

**CAMERON'S SEXUAL IDENTITY FORMATION IN *THE
MISEDUCATION OF CAMERON POST* NOVEL BY EMILY
DANFORTH**

THESIS



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2021

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Surabaya, October 27th, 2021

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(Devan Tangguh Patmagara)

means attraction to the same sex, while Bisexual means attraction to both sexes (2011, p. 13). Some of the forms of sexual orientation mentioned above are what is referred to as sexual identity.

Knowing that there are many sexual identities other than heterosexual, it requires guidelines that regulate humans to stay on the path of truth following religious teachings in regulating human sexual roles. This norm is called Heteronormative. Heteronormative can be seen as a reflection of the teachings of Islam. As Allah SWT said in the Qur'an, "You lust after men instead of women! You are certainly transgressors." (Q.S. al-'Araf: 81). Heteronormative beliefs about gender assume that male gender identity and sexual attraction to women are a natural and inevitable gender package (Nagoshi, 2014, p. 4). It is heteronormative following Islamic teachings that humans are created in pairs between men and women. Michel Foucault also said that ideas related to the truth of sex are based on a coherent identity with gender norms in society. (Butler, 1999, p. 23). Heteronormativity exists to protect humans from homosexuals and bisexuals or other sexual identities that are considered to deviate from religious teachings. It causes people with sexual identities such as homosexuals and bisexuals to be difficult to accept by society. Healey (2014, p. 43) state that people who reject homosexuals are generally referred to as homophobes. The term homophobia refers to individual and social prejudices against people who do not conform to heterosexual identity and behavior or do not conform to heteronormative behavior. Healey emphasized that being homophobic is wrong because it denies human rights to homosexuals. Detiknews (2019) reported that a

Semarang police officer was fired due to his deviant sexual orientation. The police officer is suspected to be a homosexual. The police officer felt discriminated against because he was fired on the grounds of his sexual orientation. The case example above proves that the rights of homosexuals have never been considered equal to the majority of heterosexuals.

The rejection of homosexuals is caused by a lack of understanding by the public regarding the definition of homosexual itself. The knowledge gap on this issue makes people view homosexuals negatively. Hence, they then assume that this phenomenon is a bad thing. This rejection makes homosexuals more and more uncomfortable with their situation and blames themselves for their situation. Their efforts to show who they are, are being hampered by feeling inferior. In their growth to become a homosexual, there are several stages of self-identity formation. According to Cass, a psychological theorist, identity formation in homosexuals goes through six phases (1984, p. 147). This phase of identity growth will show how far a person can accept themselves as a homosexual, with all the influences and pressures from their environment. According to Balthazart (2012, p. 159) adolescents more often suffer psychologically in recognizing their identity as homosexuals. The growth of sexual identity in a homosexual is significant to study to know the condition of homosexuals so that we can treat them well.

All problems in the world can be reflected in literary work and issues regarding sexual identity in society. It is because literary works also contain life values. Literature can be a medium in conveying one's

feelings. Writing in a literary work involves extraordinary experience, thoughts, and emotion (Bennett & Royle, 2004, p. 35). Literary works can be used as a medium to symbolize and replicate themselves (Bennett & Royle, 2004, p. 12). Literary works can produce a strong identification between readers and characters or between readers and writers (Bennett & Royle, 2004 p. 19). Therefore, literary works can examine various issues from the author's point of view according to the theme raised. One of the themes that can be present in a literary work is the issue of homosexuality. Of course, many writers raise the issue of homosexuality in their literary works, such as *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily Danforth (2012), *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982), *City of Night* by John Rechy (1963), *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg (1993), and more. This study uses the novel *The Miseducation of Cameron* by Emily Danforth as the main object of study. It was because the main character in the novel shows the formation of a homosexual identity.

This study applies a queer study focusing on describing the stages of homosexual identity development and the factors that influence homosexual identity. According to Tyson (2006, p. 322) queer theory is based on deconstructive insights and is relevant to the issue of heterosexual identity and issues of gay and lesbian sexual identity. Queer theory also explains that an individual's sexual identity is flexible and can change at any time because sexuality is a dynamic range of desires (p. 335). Therefore, Queer theory will be very suitable to be used in this study

because this study aims to discuss changes and development of the main character's sexual identity. This study also uses new criticism theory as a supporting theory to describe Cameron Post as the main character. At the same time, the theory of Homosexual Identity formation by Vivienne C. Cass is used to find the growth phase of Cameron Post's sexual identity in Emily Danforth's novel *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. It is because this novel was written by Emily M Danforth, who is a lesbian. In her book, she raises the issue of homosexuality about the growth of a girl's sexual identity.

This study focused on the main character, Cameron Post. The novel talks about Cameron Post's daily life as a teenager who will enter a stage in finding her sexual identity in life. The story begins when twelve-year-old Cameron loses both her parents and lives her life as an orphan. In life, Cameron meets with various new people who shape her sexual identity.

In this study, the researcher has found several previous studies related to the current study. Later, previous studies were used as a reference and guide for obtaining research updates. Several previous studies used novels with the same title as the current research object. Previous studies include Barbara, Wendy, & Elizabeth (2017), Robert (2014), Putri (2021), and Nanda (2017). None of the above studies addresses the formation of a Homosexual identity. Therefore, this study explores the phases of sexual identity development in homosexual

2.1.1 Character and Characterization

Character is an almost inseparable element in a literary work. The character has an important role in the course of a story in a literary work. The story in a literary work always has a conflict to run, and conflict is formed from various perspectives and ideologies of each conflicting character. According to (Bennett & Royle, 2004, p. 60) characters are the object of our curiosity. Characters in literary works often reflect human nature and behavior in general through sympathy and antipathy so that they become part of humanity itself. Because the character reflects humans, the characters in literature also have different personalities like humans in general. Giving nature to a character in a literary work is called characterization.

Characterizations can start from physical depictions to the way characters think and act. According to Baldick (2001, p. 37) characterizations can be done in two ways, namely directly and indirectly. The direct way is by describing through the narrator in the story. At the same time, the indirect way is the depiction of characters through the actions of characters, speech, or physical appearance, which is then concluded by the readers themselves. Therefore, characterization is an inseparable element from the character itself.

2.2 Queer Theory

The term queer will always refer to oddities and things that are not straight. This anomaly is related to gender issues and deviant sexual orientation in a person. Hendri Yulius (Vasava Shakti, 2016) argues that queer was initially widely known for the first time in America as an object of ridicule. Homophobia

2.3.3 Bisexual

Bisexuality is a sexual orientation in sexual attraction to the opposite sex or the same sex (Healey, 2013, p. 44). Bisexuals are also considered deviant because they still have same-sex attraction. As with homosexuals, a bisexual will also be difficult to accept in society. It is because it is still not following religious teachings and heteronormative norms. However, in this study, no bisexual character was found and the research will focus on homosexuality.

2.4 Cass's Model Homosexual Identity Formation

According to Cass, the image of sexual identity in a person can change. The image of a person's sexual identity is heterosexual. However, that image can change to something else like homosexual or bisexual. In its changes, homosexuals often show a stage of transition from heterosexual to homosexual (1984, p. 145). This stage of change is called homosexual identity formation. Cass divides this stage into six stages of development. The phases are Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride, and Identity Synthesis. These six phases will occur sequentially to form a perfect homosexual identity if it ends in the sixth phase.

2.4.1 Identity Confusion

The first phase felt by homosexuals is the phase of confusion. In this phase, a person is faced with where their sexual orientation is going. This confusion is caused by thoughts, feelings, and actions that represent homosexuals

2.4.4 Identity Acceptance

The fourth phase is called the identity acceptance phase. At this stage, a person begins to accept himself as a homosexual. Interaction with the homosexual community in the previous stage became a medium for learning about the subculture of being a homosexual to create a positive view of the sexual orientation. In this phase, homosexuals can adjust to society by pretending to be heterosexual but still living a homosexual lifestyle in their community. This strategy is used to avoid negative reactions from the surrounding community regarding their homosexuality. The stage will be influenced by how far the perpetrator can accept negative ideas about being a homosexual (Cass, 1984, p. 151-152).

2.4.5 Identity Pride

The fifth phase is called the identity pride phase. In this phase, homosexuals reached a phase where they are proud of their identity as a homosexual and their community. This phase often results in conflicts over the issue of rights to homosexuality among the community. Homosexual perpetrators at this stage begin to blame the bad stigma of society and demand the validity of homosexual equality with heterosexuals. Identity development then becomes dichotomous in this phase. Homosexual perpetrators no longer hide their sexual identity. The developments at a later stage will be influenced by the perpetrator's acceptance of the confrontation's negative reaction. Homosexual who can overcome the dissonance that ensues will proceed to the final phase (Cass, 1984, p. 152).

2.4.6 Identity Synthesis

The last phase in developing sexual orientation identity as a homosexual is called the Identity Synthesis phase. This phase is the most peaceful in the acceptance of identity as a homosexual. Apart from the conflicts that arise in the fifth phase, homosexuals begin to accept and have positive contact with non-homosexuals. It is because the view of self-image by oneself and the view of society has been synthesized into a unified identity that unites private and public aspects, thus creating a stable and peaceful atmosphere (Cass, 1984, p. 152-153).

2.5 Previous Study

The Previous study is used as a reference and guide for the current study to find research updates related to the research object and the same research field. Therefore, the researcher has found four previous studies with the same research object, namely the novel *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily Danforth.

The first previous study was written by Sindiya Mutiara Putri, a Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta student. Her study is entitled *The Lesbianism Reflected in The Miseducation of Cameron Post Novel (2012): A Feminist Approach (2021)*. This study analyzes various aspects of lesbianism and the issues in the novel *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* with a feminist approach. This study found three aspects of lesbianism, namely biological, environmental, and psychological aspects. Then the researcher also set out the issue of preventing the existence of homosexuals. The last finding is the supporting elements of homosexual issues in the novel, such as themes, characters, settings, and plots.

The second previous study is an article written by Barbara Pini, Wendy Keys & Elizabeth Marshal. This study is entitled *Queering rurality: reading The Miseducation of Cameron Post geographically* (2017). This study explores the geographical aspect of writing the novel *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by reading the text geographically. This study found three geographic themes. The first is the well-documented heterosexism of rural life. The second theme is that rustic spaces can be quite whimsical. The third theme found is non-existence.

The third previous study is research conducted by Nanda Vidyastria, a State University of Surabaya student. This study is entitled *Homosexual Identity in Alex Sanchez's Rainbow Trilogy* (2017). This study aims to describe the stages of development of homosexual identity in the three main characters of the Rainbow trilogy using the Cass model, the factors that influence the development of homosexual identity using D'Augelli theory, and the form of violence against homosexuals experienced by the main character using D'Augelli and Rivers theory. As a result, this study found that the three novels describe the development of homosexual identity in Jason and Kyle, including identity confusion, identity comparison, identity acceptance, identity tolerance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. In Nelson, the identifiable stages include only the identity synthesis stage. This study also reveals how the factors of personal subjectivity and action, interactive intimacy, and historical, social connections are related to each other and influence the development of the homosexual identity of the main character. In addition, this study shows various forms of victimization that occur to Jason, Kyle, and Nelson in the form of physical and verbal violence.

The fourth previous study is a journal written by Robert Bittner with the title *Hey, I Still Can't See Myself!: The Difficult Positioning of Two-Spirit Identities in YA Literature* (2014). This study explores the difficulty of depicting characters with two souls in textual form in two novels, *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* by Emily Danforth and *The Dreamer's Legacy* by Celu Amberstone. The study result found that the depiction of characters with two souls apart from gay and lesbian identities was only found in the novel *The Miseducation of Cameron Post*. Danforth presents a character named Adam as a character with two souls.

From the four previous studies above, few of them use the same research object as the *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* novel. However, none of the four previous studies discussed identity sexual identity formation in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* novel. Judging from the importance of this issue, the researcher decided to analyze *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* novel with the Homosexual model formation theory by Vivienne C. Cass to produce research updates.

personality analysis shows indications of gender identity deviation in her. When viewed from her nature, Cameron has traits that lead to Masculine gender characteristics, such as independence, aggression, strength, and competitiveness. A girl is usually described as having more feminine traits from a heteronormative point of view, such as sensitivity and passivity because of cultural expectations (Healey, 2014, p. 15). Despite being a girl, Cameron shows a more dominant masculine trait than showing a more feminine self. It is also evidenced by the words of one of her male friends, Jamie "Sometimes when I hang out with you, you're like more guy than I am." (Danforth, 2012, p. 104). In the end, gender deviation can lead to the onset of sexual orientation deviation as well. According to Isnaini (2018) the tendency regarding a person's sexual orientation depends on their sexual behavior, emotional connection or physical attraction to one or both sexes. It evidenced by a quote that shows Cameron's attraction to the same sex in an emotional form, "...the more I fell in love with Coley Taylor." (Danforth, 2012, p. 92). If this were the case, a teenage girl like Cameron would find herself in a sexual identity confusion and turn her into a homosexual.

3.2 Cameron's Homosexual Factors

This study finds several factors that cause Cameron's homosexuality in *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* novel. Some factors include homosexual friendship, the absence of parents, and the homosexual society. These factors will be discussed in this sub-chapter.

3.2.1 The Absence of Parents

The next factor that causes Cameron's homosexuality is the absence of parents. Every growing child will always learn from the experiences around them. The experience they get and the simplest is to see their parents. All parents act as role models for every child. According to Nurhayati and Rosaria (2017), parents are tasked with maintaining, teaching, and understanding appropriate behavior in the surrounding social norms. Their role is important for forming a child's identity, one of which is gender identity and sexual orientation. It is why the role of parents is very important. The researcher found a problem in the role of Cameron's parents so that it became a contributing factor to Cameron's homosexuality. "...after my parents' car crashed through a guard rail on the skinny road that climbed the ravine over Quake Lake." (Danforth, 2012, p. 17). The quotation explains that both of Cameron's parents died in an accident en route to the camp at Quake Lake. The death of Cameron's parents became the most influential moment in Cameron's life, especially in the formation of her identity formation. Cameron was said to be twelve years old when her parents died. "She was twelve," I said. "Just like us." (Danforth, 2012, p.12). The existence of parents is needed at Cameron's golden age. The absence of Cameron's parents meant the absence of a role model for Cameron as well. Cameron does not have a role model and experience of affection from someone she cares about. This situation forced Cameron to look for alternatives in seeking affection in other ways. One of them is the affection of a childhood friend Irene who is described as

And I just couldn't help myself. "What does Miles City have to do with anything?" I asked the floor. "There are too many unhealthy influences here," he answered. (Danforth, 2012, p. 173)

As explained by Pastor Crawford, that the society around Cameron is an unhealthy society "...I think we can agree that Miles City isn't the best place for you right now, spiritually or otherwise..." (Danforth, 2012, p. 173). It is one of the factors that cause Cameron to have unhealthy friendships as well, "...There are too many unhealthy influences here," he answered." (Danforth, 2012, p. 173). As a result, Cameron became a person with a distorted sexual identity.

One of the things that make the society around Cameron unhealthy is that there are so many people with same-sex attractions. The first is Irene Klauson, who is Cameron's childhood friend. "This is how things usually went with Irene and me. It was best friends or sworn enemies with no filler in between. (Danforth, 2012, p. 3). Cameron has been friends since childhood. With a girl who has a same-sex attraction, "Irene had dared me to kiss her." (Danforth, 2012, p. 4). Second, Cameron met a childhood friend of her mother named Margot. "The big thing that happened while Ruth was away was that my mom's friend Margot Keenan paid us a visit." (Danforth, 2012, p. 35). Margot is described as an adult who also has same-sex attraction. "She seemed like she was done, but then she added, "I loved your mom since I met her." (Danforth, 2012, p. 39). Cameron's meeting with Margot, an adult who is considered the same, seems to make Cameron more comfortable accepting that being a homosexual is not wrong. The third is Lindsey, a friend of Cameron's swimming team. She was the one who introduced Cameron to live as a homosexual. The fourth is Mona Harris, who is

Cameron's senior lifeguard "...I asked the senior guards to watch my attempts and offer advice. One of them, Mona Harris—a college sophomore with a gymnast's build and a huge mouth..." (Danforth, 2012, p. 132). Mona Harris is also described as a homosexual girl. "Mona went on, flinging a scoop, trying for nonchalance. "You probably already heard that I dated a girl for a while this year..." (Danforth, 2012, p. 140). The last one is Coley, who is Cameron's schoolmate. "I had biology with her fall semester of freshman year, and Coley didn't huddle at the back table with the other FFAs, though they had saved her a seat." (Danforth, 2012, p. 86). Coley is not a Lesbian girl but a victim of Cameron's Lesbian influence. Even though as a victim, Coley's existence is a factor that makes Cameron a complete homosexual. Coley eventually also became a homosexual because of Cameron.

The society around Cameron is declared an unhealthy society. It is a result of the many homosexual women who exist and are in a relationship with Cameron. This kind of society then affects the friendships in Cameron's life and then becomes a trigger for unhealthy relationships that make Cameron a homosexual.

The causes of Cameron's homosexuality have been described in several sub-chapters above. That Cameron's homosexual development was triggered by several factors such as friendship, the presence of parents, and society. Cameron received treatment from the wrong environment due to lack of parental affection and unhealthy friendships with other homosexual girls. She fell into a deviant sexual orientation and became homosexual. After knowing the factors that cause

(Danforth, 2012, p. 6). Sexual contact with Irene creates identity confusion in Cameron.

“Yeah,” I said right away, because even though no one had ever told me, specifically, not to kiss a girl before, nobody had to. It was guys and girls who kissed—in our grade, on TV, in the movies, in the world; and that’s how it worked: guys and girls. Anything else was something weird. (Danforth, 2012, p. 6)

The quotation shows the first stage of Cameron's identity confusion. Cameron, who had just kissed her best friend Irene, felt that what she had done was wrong. It is contrary to the hetero culture that surrounds her. In addition, Cameron felt physical symptoms after kissing Irene, "It was all action and reaction, the way her lips were salty and she tasted like root beer. “The way I felt sort of dizzy the whole time." (Danforth, 2012, p. 6). Cameron's reaction showed confusion about her sexual identity that she felt dizzy after kissing Irene. However, Cameron did not take long to accept the potential for homosexuality in her. It is caused by one of the biological factors, that Cameron has shown homosexual symptoms since she was nine years old. “But after that kiss, as we leaned against the crates, a yellow jacket swooping and arcing over some spilled pop, Irene kissed me again. And I hadn’t dared her to do it, but I was glad that she did.” (Danforth, 2012 p. 6). The quotation shows that Cameron accepted the sexual treatment by saying that she was happy Irene kissed her back. According to Cass, in identity confusion, the perpetrator will be faced with choosing to accept their new sexual identity or ignore it. If the perpetrator accepts their new sexual identity, they will enter the next stage (Cass, 1984, p. 150).

She played the role of the server and stayed, with Grandma, in the kitchen and breakfast nook during the bulk of the pre-prom meal, entering the dining room only to refill our wine glasses with sparkling grape juice and snap photos of us eating our frites. But she was sort of sweet about the whole thing and obviously genuinely happy to have the four of us there, me behaving like her vision of a typical teenage girl. (Danforth, 2012, p. 101)

The quotation above shows that Cameron acts like a normal girl in front of Ruth's aunt and keeps her homosexual identity a secret. Cameron tried to comply with Coley's request to go to prom night with Jamie, albeit with a heavy heart. "Jamie will go with you if you ask him, even if he doesn't really want to." "Coley, I don't really want to." (Danforth, 2012, p. 96). Although uncomfortable with this, Cameron still tries to act normal and accepts Coley's invitation to go out with Jamie.

In addition to seeking information through homosexual genre movies, Cameron is also accidentally meeting a lesbian girl. This girl is Lindsey, Cameron's swim teammate. "That summer Lindsey Lloyd and I traded off for high point in the Intermediate Girls Division at each of the Eastern Montana Federation swim meets." (Danforth, 2012, p. 57). Her meeting with Lindsey is coincidental, and Cameron doesn't even know that Lindsey is also a Lesbian. "Don't be mad at me," she said, her voice quiet and much less Lindsey than usual. "It's Gay Pride." (Danforth, 2012, p. 60). Lindsey's presence is a determining factor for Cameron to enter the next stage. With Lindsey, Cameron can easily learn about the life of being a homosexual.

3.4.5 Cameron's Identity Pride

After going through the identity acceptance stage, Cameron has the potential to be able to proceed to the Pride identity stage. In this stage, homosexuals will think that their identity is not something wrong and should be isolated. It makes some homosexual communities open their mouths to the issue of the alienation of their people. It shows that homosexuals at this stage are so proud of their sexual identity that they want to defend the truth and social equality and the rights of their people in society. Homosexuals at this stage often cause conflict in the community (Cass, 1984, p. 152). It is due to the magnitude of the feud between homosexuals and existing heteronormative. In this stage, the possibility of returning to a heterosexual identity is very slight because the perpetrators have believed that the path they chose was right and worth fighting for.

Cameron is told that her family discovered her homosexual identity. Cameron's family, who could not accept this fact, then sent Cameron to a rehabilitation center for homosexuals, namely God's Promise "Ruth would drive me to the God's Promise Christian Discipleship Program the following Friday." (Danforth, 2012, p. 174). In God's Promise, Cameron is found with various heteronormative treatments that confront her with a conflict about her homosexual identity. The researcher illustrates God's Promise as a form of heteronormative itself. "We help teens come to Christ, or in some cases come back to Christ, and develop the kind of relationship with him that you all are working on." (Danforth,

