

## Bisexual Identity in a Religious Environment in Christina Lauren's *Autoboyography*

### (Identitas Biseksual di Lingkungan Religius pada Novel *Autoboyography* Karya Christina Lauren)

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#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini berfokus pada analisis representasi dari identitas subjek biseksual dalam novel *Autoboyography* karya Christina Lauren. Dalam bentuk penelitian kualitatif, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap wacana biseksualitas yang dikonstruksi dari tindakan dan perilaku karakter lain terhadap karakter utama laki-laki dengan menggunakan teori representasi Stuart Hall, yang berfokus khusus pada pendekatan diskursif Michel Foucault. Tujuan lain yang terdapat dalam penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui posisi kritis dari Christina Lauren sebagai penulis novel terhadap isu biseksualitas. Temuannya mengungkapkan bahwa penulis menciptakan karakter-karakter yang menentang dan mendukung biseksualitas, sehingga hal tersebut dapat menyoroti isu biseksualitas yang terjadi pada abad ke-21. Penulis novel, melalui narasinya, menyoroti tantangan yang dihadapi oleh subjek laki-laki yang hidup sebagai individu biseksual di dalam lingkungan agama yang konservatif. Dengan demikian, Christina Lauren tidak hanya menunjukkan beberapa isu sosial seputar biseksualitas tetapi mereka juga menggambarkan beberapa perjuangan dari karakter utama dalam menerima status biseksual di lingkungan yang dipengaruhi oleh keyakinan agama.

**Kata kunci:** identitas biseksual, lingkungan religius, pendekatan diskursif, teori representasi

#### Abstract

This study focuses on analyzing the representation of bisexual identity in Christina Lauren's novel "Autoboyography." Through qualitative research, the aim is to reveal the discourse of bisexuality constructed by the acts and behaviors of other characters toward the male main characters using Stuart Hall's theory of representation, with a particular focus on Michel Foucault's discursive approach. Another objective of this study is to examine the critical position of Christina Lauren as the novel's author towards the issue of bisexuality. The findings



reveal that the author created characters who both oppose and support bisexuality, thereby highlighting the issue of bisexuality in the 21st century. Through their narrative, the author sheds light on the challenges faced by male individuals living as bisexuals in a religiously conservative environment. By doing so, Christina Lauren not only addresses social issues surrounding bisexuality but also illustrates the main character's struggles in accepting a bisexual identity in an environment influenced by religious beliefs.

**Keywords:** bisexual identity, discursive approach, religious environment, representation theory

## INTRODUCTION

The word *bi* in the term bisexual means 'two.' This means that people with this sexual orientation have an attraction to two genders, both the same and different. The term *bisexual* can also refer to a male who is sexually or psychologically drawn to both men and women, and vice versa for women who are drawn to both men and women in the same way. Bisexual views gender is only divided into two types or binary, namely men and women. However, there are some who also think that bisexuals are people who like both genders, including non-binary genders. The issue of bisexual invisibility and the issue of defining a bisexual orientation are both made worse by the social perception that bisexuality is not a real orientation for either men or women. In the United States, social rifts can be fuelled by the categorization of people based on their sexual orientation. For instance, when heterosexuals and even other sexual minorities are asked to characterize bisexuality, they tend to describe it only in terms of sexual conduct, whereas bisexuals define their own sexuality in terms of both actions and the effect of it (Swan & Habibi 2019, 40).

Hafeez, et al. (2017) analyzed there is about 3.5% of people identified themselves as bisexual, lesbian, or gay in America. However, there are still some locations in the United States that are still known as conservative states and one of them is Provo, Utah. Provo is a city in Utah. Its location is about 43 miles south of Salt Lake City, along the Wasatch Front. It is positioned halfway between the towns of Orem and Springville. Brigham Young University (BYU), which is run by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), is located there. Also, it is sometimes called the Mormon or LDS Church. Moreover, nearly 90% of the population is believed to be LDS, and many people are either current or former BYU students. Therefore, they have influenced the culture of the city. Mormons do not drink alcohol, so they tend to avoid bars and places to go out drinking, even though a large portion of the county is mountainous and popular with outdoor enthusiasts who like happy hour (Sachs 2019). Take part in activities that are considered as contrary to religious teachings will be seen as something improper and one of those activities is having the non-heterosexual relationship. In this case, having a bisexual identity is also included. Moreover, since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, non-heterosexual relationships have been strongly discouraged by many conservative religions. In the perspective of the LDS Church, their theology of a "true family," as desired by God, serves as the foundation for their opposition to same-sex marriage.

In addition, acknowledging the long-running struggle for equal human rights for the LGBT communities, along with congressional efforts to legislate them, the issue of discrimination against the LGBT community has been fought for a long time, but it was not until 2015 that the lesbian women, gay men, bisexuals, and transgender individuals have the freedom to marry and start families in the United States. This also has an impact on the bisexual community where many artists or writers have included bisexual topics in their works and one of them is *Autoboyography* by Christina Lauren (2017). Furthermore, the novel is relatable to those who

share the same sexuality as the main character since this book is considered an appeal to individuality, not an attack on the faith they hold. The readers feel that what is in the main character is a representation of the bisexual community in today's society where many people are struggling with their sexual identity with their beliefs (Simon and Schuster 2020).

This novel tells the story of Tanner Scott as a bisexual and Jewish high school student. His family moved out from California to Utah three years prior, a state known for its ultra-conservative religious sects. Tanner keeps his sexuality secret from his friends and neighbors to avoid scrutiny and the worry of not being accepted among them, but his parents are always supportive of him. His family is so concerned about him being bisexual that their home sometimes makes efforts to make him proud of who he is since Tanner's mother was raised in a Mormon environment and was forced to leave her family after her parents disapproved of her lesbian sister, who is now happily married to another woman. With only one semester remaining, Tanner's primary goal is to graduate as quickly as possible and get out of Utah so he can resume his normal life without fear of being discovered (Lauren 2017).

The author of the novel consist of two people, namely Christina Hobbs who lives in Salt Lake City and Lauren Billings who lives in Orange County, California (Beck 2019). The author came from different states where there are cultural diversity from each places; however, they share the same culture and involved the same cultural background to establish the discourse in the novel which is bisexual identity discourse. Furthermore, the story of the novel represents discourse through the main character. In addition, it is assumed that the novel constructs the struggle of the main character who is bisexual in a religious environment. This research purpose is to discover the struggle of the main character living as a bisexual in a religious environment, along with the critical or ideological position of the author. This topic is relevant in today's society. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the main character's bisexual identity in a religious environment that appears in the novel *Autoboyography* using the theory of representation by Stuart Hall.

## **METHOD**

The qualitative method is used since it focuses on the descriptive text that is purposed at analyzing data and information as detail as possible. The data are collected in the form of sentences, dialogues, and quotations taken from *Autoboyography*. The analysis is constructed from primary and secondary data. The primary data are taken from a novel by Christina Lauren entitled *Autoboyography* and in the form of sentences, dialogues, and quotations related to bisexuality. Meanwhile, the secondary data are taken from some sources, such as journals, theses, books, and articles, as well as from internet sources. Primary and secondary data are collected by doing a close reading.

The analysis of the current study starts with the activity of classifying the data which is found in the primary data by selecting and categorizing the sentences, dialogues, and quotations from the novel that depict the theme of bisexual identity in a religious environment as the main topic of this study, with a particular focus on the main character, Tanner Scott. The primary data are supported by the secondary data. The next step is analyzing the selected data using Stuart Hall's theory of representation with a focus on Foucault's discursive approach. According to Hall's encoding and decoding theory (Hall 2003), each message or meaning is actually a collection of unedited social occurrences that include an ideology. Hall argued that the representation involves both the construction of meaning through language and the analysis of that meaning using discourse (Hall 1997, 42–44). Discourse is related to power, in the sense that when

discourse is the truth, it will affect subjects in society whereas in literary works the subject of society is imaginative. In this case, the subject is the main character in the novel. Besides, Foucault examined that power could exist in a variety of contexts, such as family relationships, institutions, administrations, or power dynamics between dominant and dominated classes (Foucault 1988, 38). He also analyzed the mechanisms and strategies of power and how it occurs in people's lives (Foucault 1978, 94). Therefore, the discursive approach is chosen to answer the two research questions in this study, specifically by analyzing the narrative events of the characters. As a result, the bisexuality discourse can be revealed, including how the character who identify as bisexual are perceived by those who support heterosexuality. Thus, the discourse on bisexuality and the impact of that discourse as the main character will be revealed, as well as responses to other characters.

Next, the discourse in the novel will be linked to the discourse in American society, especially the state of Utah around 2017 regarding bisexuality. In addition, the author came from different states where there are cultural diversity from each places but they share the same culture as well as involved in the same cultural background. Moreover, since most of Utah's population is Mormon, the author, Christina Lauren, had the courage to come out with something different where the main character is bisexual. After relating discourse from text and context, as well as analyzing some information about the character related to the issue of sexuality, Lauren's critical position in viewing the problem of bisexuality will be found in this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. The Representation of Bisexual Identity in *Autoboyography*

#### 1.1 Exposing Bisexual Identity Discourse

In *Autoboyography*, plenty of bisexual identity discourse are constructed since the early chapter of the novel. The main character, Tanner Scott, realized that he is bisexual when he was thirteen years old. He moved from Palo Alto, California to Provo, Utah when he was fifteen years old and the fact that he moved to Provo, Utah, a Mormon town, made him very cautious about his sexuality. He understood that revealing his sexuality will make him in trouble. In addition, when Tanner was asked to make an outline for a book, it is stated in the novel that Tanner thinks about sentences that he will not dare show to someone, that is "A half-Jewish, half-nothing queer kid moves to an LDS-infested town. He can't wait to leave" (Lauren 2017, 46–47). It can be seen that Tanner intended to tell himself in the book he is going to write because he could not bring that up in person even to his best friend. A bisexual man is often assumed that he is not masculine and continues to be stigmatized as being indecisive, ambivalent, and promiscuous. This is also can be seen in the sentences below where there is an inner conflict inside Tanner's mind about being bisexual.

There's the devil on one shoulder, the ignorant perception that I get from all sides, both inside and outside the queer community, who say bisexuality is really about *indecision*, that it's impossible for bisexuals to be satisfied with one person and the label is a way to not commit. And then there's the angel on the other shoulder—who the queer-positive books and pamphlets encourage me to believe—saying that no, what it means is I'm open to falling in love with anyone. I'm happy to commit, but the specific parts don't matter as much as the person (Lauren 2017, 20).

The sentences above indicate how Tanner thinks about being bisexual and it really is depicted in today's society. In addition, some bisexual men believed that disclosing their sexual

orientation would cause general changes in how they are perceived and treated by others. Lauren (2017, 137) wrote,

“Why wouldn’t you just be with a girl, then?” he asks quietly. “If you were attracted to them? Wouldn’t it be so much easier?”

“That’s not something you get to choose.”

From the quoted text before, it can be seen that Sebastian does not want Tanner to face the barriers in society because of his sexual identity. However, Tanner could not do anything about it since it was not something he could choose as he likes. Nonetheless, there is often disagreement between how bisexual people understand their own identity and how that identity is understood by others. This can be one of the factors that makes people with bisexual identity confused about their own identity and tend to choose not to come out to those around them.

Moreover, according to Weinberg, Williams, & Pryor (1994, 188), it makes sense that bisexual people manage the stigma of being bisexual by disguising themselves as heterosexual because they do not want to take the risk of revealing their sexual identity and suffer the consequences. In addition, it will be easy to show their heterosexual side to the people around them because they are more entangled in the heterosexual environment. However, at some point, Tanner does not disguise himself as heterosexual since he is showing his sexual identity to his best friend, as shown in the data below.

“But you made out with Jen Riley sophomore year. I *saw* you,” she says. “And what about Jessa, Kailley, and Trin? You’ve had sex. With girls.”

“I also made out with *you*,” I remind her. She flushes, and I point to my chest. “Bi.” (Lauren 2007, 238).

According to Synder (2022), the bisexuality in men does exist. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, heterosexual women continue to be concerned about bisexual men. Many people considered not to date a man who admits that he also has an attraction the other men. Barker (2016) in the *Biscuit Magazine* reported that people frequently assume that bisexuality is unusual since few people come out as bisexual. Some of the stigmatization anticipated or experienced by bisexuals because of their identity is the strongest reason for not disclosing it to those closest to them, especially when they live in an area with a religious or cultural background that prioritizes heterosexuality. Someone who openly identifies as bisexual will be judged differently by the surrounding community compared to someone who does not identify as bisexual. In other words, people who do not identify as bisexual will not experience the same social stigma as those who openly identify as bisexual. They believe disclosing their sexual identity will contribute to a reaction of rejection in society.

## **1.2 Othering the Bisexual Characters**

According to Jones (2021), there are the latest data in 2020 regarding LGBT self-identification towards American adults, namely 5.6%. This is estimated to be up from 4.5% and 4.1% based on previous data in 2017 and 2016. Jones also believes that the majority of LGBT people in America identify themselves as bisexual, which is 11.7% of half of LGBT adults (54.6%). Therefore, 3.1% of Americans identify themselves as bisexual among all American adult population. However, despite the fact that the number of Americans who identify as bisexual is growing, the stigma still remains. Whereas same-sex relationships are widely accepted in society and gay marriage was declared lawful by the US Supreme Court in 2015, the Mormon religion is one of the various conservative religious movements that uphold theological objection to

such relationships. The Utah-based Mormon church faced criticism in 2008 after taking the lead in the campaign to pass California's Proposition 8 constitutional amendment prohibiting gay marriage. Eventually, religious leaders tried to adopt a more sympathetic stance toward LGBTQ issues. That was stopped in 2015 when the church introduced regulations prohibiting baptism for children of LGBT parents until they are 18 years old. In order to inform members that attraction to persons of the same sex is neither a sin nor a reflection of their loyalty, church leaders updated a website established in October 2012. However, the church also cautioned members that engaging in gay relations goes against the core since it is an unchanging doctrine (The Guardian 2017).

Nonetheless, in the novel, it is mentioned that Provo, Utah is still considered as a conservative country where same-sex marriage is an uncommon thing. This means that homosexuality, as well as bisexuality is a minority in that country. Hence, power relations are created. In addition, the use of power involves more than just relationships between individuals or groups. Even though it is engraved in a field of spare accessible possibilities supported by a permanent structure, power only exists as it is wielded by some on others and only when it is put into action. As a result, power is not dependent on permission (Foucault 2002, 340). It is known that power occurred between two parties and each party has its own objectivity. Thus, a dominant party will take every necessary action to pursue the opposition party. Therefore, in this case, heterosexuality has more power than bisexuality.

The religious background of Provo as a Mormon town constructed within the novel is the main problem of Tanner's struggle and the reason why he anticipated the negative reactions to disclosure his sexual identity to his friends at school. Even though Provo High is not a religious school, sometimes Tanner feels that way since it is located in Utah. In this case, any actions related to other than heterosexuality, for instance, bisexuality, will be acknowledged as an inappropriate act. The strictness of the Mormon was shown when Lauren (2017, 101) wrote, "Well, for argument's sake, let's assume he is and your feelings are reciprocated. You know the church thinks it's okay to have same-sex attraction but you aren't allowed to act on it?" It can be seen that Tanner's mother knew about the rules of the LDS Church and she tried to tell Tanner that whatever he did is wrong since he has a feeling towards a Mormon male that lives in Mormon town. More of the strictness of the Mormon is depicted when Tanner exposed his feeling towards Sebastian where the act is prohibited and he said, "And I know your church doesn't allow that kind of feeling." He waits, so still, like he's holding his breath. "It doesn't allow for guys to have feelings like this . . . for other guys" (Lauren 2017, 136).

Bisexual people are considered as irresponsible individuals since they often involved in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships (Garellick et al. 2017). Hence, *Autoboyography* constructed the power relation through the majority group which is heterosexuals and the minority group which is bisexuals. The author depicted biphobia act from Sebastian's parents by saying, "That's not what I'm saying. I want you. But I hate to think that your parents would ever look at us and think we are something to be fixed" (Lauren 2017, 263). From the quoted narration above, it shows the general stereotype from the people who against bisexuality. They think that bisexual is some kind of illness that need to be cured. As a member of LDS Church, Sebastian's parents definitely know that being bisexual or homosexual does not reflect the adherence of the church or the religion rules. As a consequence, they did not talk to Sebastian for a week when he brought the topic regarding bisexuality.

There is a stigma attached to the identity of the non-heterosexual community. It cannot be denied that the people of the United States still believe that people with bisexual identities are people who deviate from religion. In this case, Sebastian's parents are aware of it. They know that LDS hold an idea that heaven will be a home paradise where families will coexist in perfect peace for all of eternity. That is based on a divine heterosexual archetype which is a Mormon theology. Therefore, they are strongly opposing bisexuality.

Another biphobia act was shown when Lauren (2017, 233) wrote, ““Get off me, faggot!” he yells, noticing how much attention they're getting now.” Even though the word *faggot* was referred to someone else, Tanner who was there witnessed the fight and was stunned when he heard that word.

I turn away, acting like I'm just going to squint across the horizon at the beautiful mountains in the distance, but when I catch a glimpse of Auddy, she looks like she wants to rip Eli's balls off with her bare hands. I can't really blame her—I'm horrified to realize that people still talk like that . . . anywhere (Lauren 2017, 233).

The dialogue above shows that Eli depicted the act of biphobia. This means that Lauren also realizes that in society, not everyone can accept and appreciate the differences that the other people have. In this case, the superiority of heterosexual people over bisexual people is greatly influenced by the surrounding environment that creates power relations.

The discomfort and restlessness experienced by Tanner made him always think of negative things. The existence of power relations that caused bisexuality to become a minority in that town, made Tanner feel pressure from the majority group. He also mentioned several times that he wanted to get out of Provo since he could not feel free and always feel anxious wherever he is, especially when he is in school. Tanner could not experience the freedom of being bisexual in the town he lives in. In addition, it is mentioned in the novel that he decided to enroll at the University of California, Los Angeles. This proves that he still has the option to maintain his sexual orientation by moving out of Utah because he knows that there are other places that can accept him as a bisexual. Tanner's choice to leave Utah is a strategy as a bisexual subject living in a heterosexual society since he could not do anything if he stayed in that town. Therefore, he decided to find another place where bisexuality was considered normal and all bisexual subjects could get their rights. Furthermore, Lauren's decision to create characters who against bisexuality in the novel is also one of the proofs that the narrative events described above actually occur in American society.

### **1.3 Accepting the Bisexual Characters**

#### **1.3.1 The Main Character's Family**

For the majority of teenagers, constructing their sexual identity is a continuous process that frequently begins before puberty. LGBT teenagers, including bisexuals, should eventually determine whether to disclose their identity to others and with whom to do so (Mills-Koonce et al. 2018). Bisexual stigma manifests as binegativity, which is bias and discrimination against bisexual people, and monosexism, which denies bisexuality in favor of monosexual orientations. Nonetheless, Tanner still talks to his mother regarding his sexuality. The fact that his mother is the first person in his family he talked to about his orientation means that he believes his mother even though organized religion is not something that is held in high respect in his family as Lauren (2017, 23) wrote, “Organized religion isn't something that's regarded too fondly in our house.” Moreover, when Tanner's mother knows about his sexuality, he is told that he should be careful to who he comes out to since not all people will accept his identity as bisexual.

The novel also constructed how Tanner's mother behaved at home when Tanner told her about his sexuality. LGBTQ related items such as essays, Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) pamphlets, as well as rainbow T-shirts were given to Tanner with a proud expression.

Mom will slide the occasional bumper sticker into my pillowcase, to be found when the sharp corner meets my cheek at night. NOTHING WOULD BE THE SAME IF YOU DID NOT EXIST! COURAGE IS BEING YOURSELF EVERY DAY IN A WORLD THAT TELLS YOU TO BE SOMEONE ELSE. LOVE KNOWS NO LIMITS. NORMAL IS JUST A DIAL ON THE WASHING MACHINE! (Lauren 2017, 26)

Additionally, parents have the authority to defend their children, including the bisexual children, from a variety of dangers. A child who is bisexual and has supportive parents experience less depression and risky behavior. Another example that can be seen in this novel of how Tanner's mother supports him is when Lauren (2017, 99) wrote, "Not really, but I know everyone does it, so I'm willing to pick my battles. About your sexuality? Absolutely. You never have to worry about that with your dad and me, okay?" In the quotation before, Tanner's mother convinced him that he should not be afraid of him being bisexual and her acts made Tanner realized that he is endlessly lucky to have parents who accepted him. Besides, Lauren (2017, 239) also wrote the scene, "Her eyes widen at the way the word slips so easily from my mouth, and I forgot not everyone lives in a household where parent sleeps in a MY QUEER KID RULES nightgown." This act may be depicted as something that not all parents do when their son or daughter discloses his or her sexuality.

Moreover, Lauren (2017:282) created another similar scene by writing, "I take a moment to appreciate that she's wearing a nightgown that says LIFE GOES BY TOO QUICKLY, with rainbow-colored words highlighting the LGBTQ acronym." This shows a similar act that was performed by Tanner when he talked to his father regarding Sebastian. It can be seen that Tanner's parents accepted his sexual identity as bisexual because religion is not the main thing in his family. This also relates to where they lived before they moved to Utah, namely in California. Even though teenagers may have been ready when they came out to their parents, the revelation itself sometimes surprise parents. Some children may worry about being rejected because they are aware of their parents' beliefs toward LGBT individuals, or they might worry about how unpredictable it will be for them to deal with a significant life event that is beyond their control. However, in the novel, Tanner experienced warmth and acceptance when he disclosed his gender identity to his parents.

### 1.3.2 The Main Character's Friends

School is one of the areas where heterosexist culture is nurtured. The media, academics, medicine, government, and religion are a few examples of other fields. Although it is not a separate part of society, the school both reflects and maintains society's broader norms and beliefs. In addition, during the years when they spend most of their time in school, young people develop their sexual identities (Kangasvuo 2003, 211). Since Tanner attends to high school in Provo, it means that he meets a lot of Mormon students because 90 percent of people who live there are LDS. So, many of them are not used to bisexual people. Therefore, people with bisexual identity like Tanner will afraid and choose not to reveal their identities to friends in school.

This is how we reveal ourselves: these tiny flashes of discomfort, the reactions we can't hide. In some ways, it's why it's so terrifying to live here and have my sexuality



safely known only behind my front door. Outside, I could give myself away by a twitch of my lips at the word “faggot,” by staring at someone too long, by letting a guy friend hug me and doing it wrong (Lauren 2017, 109).

From the sentences above, it can be seen that for bisexual student like Tanner, a school can be an unsafe place. Moreover, when students feel insecure or unwelcome at school, they may decide to avoid the specific places or activities where they feel most uncomfortable, or they may decide that they have to skip school entirely. According to the 2017 National School Climate Survey regarding the experiences of LGBTQ students, 59.5% or more than half of LGBTQ students are reported that they feel unsafe at school because of their sexual orientation.

In contrast, the novel depicted the attitude of Tanner’s close friend, Autumn, who supports him as part of the LGBT community. Even though it is not revealed in the early chapters, it can be seen when Tanner has revealed his identity as bisexual and Autumn is not against that. Instead, she helped out in activities related to the LGBT community. Lauren (2017, 237–238) wrote, “I know that Autumn is pro-gay rights—she adores Emily and Shivani, she rails about the LDS policy about queer members, and she helped put up flyers for the Provo High Gay-Straight Alliance party last spring.” It is stated in the novel that Autumn only felt unhappy, and she is not against her best friend being bisexual by saying “If I look anything other than fine with this, please understand I’m only upset that you didn’t tell me sooner” (Lauren 2017, 238). Another conversation which proves that Autumn is not against bisexuality is when she said, ““When you told me you were bi—and God, this makes me such a terrible person, but since there are literally no more secrets between us, I need to get it out. Okay?”” (Lauren 2017, 311).

Aside from Autumn, Manny is another friend of Tanner from school that find out about Tanner’s condition.

It’s great that he’s supportive, I guess, but it still irks me that I’ll probably spend most of my life dividing the people I know into two groups: the people who support me without question and the ones who should. I’m glad Manny ended up on the right side, but I can’t let myself dive into the rabbit hole of wondering *how* he knew (Lauren 2017, 241).

Based on the sentences above, it shows that although some of Tanner’s friends support him, he still cannot feel secure since he is hesitant between being relieved that it is noticeable to at least one person and that is still not a significant problem and being concerned that it will become too obvious to more people to the point it will become a major issue.

It can be seen that Tanner’s friends did not against bisexuality because they think that being bisexual is not wrong and inappropriate. Even though they live in Utah, they also still have the choice to support and accept bisexuality. In addition, it can be seen that Tanner’s best friend, Autumn, supports his sexual identity because they are close friends. Therefore, Autumn knows that bisexuality is not different from the other people in general.

## **2. The Critical Position of the Author**

Christina Hobbs and Lauren Billings met online in 2009. They were writing fan fiction and also reading each other’s stories. When they met in person in July, they clicked and decided to start writing a story together in August. Therefore, it can be said that it was a collaboration from the start (Beck 2019). Lauren grew up in the bay area with a very supportive family, while Christine worked with a lot of kids in the junior high who had less supportive situations. In their interview with Rainbow Crate (2020), they said that *Autoboyography* is the book of their hearts. Moreover, Lauren said that the story of *Autoboyography* is a sort of love letter to those

kids who did not have the situation she had. Since they went to Utah and did a lot of research regarding the environment, lifestyle, as well as the religion, *Autoboyography* became the most carefully outlined book that they have ever done.

In the novel, it can be seen that Christina Lauren wrote a male protagonist instead of female protagonist. This is because when Christina was working in the junior high, the most people who came to her office were boys. Therefore, many males appeared in the novel. Christina Lauren went through the whole process of living in that town, as well as went to visit the high school. Not only that, but there is also one of their good friends who had gone to Brigham Young University (BYU), which is a private university in Provo, and was kicked out because he told his bishop that he kissed a boy. His story became one of the reasons how the novel came to exist.

Moreover, in *Autoboyography*, the author builds the characteristics of the main character as well as the other characters based on their understanding and perspective towards the society of the town they lived in. They portray the main character named Tanner as a bisexual male who moved out from California to Utah and never revealed his sexual orientation, except from his family and his best friend. This supports the idea that Christina and Lauren are very aware and understand how difficult it is for someone other than heterosexual to live in that city. Therefore, they wrote a main character who depicts as someone lives in the real condition of Utah, especially in Provo. Besides Tanner, the author also wrote some characters who support bisexuality, such as Autumn which is Tanner's best friend, and Tanner's family. However, there are also some characters who are against bisexuality, such as Eli and Sebastian's parents since they are members of the LDS Church.

In addition, in an interview with Rainbow Crate (2020), Christina stated that she lives in Utah, and she is not a Mormon. However, some of her family is Mormon. While she was working in junior high, there were a lot of kids who would come to her office whether they knew that they were gay or were questioning it. To those kids, it felt so real that their parents would rather have a dead child rather than a gay child. Therefore, those kids find a safe space in Christina. She also stated that whenever some kids came to her office just to tell her about their orientation, she told those kids that it is not their fault. Instead, it is how other people see their life unfolding, that is why people have to change the way they see things.

As someone who grew up in Utah, Christina argued that even though the Church does some good things, as well as bring people a lot of comfort and a lot of joy, there are lots of things that she did not agree with the Church. This can be one of the reasons why the author created a character like Sebastian's parents. In the novel, Sebastian's parents made their son feel terrible concerning his sexuality since they believed to their soul as a member of the LDS Church that if their son chooses that way, then it will be against the church's rules so they would not be with him.

Furthermore, in Rainbow Crate (2020) interview, Lauren argued that it is very hard for her to believe that people actually adhere to a religion since she grew up without any influence from a church or any sort of religious structure. When they wrote the character Sebastian, they wrote it with empathy because in the novel, Sebastian is described as a person who grows up and believes in a religion. Moreover, the fact that he and his parents are members of the church, his feelings about his sexual orientation can become a worry for him and he starts to judge his life since he feels that bisexual or homosexual people are terrible people. Lauren added that she

and Christina do not want to malign one side of this story since people are raised in the context that they are raised and this is the framework of their life.

Thus, based on the characters behavior as well as the narratives events within the novel, along with the condition in Utah which supports heterosexuality, it can be summed up that Christina Lauren supported the bisexuality. Even though they live in different areas, especially Christina who lives in Utah as the main place of the novel, they share the same view that everyone can be themselves. Besides that, they also try to convey the message to their readers that in society, there must be some parties who disagree and against bisexuality. However, there will be people who care about them regardless of what sexual orientation they have.

## CONCLUSION

The main issue Tanner encounters and the reason he anticipated negative reactions to revealing his sexual orientation to his schoolmates is the religious background of Provo as a Mormon town. Tanner's uneasiness and restlessness caused him to always dwell on the negative. Additionally, he mentions several times that he wants to leave Provo since he could never feel at ease and was constantly anxious, especially when he is attending the school. Therefore, the majority group, which is heterosexual, and the minority group, which is bisexual, depicts the power relations within the novel. *Autoboyography* is also constructed the biphobia act through the other characters, such as Tanner's friend from school named Eli and Sebastian's parents. Tanner is seen as the other in this situation because of the power relations that established by the LDS Church who supports heterosexuality. Therefore, the author's choice to include a character who experiences biphobia is a representation that what the main character goes through is happening in society.

Moreover, it was found that in the early chapter of the novel, Tanner hides his identity to his best friend since he was afraid of the stigma concerning bisexual individuals. The main reason of someone against exposing their identity to people closest to them is the stigmatization that bisexuals fear or face as a result of it, particularly if they live in a town where heterosexuality is valued above all else due to cultural or religious reasons. In addition, Tanner was welcomed and accepted by his parents when he revealed his gender identity. Although Tanner's mother worry about his identity, his parents still support him by giving him some items related to LGBT. Moreover, despite the fact that some of Tanner's friends are on his side, he still does not feel comfortable because he is wary of being revealed and because he does not want to cause any major problem.

In addition, it is concluded that the author develops the characteristics of the characters in the novel based on their perceptions and comprehension of the society of the town they lived in. Therefore, they supported bisexuality. They also aim to tell their readers through the novel that there must be people in society who disagree with and are opposed to bisexuality. Nevertheless, there will be people who care about them regardless of their sexual orientation.

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