

THE ANALYSIS OF DISCRIMINATORY ACTIONS AGAINST HOMOSEXUALS IN THE MOVIE *Love, Simon*

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Abstract: *This study focuses on the discriminations that happen in the movie Love, Simon (2018). The aim is to analyze what kind of discriminatory actions against homosexuals by using the discriminatory discourse strategies proposed by Flowerdew, Lin, and Tran (2002). It incorporates a content analytical approach in analyzing the data by using the mentioned theory as well as the transcription method adapted from Schegloff (2007). This study shows how the discriminations affect the victims and how they try to cope up with it.*

Keywords: *Homosexuals, LGBT, discrimination, discourse analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, there have been many forms of popular culture to promote LGBT, especially movies. A large of evidence to confirm that most of the general persuasive power is influenced by media narratives. Most of the audiences will have their beliefs to be altered if they are often exposed to a certain narrative, even when they know that it is fictional (Green and Brock, 2000). It means popular culture as a part of media has more potentials in affecting people's opinions or attitudes towards something, especially social issues. For instance, the theme that covers war, Holocaust, discrimination, racism, or disability mostly affects the attitudes of the audiences (Igartua and Barrios, 2012). Due to society characteristic that is being dynamic, surely it changes easily from time to time. By having a well-known culture in the mix, it is no longer difficult to have people support things that used to be seen as despicable. This case applies to the very theme of LGBT.

Ever since 1990, that was known as a unique era for queer film history, there had been a dramatic increase in the number of movies that portray queer storylines and characters that referred to as "New Queer Cinema" (Cabosky, 2015). Those LGBT-related campaigns had also been altered as campaigns to gather support by having lighter studio fare in ads that embraced bright color pallets. As time goes by, some LGBT movies had even received more attention from the audience. From 2002 to 2005, more supports towards the advancement for gay rights due to the broader cultural, political, and legal changes for LGBT Americans, though this advancement often countered conservative backlash. Although there had been an attempt from Bill Clinton to deal with it by having discussions with the gay rights organization known as The Human Rights Campaign (hrc.org), the backlash did not really stop. Even as many as thirteen states sent their initiatives to prevent the legalization of any rights related to same-sex relationships or marriages. However, as the years go on, more movies about LGBT community are publicly released and start to change American opinions towards the community. The community itself cannot be considered as dangerous if what they do is loving another person of the same sex. People started to realize that the problem comes from people who have inappropriate thoughts (usually related to harassment, sexual assault, or rape). They also got to learn that those acts were done by irresponsible people who want to taint the whole identity of the community, and not all LGBT members are the ones with criminal thoughts. Instead, they actually become the victims instead. This fact increased the empathy towards the community which makes the society opens up little by little.

Unfortunately, not all would think the same. There are still many people who think same-sex relationships or marriages are disgusting and or deviant. They will not even think twice to do discriminate against those who are involved with the community. Some would bully the victim until they get stressed, some even would go further to physically attack or kill the members of the community just because of their sexual orientation. Many films had been trying to portray this case to gain empathy from people so that they will no longer do such a horrible act. There have been a lot of studies that deal with popular culture or media narratives (Marshall, 2009; Rudy, 2016; McGivern and Miller, 2017). However, none of them have discussed the movie *Love, Simon* and analyze the discriminatory behavior from the antigay people through critical discourse analysis.

This paper attempts to answer the following research question: What kind of discrimination is done in the movie, and how do the victims struggle with it?

METHOD

Source of Data

The data for this research will mainly use the movie *Love, Simon*. Originally, this movie is a novel written by Becky Albertalli under a similar title. It is an American romantic comedy film that was released back in 2018. The plot of the story tells about a closeted high schooler named Simon who struggles to hide the fact that he is interested in males ever since he got a “sexual awakening”. Until one time, he finds that there is another person who confessed to being gay on a website that resembles Tumblr. Since then, he keeps emailing that anonymous person while also trying to look for the actual person in the school. Unfortunately, his emails were accidentally found out by a class clown who ends up blackmailing him to expose the screenshots of the emails if Simon does not help him to get close to one of Simon's girl best friend named Abby. Ever since the beginning, the movie has shown some discriminatory actions that were done by homophobic people (represented mostly by the two bullies) towards the members of LGBT community (at first, was represented by Ethan, a queer character who comes out publicly to be gay). That kind of prejudice and intolerance had made the main character to fear to come out about his sexual orientation. He kept on wondering why only homosexuals have to come out and why being straight is the “default”. The feeling of injustice and insecurity eventually gets into Simon's nerves until it breaks his relationship with his best friends. The movie shows how big of a deal discrimination actions are towards the mental health of the victims. Even when it shows that others can grow out of it, some of them might not be strong enough to bear the discrimination.

Data Analysis Methodology

This study aims to show the discriminatory actions in the movie *Love, Simon* to serve the objective of showing how unfair it is to judge people just from their sexual orientation. The researcher downloads the film and the script, looks for the discriminatory actions (content analysis), transcribe the dialogue using the transcription method adapted from Schegloff (2007) to gain the necessary data. It is used because in studying verbal interaction, a written representation is needed to support the analysis. Meanwhile, to analyze the data, the researcher is using discriminatory discourse strategies proposed by Flowerdew, Lin, and Tran (2002).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Throughout the movie, the study finds there are about seven times when the discriminatory actions occurred, both implicit and explicit, either intentional or unintentional. After having them all transcribed by using the transcription method adapted from Schegloff (2007), the researcher analyzed the transcription using discriminatory discourse strategies by Flowerdew, Lin, and Tran (2002). This study finds that most of the times, the discriminatory actions tend to be representing the LGBT community as the “negative others” by expressing, showing their disliking through harsh words or bullying (intentional and explicit), or talking about the LGBT community as if they are bad (unintentional and explicit), or the characters who have been hiding their sexual orientations and being afraid of getting many judgemental comments from others (unintentional and implicit). There is also an occasion when the perpetrator of discrimination uses the strategy of blaming the victim, using the gay character as a mass diversion to his problem. In addition, there is a subtle hint of delegitimation by indirectly saying that the minority has no power against the majority. The more in-depth analysis can be seen in the following:

1.

06:51 – 07:00: Bully towards Ethan

1. Bully 1: Cool scarf, Ethan. Hope it doesn't get caught in your vagina. ((Grins))
2. Ethan: Great choice on the cargo pants, by the way. It looks like you got gangbanged by a T.J. Maxx.
3. Bully 1: Whatever, fag. ((Laughs))

In the narrative above, we can see there is a clear discrimination act done by the first bully towards Ethan who had come out about his sexual preference. Here, the bully shows the negative other presentation in which he emphasizes Ethan's name, and although they know it is a boy name, they mock him by saying that he has female genital, indicating that Ethan is deviant on his supposed nature. When Ethan tried to stand up for himself by mocking the bully back, it seems to only fuel the bully's disliking towards Ethan. He calls Ethan with an inappropriate word instead, indicating how abnormal it is to have a part of LGBT community there.

2.

09:08 – 09:27: The indirect disliking towards gay

4. Father: Yeah, how did that guy even become the bachelor?
5. Nora: Why?
6. Father: Well, he's clearly gay. ((Looking at Simon, showing his expression of disgust))
7. Nora: No, he's NOT.
8. Father: Really?
9. Nora: [He's handsome.] ((Showing her disbelief))
10. Father: [That date,] where he took the girl to the "make your own perfume" place?
11. Nora: Dad! [The producers plan those dates.]
12. Father: [He's a one-man pride parade.] He has more chemistry with Chris Harrison, than any of those girls.

It is an example of the unintentional discriminatory act from the movie. The father's comment, on how the mentioned guy is gay, can be considered as a part of "positive us, negative them". It is shown by his question indicating that a gay person should not have become a bachelor. He even shows the expression of disgust when he emphasizes the word 'gay'. That statement is rather ignorant because his son is actually gay, too. As a result, he had discouraged his son to open up about his sexual preference. It only strengthens Simon's reason to hide the fact that he is gay because he is afraid of the judgment which would make him be a part of the 'negative them'. This is one of the evidences that ignorant comments containing indirect discrimination might affect the victim to bottle up their emotions. In addition to that, Nora's denial that 'the guy' might be gay is another "fuel to the fire" on how unacceptable a gay person can be in society. Her constant denial shows that people would ignore the 'gay scenario' and make it as hetero as possible; therefore, indirectly saying that being gay is considered to be bad.

3.

01:04:56 – 01:05:00: Another bully towards Ethan

14. Bully 1: Ethan! I didn't know you like football?
15. Bully 2: ((Laughs)) He's just here to check out the packages.

This transcription, again, depicts bullying towards Ethan showing how negative gay people can be from society's point of view. It is yet another representation of negative others, showing that gay people are only interested in 'preying' another person of the same-sex. They are ignoring the fact that there are more cases of hetero people (especially males to females) checking out the others. They also ignore the fact that there have been more rape cases that were done by hetero people than gay people. This is evident how society has always seen LGBT community as sex criminals, possibly due to some cases that indeed involved same-sex crimes. In other words, the actions that are done by LGBT people have more negative impressions than those of hetero cases. As a result, the victims have to face constant discrimination like this in their everyday life if they choose to come out. Adding more reasons for being afraid to come out about sexual preference.

4.

01:12:00 – 01:12:22: Martin's declaration on Simon's sexual orientation

16. Martin: Dear fellow Creekywood students (0.2) Simon Spier, has a secret male pen pal. Because he's gay. Interested parties may contact him directly to discuss arrangements for butt sex. Ladies (0.2) need not apply. We should all probably be talking about this instead of Martin Addison's homecoming debacle (0.2) which was actually kind of sweet, and romantic, if you think about it.

This is another depiction of discrimination in the movie that involves two strategies, the presentation of a "negative other" and blaming the victim. As we can see from the transcription, the emphasis is always on the words that are related to being gay. Those are butt sex, and that ladies do not need to apply. The arrangement of the sentences, yet again, showing the negative point of view of gay people that they only want sex relationships instead of a normal romantic relationship that most hetero couples would have. The fact that Martin previously mentioned "secret male pen pal" showing that the intimacy between men sometimes is intolerable, and

therefore being claimed as gay. In reality, this kind of claim has broken many friendships just because they are very close. Not only that, the declaration that Martin made has the function of scapegoating in which it is meant to avert people's attention on his problem to another problem, that is Simon being gay. He even went further to compare his failed confession to Simon's pen-pal relationship, saying that being hetero is more romantic than a homosexual relationship. In this declaration, Martin also indicated how bad it would be to have another gay person in the school by emphasizing that people should talk about that matter more than his failed confession. This discrimination, of course, ruins Simon's normal daily life, which reflects the reality where homosexuals will have it bad to be exposed by others.

5.

01:20:05 – 01:20:36: The indirect disliking towards gay by both principal and Simon's ex girlfriend

16. Principal: Uh:: for the (0.2) uh, for the record, when I was saying that we (0.2) have a lot in common, you know, I wasn't really (0.1) That's not what I was talking about.

17. Simon: [Gotcha.]¹

18. Principal: [Yeah,]¹ uh, just FYI, just [for the record.]²

19. Simon: [Okay,]² great. [Thanks]³.

20. Principal: [All right.]³

In canteen

21. Simon: Hey, Jackie.

22. Jackie: Did you date me because you think I look like a guy? ((A bit annoyed))

23. Simon: No. No, I actually broke up with you because you don't look like a guy.

24. Jackie: Oh, okay. Thanks! ((Laughs happily))

The two occasions happen simultaneously, both show another form of negative other presentation. Although the two occurrences are different, both contain the same idea that is indirect discrimination against homosexuals. On the first occasion, the principal tried to say to Simon that although he once said that they have many things in common, he is not gay. The principal does not have to confirm that kind of thing because it only shows how bad it is of being gay. Instead of trying to cheer up his student, his statement will only make Simon feels bad since it means that being gay is unacceptable to society and he has to endure that feeling alone. In addition to that, Simon's ex-girlfriend even asked for confirmation that Simon did not see her as a guy and when she got the answer, she instantly became happy. Both of those cases are evidence that homosexuals are nothing but bad and they have to make sure that they are not involved with those people. It further indicates that gay people really have no space to live in a hetero society without being discriminated either directly or indirectly.

6.

01:20:56 – 01:21:18: Bully towards Simon

32. Bully 2: Yeah! Hey, Creekwood! ((Both bullies jump on the table))

33. Bully 1: This one's for you, Spier. ((Pointing at Simon)) Hey, Ethan.

34. Both bullies: Oh, yeah! Oh, yeah! Ooh, ooh, ooh. ((Doing the pose of making love))

35. Bully 2: ((While keep doing the pose)) You like that, don't you, Spier?

36. Bully 1: Yeah. Oh, yeah, Ethan, Simon likey.

After Martin's declaration blows Simon's cover, the next targets of the bullies are Simon and Ethan. This time around, they do it in a very inappropriate way more than before. They mimic the pose of making love by acting as both Simon and Ethan. As I have previously mentioned before, it is just another form of discrimination in which the actors are presenting homosexuals as people who are sexually "thirsty". Although Simon and Ethan do not have a romantic relationship, the bullies keep them as a pair because it is society's common sense to pair bad people with other bad people. As per Ethan's comment, "One gay's a snooze, two's a hilarious hate crime." Which means that one homosexual does not interest more bully's attraction, unless it is two, so they can mock the two of them in one act. This case emphasizes that no matter how many numbers there are for homosexuals, they will still get discriminatory actions and it gets harsher when the number grows. In other words, the growing numbers of homosexuals appeal to more hate crimes addressed to them.

7.

01:23:11 – 01:23:40: Ethan asked why Simon did not come out

37. Simon: Maybe I was jealous. You've been out since you were 16. It always seemed so easy for you.
38. Ethan: Easy?: Are you kidding me? My mom still tells my grandparents about all the girls I'm dating with when we go to their house for dinner, every Sunday. She says it's 'cause they're old and religious, and it's just easier that way. I don't know, maybe it's true.

This transcription shows another indirect discrimination that is done by Ethan's mother who claims everything would be easier to just admit that Ethan is hetero. This is the fact that often happens in reality. Parents might not say that they disagree with their children becoming homosexuals, but they may still have no heart to hurt them. To cover the disappointment, the parents will resort to making excuses like it will be easier to just say that they are hetero to other people, especially when interacting with conservative people. In this case, Ethan's mother said that the grandparents are religious, which would make the most makes sense of reason that most religious people are intolerable to same-sex relationships or marriages. By doing that, though, the mother had indirectly said that she dislikes homosexuals and discriminates against her son. There is a subtle hint of delegitimation where the minority has no credit nor power to blend with the majority. Consequently, if the minority tried to blend, they would be considered outlawed, which is why most homosexuals do not come out because they think, "It is easier that way."

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the analysis, this study has revealed many ways of discriminatory actions that were done by the characters in the movie *Love, Simon* and how it affects the victims. One of those discriminatory actions involved direct bullying either by saying harsh words or actions that always relate the homosexuals as people who sexually thirsty even going as far as impersonating inappropriate acts to mock the gays. In other words, it is a presentation of LGBT community as the "negative other" part of society. Not only that, but there is also indirect discrimination that mostly is done because the perpetrators are ignorant towards the victim feelings in response to their statements.

Furthermore, there is also a way in which exposing gays can be used as a scapegoat to distract people's attention from the problem, and by comparing it to a hetero relationship. Last but not least, there is also a subtle hint of delegitimation in which the minority is visualized as powerless and has no right to blend with the majority. This limitation limits them, and if they try to break out, they are considered to be outlawed. In all those ways, homosexuals will always have tendencies to hide their true selves from the world because of the fear created by such discriminations and that there is a possibility that it might affect their mental health. Unfortunately, that field is not yet made under discussion, neither analyzing the movie through a combination of discourse analysis and feminist approach. Hopefully, it will inspire other researchers to undergo research on those matters.

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