation. Internal action is an inner world of action that normally remains unseen and unheard by other characters. Inner action occurs within characters' minds and emotions, consists of secrets, unspoken thoughts, daydreams, aspirations, memories, fears and fantasies (60).

3) Dialogue

Characters use dialogue not only as a way to communicate but also as an expression about themselves by what they say and how they say it. Their true thoughts, attitudes, and emotion can be revealed in subtle ways through word choice of their speech and the use of grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, and particular dialect reveal about the characters' social and economic level, educational background, and mental processes (61).

4) Reaction

The way other characters react also serves as a tool in characterization. Meaning how they react to something that the character says or displays can be used to determine one's characteristics or personality (64). One's characteristics or personality also can be seen through the views of the others around them because of how others' thoughts or judgments of their actions.

Therefore, the selected queer characters in this study are analyzed based on their characterization through appearance, action, dialogue, and reaction of others to figure out their characteristics.

3. Queer Theory

The word 'queer' used to be a slang for homosexual and worse, used for homophobic abuse as an insult. In this day and age, the meaning of queer has changed by losing its negative connotation and refers to individuals that are attracted to the same sex and also to individuals whose sexuality and bodies do not conform with the traditional dominant norms [heterosexual, cisgender]. Therefore, queer explores the discrepancy between biological sex, gender identity, and sexuality against

heteronormativity. This term also can be seen as “an attempt to re-appropriate the word from what has been its homophobic usage” (Tyson 334) reclaim it to demonstrate that the one who should be allowed to define them — queer people — is themselves.

The history of queer theory itself is the result of a continuous process of the gay liberation movement and lesbian feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. From a theoretical framework, gay and lesbian imply a definable category ‘homosexuality’ that is clearly opposite to another definable category ‘heterosexuality’. However, for queer theory, categories of sexuality cannot be defined by simple opposition as homosexual/heterosexual. Queer theory expands its subject matters not only on “mismatches between sex, gender, and desire. The analytical framework not only associated with lesbian, gay and bisexual but also includes such topics as cross-dressing, inter-sexuality/hermaphroditism, gender ambiguity, and gender corrective surgery” (Jagose 3). Furthermore, queer theory provides a new way of thinking and understanding of sex, gender, and sexual identities as a site in becoming that do not match with the normative discourse of the previous gender studies, but actually “problematize the idea of fixed gender and sexual identities and challenges the basis for a unitary identity politics” (Beemyn-Eliason 5). Therefore, queer theory does not concern any particular identity but it is an umbrella term that refusing labels and rejecting stereotypes, embodied all those subjectivities that cross the boundaries established by the dominant norm or do not fit into the traditional concept of gender and sexuality, and debunking assumptions that identities are fixed and essential also gender and sexuality are binary.

In fact, queer theory defines “individual sexuality as a fluid, fragmented, dynamic collectivity of possibles sexuality” (Tyson 335), our sexuality may be different and changing during our lifetime because sexuality is a dynamic range of desire. As Butler says, identity is performative, which means that a person does at particular times determine identity, it is constantly moving among the possibility. she also argues that the link between sex, gender, and sexuality is a cultural and social construction. (Dobie 110). Another theorist that argues about the fluidity of identity is Sedgwick, she notes, the definition of one’s sexuality might be based on many numbers of paired opposites other than same-sex or different-sex object choice, such as “orgasmic/nonorgasmic, commercial/noncommercial, using bodies only/using manufactured object, in private/public, spontaneous/scripted” (57). This definition of one’s sexuality might be based on one’s preference for particular acts, sensations, or physical types.

Queer theory also lends a theoretical framework to observe these novels. As defined in *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, queer theory is “a radical rethinking of the relationship between subjectivity, sexuality and representation” within textual or societal discourse (Seldon 252). Deriving from gay theory and lesbian theory – which, respectively, focus on male and female homosociality – queer theory holds the binary of sexuality and gender under erasure and creates a multiplicity of identities. In a literary context,

queer theory focuses on eradicating the binary oppositions, whether linguistic or thematic and stereotypes of sexuality and gender within a body of text, aspiring to valorize sexual plurality and gender ambivalence of the characters and their world. The concepts that fuel queer theory become highly significant to the queer young adult genre because they give scholars a framework to analyze the novels and their methods of disbanding – and in some instances, simultaneously reinforcing – the harmful nature of heteronormative culture (Goldsmith 12-13).

Simply said that queer theory is showing that our ideas about sex, gender, and sexuality are socially constructed. It tries to give a new perspective about the misconceptions about our identity, that it is fixed, static, and unchanging. It can be categorized into normal and abnormal. And it is seen as binary, where queer theory sees the fluidity of identity. Moreover, queer theory is working to dismantle heteronormativity. It is all about breaking down these kinds of binaries, simplify the world being either this or that just because it seems easier, as in reality, it is more complex than that and instead of thinking in binary, queer theory suggests a new way of thinking in spectrum. And to give a better understanding, the researcher provides some basic definitions and explanations about certain terms such as sex, gender, and sexuality, also heteronormativity that are related to queer theory in the following.

Sex in this context refers to the “biological characteristics chosen to assign humans as male or female. It is determined by characteristics such as sexual and reproductive anatomy” (Queer Terminology 15). Kate Millett had drawn distinctions between sex and gender. Whereas sex is fixed and stable [even though in some cases intersex could happen]. She argues that gender is not, because it is determined by society and thereby subject to its changing convention and structures (Dobie 109).

According to Queer Terminology, gender is the social construction of concepts such as masculinity and femininity in a specific culture in time [this set of social psychological characteristics that society considers proper for male and female]. It involves gender assignment (the gender designation of someone at birth), gender roles (the expectations imposed on someone based on their gender), gender attribution (how others perceive someone’s gender), and gender identity (how someone defines their own gender) (6). The most acceptable gender in society is cisgender, which is one who’s “identifying with the same gender that one was assigned at birth. A gender identity that society considers to match the biological sex assigned at birth” (4).

Sexuality is basically a shorthand for everything that is related to sexual behavior such as sexual act, desire, arousal, the entire experience that seems sexual. According to Queer Terminology, sexual orientation refers to a person’s deep-seated feelings of sexual and romantic attraction. These attractions may be mostly towards people of the same gender (lesbian, gay), another gender (heterosexual), men and women (bisexual), or people of all genders (pansexual). Many people become aware of these feelings during adolescence or even earlier, while some do not realize or acknowledge their attractions (especially same-sex attractions) until much later in life. Many people

experience sexual orientation fluidly and feel attraction or degrees of attraction to different genders at different points in their lives. Sexual orientation is defined by feelings of attraction rather than behavior (15).

Heteronormative refers to social roles and social structures that reinforce the idea that heterosexuality is the presumed norm and is superior to other sexual orientations. A system of attitudes, bias, and discrimination in favor of opposite-sex sexuality and relationships. This includes the assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual and that heterosexuality is inherently superior to homosexuality or bisexuality (Queer Terminology 9). Similar to heterosexism which refers to institutional/organizational discrimination against homosexuality/non-heterosexuals or against behaviors not stereotypically heterosexual, and the privileging of heterosexuality that accompanies it (Tyson 320), meaning the acceptable identity are cisgender and heterosexual only, other than that is considered abnormal, odd, or deviant, etc. and it needs correction.

4. Coming Out

Coming out is a process that happens again and again, it is not just a one-time deal, and it does not follow a linear course. It occurs initially when one acknowledges oneself (a most important and difficult aspect of coming out) and to others that one is queer. One claims that orientation as their own and begins to be more or less public with it. Coming out to themselves is one of the hardest steps. It involves much soul searching and introspection and a good healthy sense of self-appreciation and acceptance.

One of the importance of coming out is that it is a necessary part of developing a healthy and positive identity as a queer individual. It is more honest and real, and it ends the stress of hiding or keeping a secret and living a double life. It reduces isolation and alienation and allows for increased support from other queer people. And also, it allows queer people to live a fuller life.

However, coming out is not always an easy process. Rejection and loss of relationships, especially family and friends who do not understand or approve. The real possibility of harassment and abuse from others, ranging from verbal insults to physical violence against them or their possessions. The real possibility of institutionalized discrimination and prejudice. For example, losing a job, not being hired for a career, being denied housing, and other equal opportunity rights.

The Cass' model of identity development can be used to look through the coming out process as it is a developmental process of recognizing, accepting, and ultimately affirming one's queer identity that encompasses six stages. This model can be used to understand one's own aspects of identity development, but cannot be generalized to every experience, it is not the same for everyone. Individuals can move through these stages of identity in different orders and may return to stages or skip stages through their lives. There may be additional steps of identity development, coming-of-age traditions, and/or more/less cultural significance are attached to certain identities. Socioeconomic status, religion/spirituality, age, abilities, race/ethnicity, and other factors also affect identity development and cohesion.

I) Identity Confusion

It is characterized by feelings of turmoil, in which one questions previously held assumptions about one's sexual orientation. Sees self as a member of the mainstream group. Denial of inner feelings. And the common task is usually asking questions of "Who am I?" and/or "Am I different?" and then accept, deny, or reject it.

Possible responses in this stage are to avoid information about queers; inhibit behavior; deny homosexuality ("experimenting," "an accident," "just drunk"). May keep emotional involvement separate from sexual contact; May have deep relationships that are non-sexual, though strongly emotional.

Possible needs in this stage are to explore internal positive and negative judgments. Will be permitted to be uncertain regarding sexual identity. May find support in knowing that sexual behavior occurs along a spectrum. May receive permission and encouragement to explore sexual identity as a normal experience (like career identity, and social identity).

II) Identity Comparison

It is characterized by feelings of alienation in which one accepts the possibility of being gay or lesbian and becomes isolated from others. Begin to come out of the "fog." And the common task is usually asking questions of "Maybe I am gay.", "I'm alone?", "What are gay people like?", and deal with social alienation.

Possible responses are to begin to grieve for losses and the things she or he will give up by embracing their sexual orientation. May compartmentalize their own sexuality. Accepts lesbian, gay definition of behavior but maintains "heterosexual" identity of self. Tells oneself, "It's only temporary"; "I'm just in love with this particular woman/man"; etc.

Possible needs are that it is very important that the person develops own definitions. Will need information about sexual identity, lesbian, gay community resources, encouragement to talk about the loss of heterosexual life expectations. May be permitted to keep some "heterosexual" identity (it is not an all or none issue).

III) Identity Tolerance

It is characterized by feelings of ambivalence in which one seeks out other gays and lesbians but maintains separate public and private images. Encounter someone or something that breaks through the denial system. Accept the possibility that "I may be gay", "Where are other gay people?". And the common task is usually to decrease social alienation by seeking out lesbians and gays.

Possible responses are beginning to have the language to talk and think about the issue. Recognition that being lesbian or gay does not preclude other options. Accentuates the difference between self and heterosexuals. Seeks out lesbian and gay culture (positive contact leads to a more positive sense of self, negative contact leads to devaluation of the culture, stops growth). May try out a variety of stereotypical roles.

Possible needs are to be supported in exploring own shame feelings derived from both internal and external heterosexism. Receive support in finding positive lesbian, gay community connections. It is particularly important for the person to know community resources.

IV) Identity Acceptance

It is characterized by selective disclosure in which one begins the legitimization (publicly as well as privately) of one's sexual orientation. Exploring subculture activities, readings, etc. Knowing that "I am gay.", "Am I okay?", "I can come out to some people.". And the common task is usually to deal with the inner tension of no longer subscribing to society's norm, attempt to bring congruence between the private and public view of self.

Possible responses are to accept gay or lesbian self-identification. May compartmentalize "gay life". Maintains less and less contact with the heterosexual community. Attempts to "fit in" and "not make waves" within the gay and lesbian community. Begins some selective disclosures of sexual identity. More social coming out; more comfortable being seen with groups of men or women that are identified as "gay". More realistic evaluation of the situation.

Possible needs are to continue exploring grief and loss of heterosexual life expectations. Continue exploring internalized "homophobia". Find support in making decisions about where, when, and to whom he or she self-discloses.

V) Identity Pride

it is characterized by anger, pride, and activism in which one becomes immersed in the gay subculture and rejects non-gay people, institutions, and values. Feel arrogance/pride in the new identity and deep rage toward majority culture. May adopt/heighten stereotypical behaviors or characteristics "I'm different and proud of it!". May isolate self from mainstream values and activities. "I am proud to be gay. I don't (and won't) pass for straight.". And the common task is usually to deal with incongruent views of heterosexuals.

Possible responses are to splits the world into "gay" (good) and "straight" (bad). Experiences disclosure crises with heterosexuals, as he or she is less willing to blend in. Identifies gay culture as a sole source of support; all gay friends, business connections, social connections.

Possible needs are to receive support for exploring anger issues. Find support for exploring issues of heterosexism. Develop skills for coping with reactions and responses to disclosure of sexual identity. Resist being defensive.

VI) Identity Synthesis

It is characterized by clarity and acceptance in which one moves beyond the dichotomized worldview to incorporation of one's sexual orientation as one aspect of a more integrated identity. Acceptance and integration of new identity. May go through five stages of grief to let go of old identity and all advantages of heterosexual privilege. Internalize pride/positive feelings about identity. Typically is "out" (with friends, family, at work). More at peace with self. "I am an okay person who happens to be gay.". And the common task is usually is to integrate gay and lesbian identity so that instead of being the identity, it is an aspect of self.

Possible responses are to continues to be angry at heterosexism, but with decreased intensity. Allows trust of others to increase and build. Gay and lesbian identity is

integrated with all aspects of "self." Feels all right to move out into the community and not simply define space according to sexual orientation.

Possible needs are to allow the trust of others to increase and build. Gay and lesbian identity is integrated with all aspects of "self." Feels all right to move out into the community and not simply define space according to sexual orientation.

5. Homophobia

Homophobia is the fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behavior. There are many levels and forms of homophobia, including cultural/institutional homophobia, interpersonal homophobia, and internalized homophobia (Queer Terminology 9). Many forms of homophobia are related to how restrictive binary gender roles are. Many of the problems faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, including health and income disparities, stem from homophobia and heterosexism. These terms of heterosexism and homophobia are interchangeable, "the difference between them apparently being one of degree: homophobia suggests the most virulent anti-gay sentiment, and the other the least virulent" (Tyson 321).

C. RESEARCH METHOD

1. Research Design

According to Verlag, qualitative research, above all, works with text. It is a method for collecting information, observation, which is transformed into text by transcription. Methods of interpretations start from the text. Very briefly, the qualitative research process can be represented as a path from theory to text and another way around (4). Therefore, it is suitable for this research because it uses text/narrative in form of literary works of the selected young adult novels, and it attempts to interpret the text using a certain theory, and in this case, is the queer theory.

In addition, to add some more understandings of this research, the researcher includes the queer approach, which According to Dilley has three tenets, they are 1) examination of lives and experiences of those considered non-heterosexual; 2) juxtaposition of those lives/experiences with lives/experiences considered "normal"; 3) examination of how/why those lives and experiences are considered outside of the norm (462). Also, it is suitable for this research because, by point number one, it uses the narrative of the selected novels as its data and analyze its narrative to seek out the queer experiences by the non-hetero/queer characters in the novels and the process carried out in this study by exploring the issues of identity of queer characters in the data of representations, analyzing it and inductively interpreting the meaning of the obtained data.

2. Data and Source of Data

The main sources for this research are the four young adult novels, they are *The Dangerous Art Of Blending In* (2018) by Angelo Surmelis, and *Brave Face* (2019) by Shaun David Hutchinson, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky

Albertalli, and *Call Me By Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman. These novels are analyzed textually from the criteria such as all sorts of narration including appearances, dialogues, action, and reaction surrounding the process of coming out from each of the queer characters and the responses or attitudes toward the queer characters, their queerness, and the coming out itself.

3. Data Collection

The researcher uses several steps to collect data that needed to be analyzed. The first step is to read all the selected novels to get the general idea of the story. The second step is to re-read the selected novels to find all sorts of narration including appearances, dialogues, actions, and reactions that show the coming out process and the issue of homophobia. The third step is to observe the obtained data and use the theoretical framework to describe, interpret, and support the analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The researcher describes the queer representations such as: 1) the portrayal of the coming out process using the Cass' model of identity development from each of the main queer characters in the selected novels; and 2) the responses/attitudes from other characters toward the queer characters, their queerness, and the coming out itself. To analyze the novels, the data is sorted only to those that represent the two points above. Then, the data is analyzed using the theories in the discussion which have been explained in the review of related literature. And lastly, to draw the conclusions based on the findings.

5. Research Instrument

According to Wilkinson and Birmingham, a research instrument is a simple device for obtaining information relevant to the researcher's project (3). The instrument of this study is the researcher himself whose role was to obtain information that is relevant to his work. The researcher collects and analyzes the data directly from the selected novel *The Dangerous Art Of Blending In* (2018) by Angelo Surmelis; and *Brave Face* (2019) by Shaun David Hutchinson, *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* (2015) by Becky Albertalli, and *Call Me By Your Name* (2007) by André Aciman.

D. DISCUSSION

Looking back from the two previous studies that say for the majority of the works published from the 1980s and early 2000s that have queer representation, the main character or protagonist would often be a heterosexual or cisgender. And the characters who identify as LGBTQ+ would only be a side character or no more than a supporting character. For this reason, it can be said that this is a way to provide an easier point of view to the story for straight readers, as well as "reflect the growing awareness of the universal presence, as known for the heteronormativity as the default". But as known,

this kind of works usually gives inaccurate representations or wrong and even bad images for the LGBTQ+ community.

And that is the reason why the selected works in this research have the queer character as the main character or the protagonist to tell their own stories. This also could serve as a link between the reader and the story, using it as an interpreter as well as to connect with LGBTQ+ readers and positively represent the queer community to heterosexual and cisgender readers from the perspectives or point of views of the queer characters.

As more works have queer characters as the main characters, the topics of the stories are now more relevant than ever and relatable or directly related to them and the queer readers. As stated, the two topics that are selected in this research are coming out and homophobia, because these topics are often closely associated with queer characters. The main reason for this is because for the majority of cultural and environmental values are often based on the heteronormativity, and it could be very challenging for queer characters to grow and learn about their identity and even more to accept it and have to come out and dealing with homophobia. And the main discussion of these two topics will be explained more down below.

Coming out is a process that happens, again and again, it is not just a one-time deal, and it does not follow a linear course. It occurs initially when one acknowledges oneself (a most important and difficult aspect of coming out) and to others that one is queer. One claims that orientation as their own and begins to be more or less public with it. Coming out to oneself is one of the hardest steps. It involves much soul searching and introspection and a good healthy sense of self-appreciation and acceptance.

One of the importance of coming out is that it is a necessary part of developing a healthy and positive identity as a queer individual. It is more honest and real, and it ends the stress of hiding or keeping a secret and living a double life. It reduces isolation and alienation and allows for increased support from other queer people. And also, it allows queer people to live a fuller life.

However, coming out is not always an easy process. Rejection and loss of relationships, especially family and friends who do not understand or approve. The real possibility of harassment and abuse from others, ranging from verbal insults to physical violence against them or their possessions. The real possibility of institutionalized discrimination and prejudice. For example, losing a job, not being hired for a career, and other equal opportunity rights.

The Cass' model of identity development is used in this research to look through the coming out process as it is a developmental process of recognizing, accepting, and ultimately affirming one's queer identity that encompasses six stages. This model can be used to understand one's own aspects of identity development, but cannot be generalized to every experience, it is not the same for everyone. Individuals can move through these stages of identity in different orders and may return to stages or skip stages through their lives. There may be additional steps of identity development, coming-of-age traditions, and/or more/less cultural significance are attached to certain identities.

Socioeconomic status, religion/spirituality, age, abilities, race/ethnicity, and other factors also affect identity development and cohesion.

But based on the findings, the researcher finds some novelty connected between the coming out process by the Cass' model and the experience of the main characters from the selected novels. Firstly, it is true that ones do not have to go through all of the six stages, but there are some stages that ones must go through, such as identity acceptance and identity synthesis. Whereas the others stages, such as identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, and identity pride, are skippable stages. More detailed explanations are right down below.

The first a Must-Go-Through-Stage is Identity Acceptance. It is because based on the findings, each of the main characters from the selected works experiences this stage. It is also because this stage implies, as its name, the beginning of acceptance of their queer identity, which is the main goal of the coming out process. And the second one is Identity Synthesis. It is also because based on the findings, each of the main characters from the selected works experiences this stage. And also because it is the final stage and the ultimate goal of the coming out process, where ones are having clarity and acceptance in which one moves beyond the dichotomized worldview to the incorporation of one's sexual orientation as one aspect of a more integrated identity. And having Internalize pride/positive feelings about identity.

Oppositely, the rest of the stages are skippable. Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Pride. It is because based on the findings, these stages do not apply to some characters. And the main reason for this is linked to the issue of homophobia that is existed during the process of coming out of each main character from the selected novels. In a simple way said that the more is found and the stronger homophobia affecting the characters, it is more likely that they have to go through and experience these stages. On the flip side, these stages are skippable if the homophobia is found less.

Go back to the issue of homophobia, by definition it is any kind of fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behaviors. Which is shown in the findings, there have been found some types of homophobia, such as cultural/institutional homophobia, interpersonal homophobia, and internalized homophobia. Each has its own characteristics and each character deals with it differently.

The first one is Cultural/Institutional Homophobia, which is shown in the findings from the novel *The Dangerous Art of Blending In*, a religious institution, a Church, which Elio and his family always go to, show hatred, aversion, and discrimination to Evan when he asks for help about the abuse he experiences at home and the pastor justify it by bringing up about his feelings toward Henry, his boy crush, which is against his religion, and his cultural value, the Greek Orthodox.

The Second one is Interpersonal Homophobia, which is the most common, and easiest to notice, as it is also any kind of fear or hatred of, aversion to, and discrimination against homosexuals or homosexual behaviors, but it comes from person

to person. Which is shown in the findings still from the same novel, *The Dangerous Art of Blending In*, from Evan's Mother and Tommy (Evan's school acquaintance). One of the reasons for the hatred is related to restrictive binary gender roles. The examples for this are when Evan is harassed with homophobic language from his mom for being perceived to be feminine, such as having long hair and not into any sports. Another example is when the hatred comes from negative stereotypes. When Jeremy is straight-up assuming Mr. Q, one of the school teachers, is gay, because he is an art teacher, not married in his thirties, and always dresses nice.

The third one is Internalized Homophobia, which is shown in the findings from the novel *Brave Face*, Shaun is experiencing shame, guilt, and self-hatred in reaction to his feelings of sexual attraction for a person of the same sex. This happens because of the negative prejudices and stereotypes of queer people that he grows up with. This is also causing him even harder to accept his queer identity more than the other ones because the homophobia comes from himself.

And the last one is not about Homophobia, but quite the opposite. As shown in the findings above, from both novels, *Simon vs. The Homo Sapien Agenda* and *Call Me By Your Name*, there are almost no homophobia is found. And this is causing the characters, Simon and Elio go through the coming out process easier, compared to the other characters in the selected novels.

For that matter, this brings up the relation between the coming out process and homophobia are very closely associated. They are affecting and having an impact on each other. Evidently, it can be said that homophobia is the cause for: 1) the queer characters to render difficulties to accept and love themselves, especially in terms of identity and sexuality/sexual orientation; 2) the queer characters to fear of showing themselves to the world, sometimes even fear for their lives, that they are not feeling accepted and not feeling safe because of their identity and/or sexuality/sexual orientation; 3) the queer characters to think that they do not deserve love or happiness because they are often not considered normal or good. And specifically, for the ones who struggle with internalized homophobia.

Internalized homophobia refers to people who are homophobic while also experiencing same-sex attraction themselves. Sometimes, people may have negative attitudes and beliefs about those who experience same-sex attraction, and then turn the negative beliefs on themselves rather than come to terms with their own desires. This may mean that they feel discomfort and disapproval with their own same-sex attractions, never accept their same-sex attractions, or never identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. People who are dealing with internalized homophobia may feel the need to "prove" that they are straight, exhibit very stereotypical behavior of straight men and/or women, or even bully and discriminate against openly gay people. It is shown that they actually never really hate their queerness, they hate how society had made negative stereotypes and prejudice about queer people, and they hate how society treated them for being one.

Aside from that, homophobia also can take many different forms, including negative attitudes and beliefs about, aversion to, or prejudice against queer people. It is

shown that it is often based on irrational fear and misunderstanding. Some people's homophobia may be rooted in conservative religious beliefs. And people may hold homophobic beliefs if they are taught by their parents and families. And it is shown and proved that homophobia is taught.

Accordingly, it is fair to say that coming out can be a lesson that accepting who they are is way more powerful than trying to be accepted by everyone, that is why coming out to oneself first is more important, and it is a process that every queer person has to experience and go through as they work to accept their identity and sexual orientation and they can share that identity openly with other people if they are comfortable enough. Coming out is a very brave thing to do, and it is extremely personal and different for everyone. The emotions when coming out may range from scared and anxious to elated and relieved. As shown in the findings, when Evan comes out to Henry for the first time, he feels anxious. When Shaun comes out for the first time to Madelyn, he is scared. When Simon comes out for the first time, he is angry. But later, when they come out to their parents, they are elated and relieved. And all of those different emotions are caused by many aspects but it is related to homophobia in some way.

Also, there is no one right way to come out. It can make the queer person feel better to be open and honest their about sexual orientation than to hide it, but there are many factors to consider before coming out as well. Coming out to oneself first is probably the most important. This happens as ones recognize their sexual orientation and begin to accept it. Next, ones might choose to tell the family, friends, and people in the community—sometimes right away, and sometimes later. The person might decide to be open with some people in their life, but not with others. Choosing to come out depends on the situation. The coming-out process can be freeing and can bring a queer person get closer to the people they love. But it can also be stressful or even risky. Ones may feel safer not coming out in certain situations. Ones do not have to be out everywhere, all the time. The person can decide what is best for them. It is also shown and proved that coming out can have benefits and risks. If ones are wondering whether to come out, there is a lot to consider. For instance, does coming out mean risking and losing emotional or financial support from the family, could coming out put ones in danger, or will the family try to give pressure into being someone they are not. All of those could lead that ones may want to wait until they are in a different situation or have more support. And based on the findings as well, it is shown that every character goes through different processes and paths as they are dealing with different issues in their lives and ways on how to deal with it might differ from one another but in the end, it seeks the same goal that is acceptance.

Continuing again to the Cass' model of identity development which contains a six-stage model that describes the developmental process individuals go through as they consider and then acquire a homosexual identity. It is shown in the coming out processes from each novel in the findings above, not every character goes through all of the six stages that are from the Cass' model. Each character does not move through the

coming out process at the same speed, as the process is very personal and it happens in different ways. For instance, Shaun may go through all of the six stages as he was the one who struggle most with homophobia, not only external but also internal. And for Evan, he skips the identity tolerance stage, it is because he is already being certain about his queer identity. He does not spend more time to find information or to reassure or convince himself about his queerness, and goes straight to the next stage which is identity acceptance. The same goes for Simon, and Elio, both skip the first two stages because, they are already sure about their queer identity as well and accept it. Another reason why a person can skip some stages is also related and affected by the issue of homophobia that can be seen from the responses from others. And as it is already shown in the findings above, that the fewer of negative responses or homophobia that are found within the environment of the queer person grow up in, the easier for that queer person to complete the final stage. The same goes for the positive responses, the more positive responses or attitudes are found, the easier it is for the queer characters to accept their queer identity.

Hence, it is objective to say that the queer representation in each novel is complex and has multiple layers surrounding them. Each shows different characterizations and personalities. And each has different problems or issues that they have to face and deal with, besides figuring out their identity and coming out. Also, it can happen in so many different ways before they come to terms with everything. But in similarities, it is shown that how homophobia can badly influence and harm a queer person and disturb their coming out processes, and all four works are showing how difficult it is to come out in a heteronormative or homophobic environment as a queer person. It also gives many perspectives on why homophobia and heteronormativity could affect the process of coming out and inhibit the queer people to come to terms with themselves, but with the right approach and support, every queer youth will find everything in place eventually. It also can be said that from the previous studies, the queer representations have evolved in terms of complexity and variety of the character and characterization such as being the main character or the protagonist in the story that they are represented in and debunking the stereotypes of a queer person is only in certain ways.

E. CONCLUSION

The queer representations in literary works especially in young adult novels have come a long way since its beginnings. It has evolved in terms of complexity and variety of the character and characterization, background, and story-wise. And by doing so, these works not only brings up important issues and positive message, but it is also debunking the stereotypes of how a queer person is only in certain ways.

Its representation in the selected works in terms of coming out is giving result that the main character from each novel has to go through some or all stages of Cass' model of identity development to fully understand and accept their queer identity. Although, each character has the same goal that is to come out of the closet, each of them also

deals with different struggles and issues that come with it. This also relates to the issue of homophobia that can be seen from the responses from other characters. The responses that are shown in the selected works have both positive and negative. The positive responses show acceptance friendly and safe environment for the queer character that help to lead them to the final stage of the coming out process. And on the opposite, the negative responses are all from of homophobia that lead the queer character to render difficulties to comes to terms with their queer identities.

And by using the Cass' model of identity development to examine the process of coming out of the main characters. It is found that there are a-must-go-through stages and a-skippable stages. The must go through ones are identity acceptance and identity synthesis. The skippable ones are identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, and identity pride.

It is also found that there are three types of homophobia in the selected works. There are cultural/institutional homophobia, interpersonal homophobia, and internalized homophobia. And all of these are shown directly affecting the process of coming out of the main characters in some ways.

While the works show depictions of queer youths questioning, exploring, and learning about their sexualities. It is not only showing positive depictions of queer lives, but also the struggles that might come during the process of coming out, and coming out could and always most likely be done in different ways based on the environment, the culture, and the people they surrounded with when they grow up.

Another important aspect that makes these works are good representations is the value and message added in the works. Such as characters that thrived on homophobia, self-love, and acceptance, being able to stand up and speak up for oneself, stay true to being oneself. By doing so, these works also arguably could inspire many readers to learn and educate themselves on the issue, as well as other authors to take up the task of writing positive representations of LGBTQ+ lives. Each of the titles included in this thesis – *The Dangerous Art of Blending In*, *Brave Face*, *Simon vs the Homo Sapien Agenda* and *Call Me By Your Name* – each shows the evolution in queer representation in the young adult genre. Besides the other criticisms it got, these works are significant in contributing to the essentials of queer representations and its continuation and growth in literature/literary works.

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