



Homophobia in 1950's America as Depicted in

***The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith**

A THESIS

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PRONOUNCEMENT

The writer truthfully confirms that this thesis entitled Homophobia in 1950's America as Depicted in *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith is written and compiled by herself without taking any results from other researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3, and diploma degree of any university. The writer also ascertains that she does not quote any illegal material from other publications or other papers except from the references mentioned.

Semarang, August 2019

Ummanabiegh Ismail Jalla

MOTTO AND DEDICATION

“People get built different. We don’t need to figure it out. We just need to respect it.”

—Princess Bonnibel Bubblegum

“If you can’t survive, just try.”

—Matthew Healy

*This thesis is dedicated to
Myself and those I am willing to live for.*

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ABSTRACT

This paper is written to analyze a novel called *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith. This paper discusses homophobia and heteronormativity as a form of oppression during the 1950s in the United States, as experienced by the characters Therese Belivet and Carol Aird in the novel. The purpose of this study is to analyze how the lives and personalities of the main characters are influenced by homophobia and heteronormativity, how the main characters describe the conditions of the LGBTQ + community in real life, and the impact of the novel itself on the LGBTQ + community in the United States. To analyze this novel, the writer uses the method of close reading and contextual. From this paper, the authors found that the characters in the novel illustrate some of the effects of homophobia and heteronormativity, such as lack of understanding of one's sexuality, domestication and early marriage for women, the invisibility and invalidation of LGBTQ+ identities, and the treatment of *The Price of Salt*. The author finds that the novel is very important in improving the representation of lesbian women in the literature and improving community treatment of the LGBTQ + community as a whole.

Keywords: Homophobia, Heteronormativity, Gender Roles, Lesbians, America in the 1950s

ABSTRAK

Makalah ini ditulis untuk menganalisis sebuah novel berjudul *The Price of Salt* oleh Patricia Highsmith. Makalah ini membahas homofobia dan heteronormativitas sebagai bentuk penindasan selama periode 1950-an di Amerika Serikat, seperti yang dialami oleh karakter Therese Belivet dan Carol Aird dalam novel tersebut. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menganalisis bagaimana kehidupan dan kepribadian para tokoh utama dipengaruhi oleh homofobia dan heteronormativitas, bagaimana tokoh utama menggambarkan kondisi komunitas LGBTQ + di kehidupan nyata, dan dampak dari novel itu sendiri untuk komunitas LGBTQ + di Amerika Serikat. Untuk menganalisis novel ini, penulis menggunakan metode *close reading* dan kontekstual. Dari makalah ini, penulis menemukan bahwa karakter dalam novel menggambarkan beberapa efek dari homofobia dan heteronormativitas, seperti kurangnya pemahaman tentang seksualitas seseorang, domestikasi dan pernikahan dini untuk wanita, tidak dianggapnya identitas LGBTQ +, dan perlakuan dalam *The Price of Salt* yang tidak adil oleh hukum. Penulis menemukan bahwa novel ini amat penting dalam memperbaiki representasi perempuan lesbian dalam literatur dan memperbaiki perlakuan masyarakat terhadap komunitas LGBTQ + secara keseluruhan.

Kata kunci: Homofobia, Heteronormativitas, Peran Gender, Lesbian, Amerika pada tahun 1950-an

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

After the disruption of World War II and the Great Depression, the culture and media started reinforcing messages about gender roles and the importance of marriage at a young age (Carlisle, 2009), which automatically excluded homosexual people, as same-sex marriage was illegal at that time. On the other hand, a genre of literature called lesbian pulp fiction started to emerge. It is a genre of literature with sapphic themes (Forrest, 2005). However, lesbian pulp fiction did not portray lesbian women's lives accurately, as it was initially written by heterosexual men for heterosexual readers for the overly pornographic contents (Zimet, 1999).

In 1952, Patricia Highsmith wrote *The Price of Salt*, a novel that was considered as the first lesbian pulp fiction with a happy ending. Portraying a Sapphic love between the main characters in a simple, realistic, and humane way, *The Price of Salt* has been named the lesbian version of the classic American story of boy meets girl (Levine, 2014). Judy Berman (2015) analyzed the contemporariness, self-awareness, and the happy ending in *The Price of Salt*, and concluded that it is its own kind of revolution in its time. *The Price of Salt* influenced other authors to write lesbian pulp fiction books that are realistic and not overly sexualized to the point where they helped other lesbian women at that time

to form and understand their sexual identities, and ultimately, change how they are perceived and treated by society (Foote, 2005).

The writer is interested in analyzing the homophobia that affects the main characters in *The Price of Salt* in many ways, as well as the positive impacts that *The Price of Salt* has for lesbian women in the United States. The writer tries to explore the effects of homophobia, heteronormativity, and gender roles on the main characters in the novel, and retrospectively, lesbian women in the United States prior to lesbian feminism.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What are the effects of homophobia, heteronormativity, and gender roles faced by the main characters in the novel?
2. In what ways does the novel depict the living condition and struggles faced by lesbian women in the United States at that time?
3. How does the novel affect lesbian women in the United States?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyze the struggles that the main characters face because of homophobia, gender roles, and heteronormativity
2. To analyze the struggles that lesbian women in the United States face as represented in the novel
3. To analyze the importance of *The Price of Salt* for lesbian women

1.4. Methods of the Study

To analyze the novel *The Price of Salt* by Patricia Highsmith, the writer uses close-reading and contextual methods. The intrinsic elements that the writer analyzes are the plot, characters, and conflicts of the novel. The contextual method, on the other hand, will be supported by three main theories: Annamarie Jagose's theory of Homophobia, Adrienne Rich's theory of Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Alice H. Eagly's theory of Social Roles.

1.5. Organization of the Thesis

This thesis contains five chapters, each of which will then be further divided into sub-chapters. The five chapters are as follows:

1. Chapter I: INTRODUCTION. This chapter explains the background of the study, the research questions, the objectives, the methods used, and the organization of the thesis.
2. Chapter II: AUTHOR AND HER WORK. This chapter presents a short biography of Patricia Highsmith as well as the summary of *The Price of Salt*.
3. Chapter III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK. This chapter consists of theories that the writer uses to analyze the novel.
4. Chapter IV: ANALYSIS. This chapter discusses the intrinsic and the extrinsic aspects of the novel in order to answer the research questions.
5. Chapter V: CONCLUSION. This chapter is the conclusion of the analysis in the previous chapter.

REFERENCES

CHAPTER II

AUTHOR AND HER WORK

2.1. Biography of Patricia Highsmith

Mary Patricia Plangman was born in Fort Worth, Texas on January 19th 1921 and died in Locarno, Switzerland on February 4th 1992. She was an American novelist, originally wrote psychological crime thrillers before writing lesbian pulp fiction.

In 1942, she graduated from Barnard College and soon had her short story entitled *The Heroine* published by the Harper's Bazaar magazine as one of the best 22 stories to appear in American magazines in 1945. She had a great success with her first suspense novel entitled *Strangers on a Train* (1950) which then got adapted into movies three times, one of which was by Alfred Hitchcock in 1951.

In 1952, under the pseudonym "Claire Morgan", Highsmith published *The Price of Salt* which is the first lesbian novel that has a happy ending. The pseudonym Claire Morgan was used because she did not want to be known as a "lesbian book author" and because she was afraid that someone might find out her sexuality at that time, as the book was actually based on her real life experiences.

Highsmith lived in Switzerland in the 80's, during which she used almost 40 pseudonyms to write various articles regarding the state of Israel and the Jews' influence in it, although many of the women with which Highsmith was romantically involved were Jewish.

Highsmith once stated that she did not like being called a crime writer, to which many reviewers agree. One of her close correspondent named Graham Greene called her a “writer who has created a world of her own -- a world claustrophobic and irrational which we enter each time with a sense of personal danger.”

Source: (<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Patricia-Highsmith>. Retrieved on September 10th 2018)

2.2. Summary of the Novel

The Price of Salt is a story about two women; Therese Belivet and Carol Aird. Therese Belivet was a lonely nineteen-year-old girl who was working at a department store while waiting for an opportunity to become a theatre set designer. Therese had a boyfriend whom she had been dating for several months. However, Therese did not feel love for him even though he loved her.

One day when Therese was working at the doll department, she became interested in a customer, a fancy woman who was older than her. The woman ordered a doll to be delivered and Therese found out that her name was Carol Aird. Carol accidentally left her gloves in the store. Therese then impulsively sent the glove back as well as a Christmas card to Carol. This Christmas card became the start of their relationship, because after Carol received it, she asked Therese out for lunch.

Therese learned that Carol was in the middle of a bitter divorce with her husband, Harge Aird. Therese then realized that she started to have feelings for

Carol. Richard said Therese is having a “schoolgirl crush” but Therese knew that it was a lot more than a crush; it was love.

Carol’s husband, Harge, was suspicious about her relationship with Therese, especially after Carol admitted that she once had a short sexual relationship with her best friend, Abby. Harge took their daughter, Rindy, to live with him and thus limited Carol’s access to her own daughter. To take a little tension off the divorce, Carol asked if Therese wanted to come with her on a road trip, to which she said yes. During the trip, Carol and Therese became physically and emotionally intimate. They had sex in Waterloo, and ultimately declared that they loved each other.

Unfortunately, Harge hired a private investigator to stalk them and gather evidence on Carol’s homosexuality, which would then be used against her in the upcoming custody hearing. The private investigator had already bugged the room in which Carol and Therese first had sex. Carol bribed him to give over the tapes but several tapes were already sent to Harge in New York. Carol soon realized that she would lose custody over Rindy if she continued her relationship with Therese. She then left Therese in Midwest and eventually wrote to her, saying that they had better end the relationship. Sadly, the evidence of her homosexuality was enough for her to lose custody of her daughter, even before she attended court.

Therese went back to New York and tried to rebuild her life. After several months, Carol asked her out for dinner and they decided to meet again. Carol told Therese that she had just purchased an apartment that is too big to live alone in.

Carol invited Therese to live together, but Therese was so heartbroken and hurt that she declined the invitation.

After they parted from that dinner, Therese went to a party during which she contemplated her feelings and relationship with Carol. Therese suddenly had a realization about how much she actually loved Carol. Therese felt very lonely and she left the party to go look for Carol. Therese found Carol and Carol greeted her warmly.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Intrinsic Elements

3.1.1. Theme

H. Porter Abbott in *Cambridge Introductions to Literature* explains theme as a repetition in narrative. It is abstract and not mentioned explicitly. Theme can lend itself to several different interpretations, but identifying the theme in a novel can significantly help establishing what the narrative work is about and what the focus is. It can then be used to eliminate false interpretations and add support correct ones (Abbott, 2002: 88).

3.1.2. Plot

Summing up a chapter by Anton Chekhov in the book *An Introduction to Literature* by Sylvan Barnet, it is stated that a plot is essentially what happens in the story and how the events in the story are arranged. Barnet explains that the traditional plot has the following structure:

1. Exposition, where the story is set as well as the initial situation of the story
2. Conflict, the complication that moves the story and characters to a climax
3. Denouement, the resolution or the outcome of the conflict (Chekhov in Barnet, 1978: 99-102).

According to Elizaeth Irvin Ross in *Write Now*, there are four basic types of conflict, which are man against man, man against nature, man against self, and man

against society (Ross, 1993: 108). In this research, the writer will try to analyze the conflict of the story using Ross' three types of conflict, which are man against self, man against man, and man against society.

3.1.3. Character

According to M.H. Abrams, characters are the people that live and are portrayed in either a dramatic or narrative work. The readers or viewers can then interpret those characters and associate them with certain moral, intellectual, and emotional qualities based on what they say, how they say it, and what they do. Characters present the idea of the story through their dialogues, gestures, actions, and conflicts (Abrams, 1999: 32).

There are two types of characters that will be discussed in this analysis, which are protagonist and antagonist. According to Barnet, protagonist is the lead actor of a literary work. Antagonist, on the other hand, is a character or force that contradicts or opposes the protagonist (Barnet 1978: 1584).

3.2. Extrinsic Elements

3.2.1. Homosexuality

According to American Psychological Association, sexual orientation is viewed from the perspective of one's relationship with others (American Psychological Association, 2006: 1). Homosexuality is one of the sexual orientations that are recognized by American Psychological Association. According to APA, sexual orientations range from attraction to the opposite sex only (Heterosexual), attraction

to both the opposite and the same sex (Bisexual), all the way to attraction to the same sex only (Homosexual) (American Psychological Association, 2008: 1).

In 2006, American Psychological Association stated that sexual orientation is not necessarily formed from sexual acts only, but also from emotional and romantic experience that emerged during their middle childhood through early adolescence, thus explaining why there are many people of various sexual orientations who could put themselves in or out the LGBTQ+ spectrum despite having no previous sexual experience with anyone (American Psychological Association 2006: 1).

Same-sex and opposite-sex relationship follow the same indications to determine whether or not love is present. Author Kathleen Dean Moore wrote in *The Pine Island Paradox* about 9 indicators of love, which are attachment, obsession, excitement, fear of loss and injury, desire to protect, change for the better, commitment, effort, and desperation (Moore, 2004:34-35)

The Youth Advocate of the University of Minnesota published an article on the importance of understanding one's own sexuality. According to them, sexuality is not always about sex, but understanding it is important to help one remain safe, responsible, and secure. They stated that the first most important thing to have when trying to understand and discover one's sexual identity and orientation is to get accurate information (The Youth Advocate, 2018: par 3. Retrieved from www.youthhood.org on August 19th 2019)

3.2.1.1. Lesbianism

A lesbian, in short, is a woman who is attracted to other women. Around 610 BC, there was a poetess named Psappho, or better known as Sappho, who was born in the island of Lesbos, Greece. Known for using the themes of love and adoration towards other women, the history then unofficially crowned her homeland, Lesbo, as a term for women who are attracted to other women, and Sappho as the first lesbian Poetess (Retrieved from Encyclopædia Britannica on August 19th 2019).

3.2.1.2. Feminism

According to Virginia Woolf as cited in *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* by Margaret Walters, the word ‘feminist’ means “one who champions the rights of women” (Woolf in Walters, 2005: 2). Based on this basic definition, feminism means the movement or the fight against the oppression of all women. Phelan believed that sexism and heteronormativity cannot be set apart and will always be intertwined with each other. He also stated that the oppression of women and lesbian is the epitome of oppression, since it is intersectional and crosses all race, class, and age. According to him, lesbian feminists are women who actualize their political freedom to commit sexual and emotional relationships with other women (Phelan, 1989: 47).

Adrienne Rich called out the lack of support and recognition of lesbian texts by feminist scholars in *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. Rich believed that it is not enough to just simply acknowledge that lesbian texts do exist. A feminist critique that speaks of heteronormativity and its impact on homosexuality and lesbianism is desperately needed to further support and validate

lesbians' visibility, because if feminist scholars want to fight for women, they should fight for all women (Rich, 1980: 634).

3.2.1.2. Gaydar

Gaydar is a combination of the word 'gay' and 'radar'. It is very commonly used within the LGBT community to indicate whether or not someone is LGBT without directly asking them about their sexuality or gender. According to the Oxford Dictionary, gaydar is "the putative ability of homosexuals to recognize one another intuitively or by means of slight indications (Retrieved from Lexico.com on August 19th 2019).

3.2.2. Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is the assumption that women can only be attracted to men, and men can only be attracted to women. The idea was first mentioned in 1980, in a series of Journal entitled *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence* by Adrienne Rich. Rich called heteronormativity as "compulsory heterosexuality". She stated that there are assumptions made about how women are born to be naturally attracted towards men and lesbians are just women who are bitter and acting out because they dislike men (Rich, 1980: 632). According to Rich, heteronormative societies have been trying to eradicate and crush lesbians' existence by forcing them to hide and invalidating their sexuality just because they do not fit into what society considers as normal when there should not be anything abnormal about two consenting women who love and support each other.

Later, in 1993, Gayle Rubin published *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*. Rubin explained how the modern Western heteronormative societies had created a hierarchal sex values. The top of the hierarchy is marital heterosexual couples with children, while the bottom of the hierarchy consists of transsexuals, people with various sexual fetishes, sex workers, and pedophiles (Rubin, 1993: 150).

3.2.2.1. Women in Post-War America

In *Handbook to Life in America*, Rodney P. Carlisle explained how American households and lives were changed after the World War II. According to Carlisle, the period after World War II ended in America is often referred to as a period of conformity. The pop culture, media, and literature portrayed and indirectly imposed the ideals of gender roles that bind both men and women, as well as the expectations that society had on them (Carlisle, 2009: xi).

One of the expectations is for men and women to marry young. Michael Johns quoted Marry Cantwell in *Moment of Grace: The American City in the 1950s*, stating that getting married at a young age is like getting to a sale on the first day. If one waited until they are 25 or 26 years old, they would not get “products” that are as good as had they gone on the first day (Cantwell in Johns, 2004: 96).

As the idea of American nuclear family started to spread out, women started to feel less and less empowered and denigrated. Men, on the other hand, became the sole source of income for the family. This gave them a significant increase of power and created the feelings of male superiority. The conformity to gender roles often became horribly toxic for both men and women, but mostly for women. Not

only were women urged, persuaded, and pushed to stay at home, those who refuse will be silenced and forced back to domesticity, denying them of their rights to earn money and develop their potentials for the sake of “maintaining the family’s harmony”.

Since the idea of the new American nuclear family became the mainstream, the term of sexuality for 1950’s America was always defined in a context of a nuclear family. This idea had no space for any other types of sexualities who were not considered as mainstream, such as single sexual culture or homosexuality. Because it did not fit into the Americans’ ideal of sexuality, homosexuality was then considered as an illness and threatening for the strength of American families.

3.2.3. Homophobia

Ivan Ward explained phobia in his book entitled *Phobia: Ideas in Psychoanalysis* as a “conditioned response to traumatic experience” (Ward, 2001: 12). However, Amy Hubbard explained in an article published to the *Huffington Post* about how Homophobia is not actually a Phobia.

According to Hubbard, there is a difference between fear in phobia and homophobia. Hubbard stated that fear should make someone hide and retract from the cause. However, people with homophobia do not hide or avoid homosexual people, but they emit hate, aggression, and discrimination towards them. (Hubbard, 2016: par.1).

Annamarie Jagose quoted Simon Watney who stated that Homophobia is essentially an anxiety that heteronormative cultures have. This anxiety is caused by the belief that homosexuality is counter-productive and promotes illegitimacy and

perversion. Watney also believed that homophobia causes violence and discrimination (Watney in Jagose, 1996: 105).

The belief that homophobia causes violence is in accordance with Gail Mason, who wrote about homophobia-related violence in his book entitled *The Spectacle of Violence* and explained that violence towards homosexual people is a result of, and cannot be separated from, the heteronormative cultures in which homosexuals live (Mason, 2002: 7).

According to a journal by the Canadian Paediatric Society on adolescent sexual orientation, the significant psychological, social, and medical problems that young queer people have been facing are caused more by the stigmatization of their gender and sexual identities and less by the identities themselves. They stated that during the process of discovering one's sexual orientation, a person may have troubles with understanding theirs (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2008: 619).

The general cause of homophobia is heteronormative culture and its misunderstanding that homosexuality is a sexual deviation. According to Florence Tamagne in her book *A History of Homosexuality in Europe*, sexuality is intersectional. Which means it cannot be studied or viewed from just one point of view. It involves several disciplines, such as history, sociology, anthropology, medicine, and determined by many factors such as culture, gender, and race (Tamagne, 2006: 3).

Tamagne stated that the traditional image of sexuality is a heterosexual and monogamous family, which automatically puts bisexual men/women and polyamorous people out of the frame. The image of the "ideal" sexuality was spread

and imposed by the bourgeois to people from the middle class to the working class, resulting in the very restricted definition of sexuality and sexual standards. Any form of sexuality that does not conform to that ideal image was considered abnormal; including prostitution, masturbation, and homosexuality (Tamagne, 2006: 3).

Shane Phelan explained in *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* how Lesbian women experience homophobia. According to Phelan, oppression towards lesbians does not only happen on the level of law, but gains power from the heteronormative society around it. Lesbians face discrimination because of the law that define them and their sexual orientation as criminal, which results in lesbian women being discriminated on the face of the law, in custody, in their jobs, in their own homes, and literally almost everywhere else (Phelan, 1989: 3).

According to an article published by Penn State University on Queer Culture, if a couple with children was having a divorce where one parent was confirmed to be LGBTQ+, they would automatically deemed as unfit as parent, regardless of their capabilities as a parent and the level of attention they were able to give to the children. Full custody would automatically be given to the heterosexual parent. (Penn State University, 2015)

3.2.4. Gender Roles

In *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective*, Linda L. Lindsey stated that gender roles are the expectations on the attitudes and behaviors that are associated with each male and female in society (Lindsey, 2016: 5). Lindsey then stated that there

is a false understanding and assumption that gender roles are inherent and permanent. This misunderstanding, according to her, is caused by patriarchy and andocentrism, which will ultimately result in sexism (Lindsey, 2016: 3).

Alice H. Eagly explained in the journal entitled *Social Role Theory of Sex Differences and Similarities* that there are traits of gender roles in society. These traits are divided into four basic kinds, which are personality traits, domestic behaviors, occupations, and physical appearance. Women have roles that are more “feminine” and men have roles that are more “masculine”. Any deviation from the assigned roles is frowned upon.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS

4.1. Intrinsic Elements

4.1.1. Theme

The general theme of *The Price of Salt* is sexual orientation and sexual identity, specifically lesbianism. During the 1950's, there was a significant rise in the popularity of lesbian pulp fiction, which is a genre of literature that focuses on mid-20 century paperback novels with lesbian themes. Katherine Forrest explained in *Lesbian Pulp Fiction: The Sexually Intrepid World of Lesbian Paperback Novels* that since homosexuality was not accepted at the time, lesbian pulp fiction was one of the very limited forms of literature that was the source of information regarding lesbianism or stories that featured lesbian characters (Forrest, 2005: ix). Lesbian pulp fiction also shaped lesbian women's identity prior to lesbian feminism. However, lesbian pulp fiction was not nearly as identical to how lesbian women lived. According to Jaye Zimet in *Strange Sisters: The Art of Lesbian Pulp Fiction*, most lesbian pulp fictions were written by heterosexual men for other heterosexual men who fantasized about lesbian sexual contents and pornography only, instead of by lesbian women for lesbian audience to educate about their sexuality (Zimet, 1999: 19).

Lesbian pulp fiction tries to depict how lesbian women's lives were or how they should be. Unfortunately, since homosexuality (lesbianism included) was still very heavily stigmatized and frowned upon at that time, it was rare for a lesbian pulp fiction to have a happy ending for both women. Yvonne Keller wrote in *Lesbian Pulp Novels and US Lesbian Identity* about how lesbian pulp fiction novels crippled her moral structure and eventually made her think that there was no place in the world where there can be a happy ending for her and other lesbian women. Because of the false depictions of lesbianism, lesbian pulp fictions had made many lesbian women feel as if they were criminals, sinners, or ill, and this indirectly added to the hopelessness that lesbian women and other LGBTQ+ people felt about their future (Keller, 2005: 386).

4.1.2. Characters

The main characters of this novel are Therese, Carol, Richard, and Harge. The story is set in 1950's Manhattan, New York. This part of the study mainly focuses on the main lesbian women, Therese and Carol. The writer will try to analyze their history, their sexuality, as well as their moments of sexual awakening.

4.1.2.1. Protagonists

The protagonist characters in this novel are Therese Belivet and Carol Aird.

Therese Belivet is a shy nineteen-year-old girl who is working at the doll department of Frankensberg's department store in Manhattan and wants to be a stage designer. Therese is in a relationship with Richard Semco but is not in love with him even though Therese describes Richard as "a decent man—better than the

others.” Therese says that Richard “treated her like an actual person instead of just some girl that he could get with” (Highsmith, 2015: 45).

As stated before how the exposition of the story is similar to that of a lesbian pulp fiction, Therese is unhappy despite having almost everything that she can ever need such as a job that is enough to provide for her daily life and a boyfriend who loves her. Therese feels like her day job and her steady domestic relationship with Richard strips her off of her individuality and sense of self. Furthermore, Therese is a lesbian woman who has never received any sex education for her sexuality. Therese’s lack of individuality and self-identity may be the reason why she is so unhappy of her life and unsure of herself.

Therese grew up in an Episcopalian—church for Anglican Communion in the United States—orphanage, despite only being a half-orphan. Other than being the protagonist of the story, Therese is also a dynamic character. In the beginning, her uncertainty is very apparent. She is very shy and not used to explicitly express herself, even when she is asked to.

““I--" Should she tell her she usually worked on her stage models? Sketched and painted sometimes, carved things like cats' heads and tiny figures to go in her ballet sets, but that she liked best to take long walks practically anywhere, liked best simply to dream?” (Highsmith, 2015:26)

This personality can be seen when Therese is having a conversation with Carol and Therese is struggling to tell Carol about herself, which depicts her lack of ability to express herself. However, the gradual changes in Therese’s attitude and personality can be seen throughout the story. At first Therese is really shy, unsure of herself, and not used to demand or fight for what she wanted. However, as the

story continued, Therese becomes more and more courageous, demanding, and sure of what she wants and what she does not want out of her relationship with both Richard and Carol.

Her queer tendencies starts to show in her views of the nun who took care of her; Sister Alicia, whom Therese “adored and thought of so often, with her pale-blue eye” (Highsmith 2015:26). Referring to Mark Manson in *The Levels of Eye Contact*, he explained a level of eye contact called “The Gaze”, which is when one looks at another person’s eyes for 2-3 seconds without breaking eye contact. The gaze usually occurs consciously and is a clear sign of attraction. The gaze allows someone to pay attention to the other person’s eyes and make their impression of them (Manson, 2011: par 13. Retrieved from markmanson.net on July 18th 2019). If Therese can remember and describe Sister Alicia’s eyes, it can be inferred that Therese paid attention to them when she was little. The writer believes that this attention to and description of Sister Alicia is a foreshadow that indicates Therese’s sexuality, since later on in the story when she meets Carol and is instantly attracted to her, one of the very first thing that Therese notices about Carol is also her eyes (Highsmith, 1952: 20), meaning that Therese, in some ways, paid attention to and is attracted to both of them.

Therese’s sexual awakening can be seen based on her immediate reaction and enthusiasm when she first meets Carol when the latter is looking for a Christmas present in the department store Therese is working in. “Her eyes were gray, colorless, yet dominant as light or fire, and caught by them, Therese could not look

away.” (Highsmith, 1952: 27) At this moment, Therese has, in Manson’s words, given Carol the gaze.

“Though there were a number of salesgirls between them, Therese felt sure the woman would come to her. . . . Then Therese saw her walk slowly toward the counter, heard her heart stumble to catch up with the moment it had let pass, and felt her face grow hot as the woman came nearer and nearer. . . . Her eyebrows were blond, curving around the bend of her forehead. Her mouth was as wise as her eyes, Therese thought, and her voice was like her coat, rich and supple” (Highsmith 1952: 20)

Therese’s blush and nervousness when Carol is walking to her can be seen as a sign of attraction. Even though Therese is not aware of her own sexuality yet, her gaydar as explained in the previous chapter is already working because Therese is already putting in effort to impress Carol. When they meet for the first time, Carol asks to see the valise on the window. The only person allowed to open the display window is Therese’s manager, but Therese quietly takes the key and opens the display window for Carol (Highsmith, 1952: 20). This spontaneity and recklessness can be seen as a result of Therese’s gaydar telling her that she is attracted to Carol and vice versa.

Therese’s sexuality becomes gradually more prominent as the story goes on. During her relationship with Richard, there is close to zero excitement. There are moments where Therese expresses her disappointment or guilt, such as when Therese and Richard are taking a walk with his friends, Dannie and Phil, Therese feels embarrassed because she has to walk along behind Richard and not beside him. She feels “like a dangling appendage” (Highsmith, 1952: 16) because Dannie and Phil must automatically think that she is Richard’s mistress even though she is not.

“They saw more and more of each other, without actually growing closer. She still wasn't in love with him, not after ten months, and maybe she never could be, ... Sometimes she thought she was in love with him, but the feeling bore no resemblance to what she had read about love. Love was supposed to be a kind of blissful insanity. Richard didn't act blissfully insane either, in fact.” (Highsmith, 1952: 16).

In the quotation above, Therese explains how she feels about Richard after dating him for ten months. As Therese explains it, what she is experiencing in her relationship with Richard does not fit Moore's characteristics of being in love (Moore, 2004: 35), because, referring to how Therese explains her feelings for Richard, she does not experience any signs of love to Richard. After having her sexual awakening, Therese becomes surer of herself. She fell madly in love with Carol, and Carol with Therese. Therese's love for Carol is so intense and so explicitly expressed that it is a solid proof that Therese's sexuality as a lesbian is valid. When Therese and Carol decided to meet each other and Carol is a quarter of an hour late, Therese stated that “If she didn't come, she would probably keep on waiting, all day and into the night,” (Highsmith, 1952: 46). This can be seen as an example of obsession and desperation according to Moore (Moore, 2004: 35).

Another example is when Therese and Carol were driving together through the Lincoln Tunnel, Therese felt so excited that she wished to die right there and then while Carol is by her side. “A wild, inexplicable excitement mounted in Therese as she stared through the windshield. She wished that the tunnel might cave in and kill them both, that their bodies might be dragged out together,” (Highsmith, 1952: 47). This can be seen as an example of attachment, euphoria, and desperation as stated by Moore (Moore, 2004: 35).

Even when Therese is home by herself, she cannot stop thinking about Carol, stating that “There was not a moment when she did not see Carol in her mind, ... A world was born around her, like a bright forest with a million shimmering leaves” (Highsmith, 1952: 59). This can be seen as an example of obsession and attachment because Therese wants to constantly be with her, which is suitable with Moore’s explanation as well (Moore 2004, 35).

The moments of Therese’s feelings when she is with Carol and when she is thinking about Carol are surprising for the readers because it is such a drastic and change from Therese’s boring and dull life. The moments Therese talks about Carol are the only times in the story where Therese’s dynamic character is really apparent. These moments that are filled with excitement, melancholia, and obsession can only mean that Therese is madly and hopelessly in love with Carol. Had these moments happened to a heterosexual person, there would be no question or doubt about the validity of their feelings and sexuality, but since Therese is a woman who is in love with another woman, she has to face many questions and doubts from the people around her, including the person closest to her at that time, Richard. Therese’s responses and behavior in these scenes can be seen as the first few stages of love, which are attraction, lust, and attachment, according to an article written by Katherine Wu for Harvard University’s Science is the News, entitled *The Science behind Lust, Attraction, and Companionship* (2017).

Furthermore, Therese and Carol have had sex when they were in Waterloo during a road trip “Her arms were tight around Carol, and she was conscious of

Carol and nothing else, of Carol's hand that slid along her ribs, Carol's hair that brushed her bare breasts, and then her body too seemed to vanish in widening circles” (Highsmith, 1952:109-110), which makes their relationship both romantic and sexual. Therese and Carol’s sapphic relationship fits the explanation of the American Psychiatric Association on sexual orientation as explained in the previous chapter, which involves both sexual and nonsexual behaviors (the American Psychiatric Association, 2006: 1). Therese and Carol’s sexuality as lesbians also fit Foucault’s definition of homosexuality being the sexual act between two people of the same sex (Foucault in Jagose, 1992: 2).

Despite being young and unsure, Therese is an independent woman. In the beginning of the story, she is and already has been in a relationship with Richard who is very eager to marry her. During the 1950’s, it is the men’s responsibility to provide for the women. Richard is willing to provide for Therese but she keeps refusing, even before she meets the wealthy, furniture-business-owner Carol Aird. Therese insists on working and providing for herself even though it means she cannot live lavishly.

Therese’s change of ideals and character are also showed in her response towards Richard’s resentment for her and Carol’s relationship. At first Therese is very submissive and timid, but once she discovers her sexuality and what she wants, she becomes braver.

“She sensed that he was never so bound to her as now, never so determined not to give her up. It frightened her. She could imagine the determination transformed to hatred and to violence” (Highsmith, 2015:134).

Therese finds the courage to argue against Richard's idea even though at that time it was considered not a woman's place to argue with a man. Therese realizes that Richard knows that she is leaving him for a woman, and she knows it will make him furious, or even violent. In chapter 13, Richard confronts Therese and her feelings for Carol. In the argument, Richard repeatedly tells Therese that her feelings for Carol are "unreasonable", "silly", "crazy", and that Therese is "in a daze" (Highsmith, 1952: 88). She is frightened but she faces him and eventually gets rid of him for Carol when Richard swears that Therese's feelings will not last.

"He sat back. "Wednesday, next Saturday, you won't feel like this at all. You haven't known her three weeks yet."

She looked over toward the steam tables, where people edged slowly along, choosing this and that, drifting toward the curve in the counter where they dispersed. "We may as well say good-bye," she said, "because neither of us will ever be any different from what we are this minute"" (Highsmith, 1952: 88)

Carol Aird is much older than Therese (Highsmith, 1952: 76). Carol is already in her 30's. She gets married when she is young to a man named Harge, and has a daughter named Rindy with him. Later in the story, it is revealed that Harge is abusive and an alcoholic (Highsmith, 1952: 40). When Carol meets Therese, Carol is already in the process of a bitter divorce with Harge (Highsmith, 1952: 44).

Since the book is told entirely from Therese's point of view, Carol is described to be so perfect, almost like a goddess. As explained before on how Highsmith created the main characters to be unconventional to the image of both heterosexual and homosexual couples, Carol has several masculine/dominant traits, but not a physically butch lesbian. Therese has described how Carol presents herself

multiple times, including Carol's dominance through her outfit, voice, and how she carried herself. "She is tall and fair, her long figure graceful in the loose fur coat that she held open with a hand on her waist. Her eyes were gray, colorless, yet dominant as light or fire, and caught by them, Therese could not look away" (Highsmith, 2015:20).

Similar to Therese, Carol is also a dynamic character. However, the change in her character only shows at the very end of the book, when she looks at Therese who agrees to come live with her, to which Carol welcomed warmly with an eager greeting. "Therese watched the slow smile growing, before her arm lifted suddenly, her had waved a quick, eager greeting that Therese had never seen before" (Highsmith, 1952: 249).

Throughout the story, from Therese's eyes, Carol has always been so cold and mysterious. She has flawless manners and can handle herself really well, which explains why she has a successful furniture business. Even when Carol is with Therese, she can always keep her composure and has her guards up very high. She almost never shows any distinct emotion, be it excitement or sadness, it is easy to mistake Carol Aird as a flat character (Highsmith, 1952: 44).

While Therese has no information about her own sexuality, Carol already has some experience with same sex relationships. In the story, Carol has a best friend called Abby, whom she has a brief sexual relationship with (Highsmith, 1952: 112). This brief relationship with Abby is what brings Carol the conflict with

Harge and when she is facing the law later on, because Carol and Abby's relationship prevents Harge from trusting her completely.

It has been previously stated that Carol Aird has a really strong personality. During the time, women were not expected or supposed to have strong personality as it would then be harder to control. Furthermore, because Harge's family already dislikes her for having her own business and not being the soft, submissive woman that they wanted (Highsmith, 1952: 75), Carol's strong personality can be seen as an act of rebellion against all those expectations put on her.

Carol is a very independent woman. Even though at that time it was the norm for wives to rely on their husbands as the sole provider for the family—and Harge is more than capable of doing so—Carol still holds on to her business and maintains her own life without depending on her husband (Highsmith, 1952: 59).

Despite being in a relationship and married to a man, both Therese and Carol are lesbian women. Highsmith stated that Therese is a character based on her own self as a lesbian, depicting her real life experiences while she was working at a department store. Carol is also a lesbian woman. Despite being married to a man, Highsmith created Carol as an case in point for lesbian women who were forced to marry men in order to “save their dignity” and avoid prosecution for being lesbians (Goldberg, 2010: par. 7).

4.1.2.2. Antagonist

The antagonist characters in this story are Richard Semco, Harge Aird, and the society that the protagonists are living in. This includes the homophobic and

heteronormative nature of the society, the social conventions, the roles applied to each gender and sex as well as the laws and policies regarding sexuality in that era.

Richard Semco is Therese “boyfriend”. In the story, Richard is depicted as seemingly nice but secretly manipulative towards Therese. Later in the story, Richard tries to manipulate Therese into staying in the relationship with and marry him. Richard also tries to persuade Therese into thinking that her love for Carol is not real and valid.

Similar to the rest of the people during that period, Richard condemns Therese’s relationship with Carol and is generally homophobic. There are moments where Richard explicitly despises and invalidates Therese’s feelings for Carol. "Fall in love with a girl? Of course not! My God, you haven't, have you?" (Highsmith, 1952:56). Richard even thinks that Carol and Therese’s relationship is a crime by saying “I’ll tell you one thing, I think your friend knows what she's doing. I think she's committing a crime against you.” (Highsmith, 1952: 89). In this dialogue, it is clear that Richard is homophobic, because he sees homosexuality as a crime that deserves to be punished by law.

Richard is trying to conform to the culture of domesticity around him. He really wants to marry Therese. His desire to marry Therese is what makes him slightly manipulative and toxic, because he will purposely make Therese feel guilty and continue being compassionate to him. He also keeps trying to invalidate Therese’s feelings towards Carol so that Therese will keep thinking that she loves him when she actually never does.

“She knew Richard meant to show her an ideal life in theirs, to remind her that they might live together the same way one day. She hated it, and any other night she might have protested, but the compassion for Richard was still in her, dragging after it an amorphous wake of guilt and necessity to atone,” (Highsmith, 1952: 123).

However, Richard is not always so nice to Therese. There is a moment when Therese spends the day with her male friend. That event makes Richard furious and makes Therese realize that maybe Richard is, too, like the other men who want a submissive girl who loves him.

“Richard was looking at her stonily, resentfully, and Therese thought, it surely couldn’t be only this he was so resentful about. He resented the fact that she wasn’t and never could be what he wished her to be, a girl who loved him passionately and would love to go to Europe with him. A girl like herself, with her face, her ambitions, but a girl who adored him,” (Highsmith, 1952: 122).

Another antagonist is Harge Aird, Carol’s ex-husband. He is the epitome of what the society at that time defines a masculine man. Harge and Carol gets married when they are young. He claims that he loves Carol but judging from the way Carol speaks about him and why they gets married “I think he picked me out like a rug for his living room, and he made a bad mistake.” (Highsmith, 1952: 112), it does not seem to be true. Based on what Carol says, Carol implies that she feels Harge sees her as a mere decoration, not because he actually loves her. This may be caused by Carol’s physical beauty and good manners.

Carol herself believes that Harge does not marry her because of love, but because he is forced. She explains that "It's not love. It's a compulsion. I think he wants to control me. I suppose if I were a lot wilder but never had an opinion on anything except his opinion-- I've never done anything to embarrass him socially,

and that's all he cares about really" (Highsmith, 1952: 112). The compulsion that Carol talks about may refer to the pressure from society for couples to get married early to avoid being taken as undesirable or expired by society. Carol also states that she never embarrasses him socially, which shows that she can keep a good manner. Carol's manners and physical beauty may be the only things that make Harge ask her to marry him, even though neither of them feels love for each other.

4.1.3. Plot

Lesbian pulp fiction has a distinct plot formula. The beginning of the story is the introduction of the lesbian women. One of them is femininely presented, which is represented by Therese in *The Price of Salt*. The other is more masculinely presented, which is Carol. Both characters are then supposed to fall in love with each other, which Carol and Therese do.

The middle of lesbian pulp fiction is when the conflict emerges. The conflict in lesbian pulp fiction usually separates the two women. In *The Price of Salt*, the conflict is Carol's divorce and the risk of losing custody, which forced her and Therese to separate.

The ending of lesbian pulp fiction is usually with both women separated permanently, usually caused by mental illness, suicide, or one of the two women realizing that she is heterosexual. However, Highsmith gave Therese and Carol a happy ending together, despite the format of lesbian pulp fictions being tragic for one or both of them. *The Price of Salt* ends with Therese accepting Carol's invitation to live together.

There are a couple of reasons why tragic endings for lesbians in lesbian pulp fictions were necessary for both the male authors and the male readers at that time. Dan Bryan wrote an article entitled *Lesbian Pulp Fiction: the 1950s Phenomenon* for American History USA about how a heterosexual ending is important to protect the author, the publishing company, and the book from being censored and prosecuted. According to Bryan, in early 1950's the regulations regarding censorship were so strict that authors would often have to change the endings to avoid censorship. Authors also would avoid giving homosexual characters happy endings because they did not want to receive prosecution as a result of being labeled as "gay/lesbian authors" (Bryan, 2013: par. 21). This particular reason is why *The Price of Salt* was initially published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan.

The second reason being how, according to Bryan, lesbian pulp fiction appealed to heterosexual male solely because of the overly explicit and pornographic scenes in the novels, and not as representations of lesbian women. Bryan stated that since the successful and generic lesbian pulp fiction novels were written by and targeted for heterosexual men, lesbian pulp fiction novels that were written by and targeted for female audience were the minority, because they cannot sell as well (Bryan, 2013: par 16). From this phenomenon, it can be inferred that the more acceptable image of lesbian women was only for pornographic purposes and not as actual human beings with complex relationships, which shows how homophobic the society was at that time (Retrieved from www.americanhistoryusa.com on July 18th 2019).

There are 4 types of conflict that the writer will analyze in this paper; man against self, man against man, and man against society.

4.1.3.1. Man against self

The man against self conflict that the writer will analyze from the novel is Therese's struggle with discovering and accepting her own sexuality.

Therese already has feelings towards the same sex ever since she is a kid. However, throughout the novel, even when Carol is present and Therese is so madly in love with her, Therese still struggles to truly accept her sexuality. This struggle is proved by how much doubt Therese is having when she needed to talk about her sexuality or when she is deciding to act on something.

“”Were you ever in love with a boy?
“A boy?” Richard repeated, surprised.
“Yes.” Perhaps five seconds passed before he said, “No,” in a positive and final tone.
At least he troubled to answer, Therese thought. What would you do if you were, she had the impulse to ask, but the question would hardly serve a purpose. She kept her eyes on the kite. They were both looking at the same kite, but with what different thoughts in their minds.” (Highsmith, 1952: 81).

Therese's doubt in accepting her sexuality is shown in the dialogue above when she tries to indirectly affirm her sexuality by asking Richard if he ever falls in love with another man. The impacts of Therese's struggle with her sexuality will be further explained in the next sub-chapter on the effects of heteronormativity and homophobia.

4.1.3.2. Man against man

The man against man conflicts in the story is the relationships between Therese, Carol, and their male significant others, Richard and Harge. The conflict between Therese and Richard's relationship occurred because of Therese's sexual orientation that Richard cannot accept. Throughout the novel, there are moments where Therese and Richard argue because the love between them is not mutual. Richard will try to dismiss and invalidate Therese's feelings for Carol. Richard repeatedly tells Therese that her love for Carol is not permanent. This can be seen in Richard's dialogues such as "You're going to change your mind, you know." She understood that. It was like a song he kept singing to her" (Highsmith, 1952: 89), or when he gets angry at Therese "You've got a hell of a crush on her," Richard announced, explanatorily and resentfully" (Highsmith, 1952: 88).

The conflicts between Carol and Harge's marriage occur because of several reasons. First, they do not marry because of love. Harge marries Carol because he thinks she will be a good and submissive trophy wife. This can be seen when Carol is explaining to Therese why Harge's family dislikes her.

"I know what they'd like, they'd (re: Harge's family) like a blank they can fill in. A person already filled in disturbs them terribly ... It's not love. It's a compulsion. I think he wants to control me. I suppose if I were a lot wilder but never had an opinion on anything except his opinion—" (Highsmith, 1952: 75)

Second, since Harge knew about Carol's past relationship with Abby, Harge already does not believe that Carol would be faithful to him. This mistrust leads him to hire a private investigator to stalk her and gather proof regarding Carol's sexual

orientation which is the sole reason that she loses the custody over Rindy. This can be seen in the letter that Carol sends to Therese after they separate.

“This morning I was given a private showing of what Harge intended to bring against me. Yes, they have a few conversations recorded--namely Waterloo, and it would be useless to try to face a court with this” (Highsmith, 1952: 148).

4.1.3.3. Man against society

The main man against society conflict in this novel is Homophobia. As lesbian women living in the 1950's in America, Carol and Therese face many cases of homophobia from the society.

Therese may have been a lesbian her whole life but she has only realized it when she meet Carol. In the beginning of the novel, Therese explains how she adored Sister Alicia, the nun who took care of her. This adoration towards Sister Alicia might have been love but since the environment in which Therese is living is very heteronormative and homophobic, Therese has never considered her feelings towards Sister Alicia as love.

Another factor that leads to the late discovery of Therese's sexuality might be the responses from the people closest to her; more specifically, Richard. When Therese finally has the courage to acknowledge her feelings for Carol, Richard goes on and mock her instead of taking her seriously. The readers, however, can see that Therese is serious, as it is the very first time Therese—who is unsure about everything—said that she is very sure of herself.

““You've got a hell of a crush on her," Richard announced, explanatorily and resentfully.

Therese took a deep breath. Should she be simple and say yes, or should she try to explain it? What could he ever understand of it, even if she explained it in a million words?

"Does she know it? Of course she knows it." Richard frowned and drew on his cigarette. "Don't you think it's pretty silly? It's like a crush that schoolgirls get."

"You don't understand," she said. She felt so very sure of herself" (Highsmith, 2015:88).

After meeting Carol for the first time at the department store, Therese has the initiative to send Carol a Christmas card (Highsmith, 1952: 22). The writer considers this as a bold move because Therese trusts her gaydar enough to make the first move on Carol without first knowing virtually anything about her other than her name and address. With the heteronormativity and homophobia that are very restrictive, making a move towards someone from the same sex can be very risky but Therese does that anyway.

This proves that even though Therese is not entirely sure of her sexual orientation yet, the sexual awakening that is her brief meeting with Carol has given her a form of self-identity. It is just the beginning, but sending a Christmas card is a sign that Therese has learned a little bit more about herself and understands what she wants, and finally follows her heart and instinct.

Carol's custody battle with her husband. Being in a homophobic society, Carol already has the court and lawyers against her for being a lesbian. When Carol is on the road trip with Therese, Harge hired a private investigator to stalk them and gather proof that Carol is indeed a lesbian (Highsmith, 1952: 119), strengthening

Harge's suspicion and mistrust based on Carol's past relationship with Abby. Carol loses the custody and Harge gets full custody solely because Carol is a lesbian, disregarding the fact that Harge violates Carol's privacy, has abusive tendencies, an alcoholic, and objectively a worse parent than Carol is. More effects of homophobia and heteronormativity in society will be further explained in the following sub-chapters of this writing.

4.2. Extrinsic Elements

4.2.1. The Effects of Homophobia

4.2.1.1. Lack of understanding of one's own sexual identity and orientation

Homophobia, heteronormativity, combined with the pressure of marrying at a young age create problems for lesbian women at that time, as depicted in the novel. One of the problems is that it may make them a much longer time in discovering and understanding their own sexual identity and orientation. Therese is 19 when she meets Carol and has her moment of sexual awakening. When women are expected to marry at 20 years old, discovering their sexual orientation at 19 years old does not leave enough space to properly understand their own bodies and form a complete identity for themselves.

The lack of sex education for lesbian women people prevents young queer people such as Therese to understand herself because according to her understanding, there is no such thing as girls being romantically and sexually

involved with other girls. She has only noticed it when she realizes that she has fallen in love with and is sexually attracted to Carol.

As explained in the previous chapter, Heteronormativity makes heterosexuality as the only valid form of sexuality, making homosexuality viewed as an abnormality. Even though it is not entirely Richard's fault to have a homophobic nature, Richard's rejection and invalidation towards Therese's sexuality are, in a large scale, the forms of oppression faced by lesbian women at that time.

According to a journal by the Canadian Paediatric Society on adolescent sexual orientation, the significant psychological, social, and medical problems that young queer people have been facing are caused more by the stigmatization of their gender and sexual identities and less by the identities themselves. They stated that during the process of discovering one's sexual orientation, a person may have troubles with understanding theirs. This confusion is caused by several reasons, such as heteronormative society, the stigmas against homosexuality, inaccurate knowledge or lack thereof, as well as the absence of role models and other youth who are going through the same thing (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2008: 619).

As stated by the Canadian Paediatric Society in the previous chapter, Therese's confusion and denial about her own sexuality since she is young will be perfectly understandable, since Therese has gone through all the criteria that Canadian Paediatric Society stated to cause confusion in one's own sexuality. It is even more difficult for Therese to properly acknowledge and understand her sexual

orientation since there is a massive challenge to develop a healthy identity for herself in the situation where she is facing negative stereotypes and prejudices without any support from her family or loved ones. This condition results in Therese's inability to have authority over herself regarding sexuality. Furthermore, it adds more challenges in Therese's process of building a foundation on which she should have been able to build a community, having healthy romantic and sexual relationships, fulfilling her sexual needs, and ultimately, keeping a good mental health condition.

Since Therese is already unable to find any correct information regarding her sexuality (or any sexuality in general, for that matter), the situation becomes significantly harder to understand for her, because as far as she is concerned, she is just having feelings that she knows she should not. This is why collecting accurate and adequate information regarding one's sexuality is important, because not only does it help one to learn the physical parts of sex, it also helps to understand how to take care of oneself and to make choices that represent who they are and what they believe in.

4.2.1.2. Discriminative laws and unjust treatment in court

Carol is the character in the novel that receives direct impacts of homophobia in the United States court. In the novel, it is mentioned that Carol has a childhood best friend named Abby. Carol and Abby have had a brief sexual and romantic relationship, as explained by Carol; "I knew I was in love with Abby. I don't know why not call it love, it had all the earmarks" (Highsmith, 1952: 113). If there is a

law legalizing gay marriage in 1950's New York, there will be a rather good chance that Carol and Abby might end together, but there is not.¹

The illegality of homosexuality was one of the main issues that queer people face during that time. Illegal same-sex marriage means homosexual couples can never marry no matter how long they have been together. Furthermore, Liv Taylor wrote in an article for the *Seattle Times* that the illegality of same-sex marriage prevents committed homosexual couples from accessing things that married heterosexual couples are able to access. For heterosexual couples, when one person dies, the other gets the deceased's Social Security and pension check. Another example is that before same-sex marriage was legalized in all 50 states in 2015, committed homosexual couples were unable to care for each other if one person was chronically ill or recovering from a surgery and needed constant care, because only family members (husband, wife, or children) were allowed to provide constant care up to 12 weeks while still receiving salary, according to the federal law (Taylor, 2007).

The biggest impact of homophobia that Carol has to face is losing the custody of her daughter. The custody battle between Harge and Carol is also the main conflict of the novel. The writer believes that this conflict might be the reason why Highsmith decides to use a pseudonym, because it calls out how unfair and homophobic the court is towards innocent lesbian women.

¹¹ Homosexuality was considered a misdemeanor in New York at that time, with a maximum penalty of 6 months in prison, according to George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World* (1994).

The custody battle between Carol and Harge shows how harsh and unforgiving the stigmas against homosexuals are. Even though Harge does not approve of Carol's career because he thought it made her less of a mother, it was solely Carol's sexual orientation that makes her lose the custody over their daughter, even though Harge has violated her privacy and showed abusive tendencies. In Carol's letter to Therese after they part, Carol explains to Therese how she loses the custody over Rindy.

"I am not even going into court. This morning I was given a private showing of what Harge intended to bring against me. Yes, they have a few conversations recorded--namely Waterloo, and it would be useless to try to face a court with this. I should be ashamed, not for myself oddly enough, but for my own child, to say nothing of not wanting you to have to appear. Everything was very simple this morning--I simply surrendered" (Highsmith, 1952: 148).

Carol's lost custody over Rindy fits the explanation by Penn State University in the previous chapter. Because of her sexuality, Carol is automatically seen an unfit and incompetent parent, regardless of her capability to provide for her child and the amount of attention she can give to Rindy. Full custody is automatically given to the heterosexual parent, which is Harge.

4.2.2. The Effects of Heteronormativity

4.2.2.1. Invisibility and invalidity of lesbian women

Richard's disbelief and mock on Therese's sexuality as explained in the previous chapter opens up a bigger conversation about the invalidation of queer identities. For decades, lesbian women have been invisible and invalidated because of their gender and sexual identities. Phrases like "it's just a phase" or "pray the gay away" have been used as responds to queer people who just come out of the closet. These

negative responses stem from and refer to the popularity of sexual orientation conversion therapies, which according to Douglas C. Haldeman in his journal entitled *The Pseudo-Science of Sexual Orientation Conversion Therapy*, are “therapies designed to change homosexual orientation” (Haldeman, 1999: 1), commonly done by the church (Haldeman, 1999: 2).

Throughout the story, as stated before, the love that Therese feels for Carol is real, intense, and raw. Therese feels more emotions for Carol than for Richard, as can be seen from when Richard is holding Therese’s hand when they are walking; “It would be almost like love, what she felt for Carol, except that Carol was a woman. It was not quite insanity, but it was certainly blissful” (Highsmith, 1952: 29). She experienced feelings such as hope (“Therese wished it. She wished for Carol” (Highsmith, 1952: 51)), love (“Carol, I love you” (Highsmith, 1952: 109)), lust (“I love you, Therese wanted to say again, and then the words were erased by the tingling and terrifying pleasure that spread in waves from Carol's lips over her neck, her shoulders, that rushed suddenly, the length of her body” (Highsmith, 1952: 109)), pain (“For a moment, she felt her body might shatter apart of itself, or might hurl itself through the glass of the long windows across the room” (Highsmith, 1952: 151)), and jealousy (“Therese thought with sudden envy, she could not make Carol laugh like that, but Abby could” (Highsmith, 1952: 49)). However, Therese cannot express it to people other than Carol because to do so would jeopardize Carol’s divorce and her own career. This is the main conflict in the novel. Therese and Carol—and queer people in general, at that time—cannot freely and openly express their love. For Therese, since the beginning, she already

cannot tell Richard about it, and when she does, Richard invalidates her feelings. Even after her relationship with Carol starts, she still cannot tell anyone about it openly.

This isolation and forced invisibility is a reflection of what lesbian women feel at that time. Queer people are terrified of being fired from their job, being bullied in their school, and being abandoned by their surroundings. This fear is also experienced by authors, especially queer authors. It is mentioned that *The Price of Salt* is initially published under the pseudonym Claire Morgan. During the time *The Price of Salt* is being published, Highsmith has just had a massive success with her thriller novel entitled *Stranger on a Train*. Has she published *The Price of Salt* under her real name (Patricia Highsmith), she will receive a massive amount of judgment and prosecution which may have resulted in the failure and sale drop for both *The Price of Salt* and *Stranger on a Train*.

This is a common issue for lesbian youths and adults who are just starting to discover their sexual identity and orientation. According to the Canada Paediatric Society, it is common for queer adults to describe their teenage years as the most isolating years of their lives because of their sexual identity and orientation. They state that during the period of discovering and understanding their sexuality, they are often made to feel ashamed, alienated, and afraid that people will find out. These emotions often impact their mental health, especially their self-esteem and their identity formation process.

As a queer individual, Therese's struggle with her own sexual orientation and herself, including her relationships and her mental health, should not be taken lightly because the writer believes that Therese is a depiction of the millions of lesbian women who are isolated and alienated because of their sexual identity that the Canada Paediatric Society mentioned in the previous chapter.

4.2.2.2. Forced submission and early marriage

One of the first effects of gender roles and homophobia that existed in 1950's America that is shown in Therese is that she is unsure about her feelings for Richard despite being together for several months and having sex several times. This might be one of the conflicts that are caused by the gender roles between men and women at the time. Since the men are responsible to provide for women, the writer believes that it creates a form of ownership that is similar to that of an employer with the employee, or an owner with the slave. Men automatically feel significantly more powerful, and vice versa. Women unconsciously start to feel like they have to do what the men tell them or give what the men want. If they do not, they will feel as if they have been selfish, ungrateful, and disappointed the men. As a result, they will often try to overcompensate for the guilt that the situation causes.

Therese clearly states several times that she does not love Richard and that she is not excited to have a future with him, while Richard is so eager to get married and move into domesticity. In this condition, Richard understands his position as a man well and uses it to try and manipulate Therese to stay in the relationship. Richard does not violently force Therese to stay with him, but he keeps spoiling her, giving her his affection, and introducing her to his family. As a result, Therese

feels guilty for not loving him back and feels like she has to compensate for his feelings, which makes her agree to keep staying with him.

“She knew what he was about to say, that she gave him practically nothing in the way of affection, but he wouldn't say it, because he knew very well that she wasn't in love with him, so why did he really expect her affection? Yet the simple fact that she wasn't in love with him made Therese feel guilty, guilty about accepting anything from him, a birthday present, or an invitation to dinner at his family's, or even his time” (Highsmith, 2015: 31).

It is clear that Therese has given signs of rejection and that Richard understands them. The writer assumes that since the feminist movement that brought up the issue of domestic violence did not start until the 1960, there is fear of getting abused that Therese feels if she decides to leave Richard. Especially because she does state that Richard is better than the other men, Therese might be afraid that if she ever tries to leave him, he will turn to violence. Richard, on the other hand, seems to be aware of this situation, and decides to make the most of it by using Therese to fulfill his needs of affection, sex, and ultimately, a steady future.

Richard's ways of fulfilling those needs are by buying her gifts such as the St. Christopher medallion, (Highsmith, 1952: 12)), showing her attention and affection (Highsmith: 1952: 16), helping her with finding a job at the stage designing by introducing her to his friend (Highsmith, 1952: 12), and consistently coaxing her to marry him by showing her what their life will be (“a shoe clerk and a secretary, happily married on West Twentieth Street, and she knew Richard meant to show her an ideal life in theirs, to remind her that they might live together the same way one day” (Highsmith, 1952: 83)).

From those examples of Richard's treatment and intention towards Therese, it is safe to say that Richard has a need to conform. During the 1930-50s, the rate of marriage in America peaked. Men and women started to get married at a younger age. The literary works did not help either. A lot of authors at the time wrote books that pressure men and women to get married early, comparing them to "products on sale", as explained by Marry Cantwell in the previous chapter (Cantwell, 1988)

Even though it is not Cantwell who popularizes the comparison between people to things that are on sale, that metaphor is planted in society. The suggestion for women and men to get married in their early 20s is problematic because it stops women from pursuing education and career. It is also dangerous for the mental health of the people because if they were single, they would have this fear and anxiety of not being good enough to marry.

Carol also goes through a problem in the form of forced submission and early marriage caused by the gender roles and heteronormativity that is imposed to the people at that time. Understanding that same-sex marriage is illegal, Carol has no other choice than to marry a man. So as expected, Carol married Harge Aird when they both were young, which she explained to Therese during their first lunch together; "At least you're not going to make the same mistake I did, to marry because it was the thing to do when you were about twenty, among the people I knew" (Highsmith, 1952; 45). As explained in the previous section, Carol and Harge do not marry out of love, but merely to fulfill society's expectation.

Harge, who has a business in real-estate, is very influenced by gender roles, so he gives in to the pressure of marrying a woman that he deems inferior to him. He marries Carol, assuming that just because Carol never “embarrassed him socially” (Highsmith, 1952: 112) it means that Carol was a submissive like how women were expected to be at that time. Unfortunately, that is not the case. In the novel, it is not mentioned what job Carol has when she marries Harge, but from examining how badly Harge changes the way he treats Carol as well how much Harge’s family dislikes Carol, the writer assumes that Carol is possibly single when she marries Harge and starts her business after that. Carol briefly explains to Therese about how Harge’s family treats her when they are having a conversation in Carol’s house.

"What do they criticize you for?"

"For having a furniture shop, for instance. But that (re: the criticism) didn't last a year. Then for not playing bridge, or not liking to. They pick out the funny things, the most superficial things."

"They sound horrid."

"They're not horrid. One's just supposed to conform. I know what they'd like, they'd like a blank they could fill in" (Highsmith, 2015:111).

Carol’s description of how Harge’s family has been treating her is a depiction of what is happening to young single girls at the time. They are expected to be a blank slate for the family or husband to fill in and to control. Each man and his family will expect women that are submissive and moldable to fit into their own values and desires. Women with strong personalities such as Carol cannot be shaped or molded. This causes a conflict between Carol and Harge’s family. Carol is not desirable in Harge’s family because she disrupted the family’s expectations, but the

fact that she was already married to Harge make his family angry and so they treats her terribly even though she has done nothing wrong to them.

Another reason why Harge's family despises and constantly criticizes Carol can be because Harge's family sees Carol as a threat to Harge's masculinity and pride. As men are expected to be the superior sex, it is easy for men to see successful career women as threats. In Harge and Carol's case, Harge and his family might have seen Carol as more of a competitor than a partner. Belittling and criticizing Carol can be a way that Harge's family uses to remind her that Harge is still superior and thus, maintaining the family's dignity.

4.2.4. The Impacts of *The Price of Salt*

4.2.4.1. Hope and visibility for lesbian women

The first and most obvious impact is how Highsmith's unconventional and alternative ending gives hope to all of the lesbian women that are reading the novel. Before *The Price of Salt*, even though at that time there were novels and fictional works that told the story of lesbian romance, lesbian pulp fiction authors had to give the characters terrible endings to avoid censorship and prosecution, as stated before. This representation has made lesbian women very hopeless about their future for a very long period of time, because they feels and knows that no matter what happens they will never be able to marry the person that they love and essentially, would never have the future that they want just because of their sexuality.

By giving them a happy ending, Highsmith who is a lesbian, has sparked a little fire through the projection of herself and her sexuality in *Therese Belivet*. This spark contributes to the desire of lesbian women to fight and demand for equal rights.

4.2.2.2. Lesbian and queer presence in literature and films

As the first pre-liberation lesbian novel that has a happy ending, *The Price of Salt* has influenced and encouraged many authors to also give their lesbian characters happy endings. One example is the novel *Desert of the Heart* by Jane Rule, published in 1964. Rule also gives the main lesbian couple in *Desert of the Heart* a happy ending. Since homosexuality was still frowned upon in 1964—well over a decade after *The Price of Salt* was published in 1952—Rule, who was working as a lecturer at the University of British Columbia, is threatened of losing her job for writing a lesbian novel.

After that, up until now, there are many other novels with happy endings for their queer characters that follow Highsmith's footsteps and are now considered the best lesbian novels of all time. Several examples are *Giovanni's Room* by Chavisa Woods (published in 1956) that highlighted the fear that queer people felt of loving anybody, *Maurice* by E.M. Foster (published in 1971) that told the story of gay men and was named as “the original gay romance”, and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (published in 1982) that highlighted the empowerment and perseverance of lesbian women (source: *The 25 Best LGBT Novels of All Time*, retrieved on June 25th 2019 from www.advocate.com).

The Price of Salt also has a major impact because of the movie adaptation. In 2015, director Todd Haynes directed the movie adaptation of *The Price of Salt* entitled *Carol*, starring actresses Rooney Mara as Therese and Cate Blanchett as Carol. The movie receives such high praises, earning the title of Best LGBT Film of All Time by the British Film Institute and one of the most iconic lesbian movie along with *Blue is the Warmest Color* (2013) (source: *The 30 Best LGBTQ+ Films of All Time*, retrieved on June 25th 2019 from www.bfi.org.uk).

4.2.2.3. Portrayal of lesbian women

The second impact is how *The Price of Salt* changes the representation of lesbians in literature and how they are viewed by society. As explained before, prior to the gay liberation and lesbian feminist movement, homosexual relationships are most commonly seen as an illness because of religion. However, literature, specifically lesbian pulp fiction novels, also plays a big role on how society shapes its views and understanding about lesbian relationships. Since it has been explained how lesbian pulp fiction novels are mostly written by heterosexual male authors for heterosexual male audience, the authors usually take a more pornographic approach to the story to keep the sales up. The writer believes that the pornographic contents in lesbian pulp fictions contributes to the stigma that lesbians are inherently pornographic, deviant, and taboo, because they are one of the very limited sources of information regarding lesbianism. Furthermore, because of the portrayal of femininely presenting lesbians as damsel in distress and masculine presenting lesbians as incomplete men, as well as the tragic endings of lesbian relationships depicted in lesbian pulp fictions, the readers and society see lesbian women as a

joke or a phase. This assumption is depicted by the novel in the scenes where Richard calls Therese's feelings for Carol silly "Don't you think it's pretty silly? It's like a crush that schoolgirls get" (Highsmith 1952: 88).

The reason why *The Price of Salt* is one of the most groundbreaking lesbian pulp fictions is because Highsmith shifts the focus of the novel from the common pornographic contents to a softer, more realistic, and more humane depiction of lesbian relationship. The conflict of the novel ever calls out the injustice and homophobia that the United States' court has towards lesbian women.

4.2.2.4. Changes in the treatment of lesbian women

By humanizing queer love and showing that it is not at all perverse or pornographic, Highsmith has also helped lesbian parents to gain justice in terms of custody battles during divorces, even though there are several states that are still prejudiced towards lesbian parents.²

Since Highsmith published *The Price of Salt*, there have been changes and reforms in the familial structure in the United States. Gayle Rubin in *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* offered the idea to "draw the line" between good and bad sex. This "line" essentially separates sexual behaviors that should be acceptable from those that should not. This means that only sex acts on the "good side" will be considered morally complex, and all sex acts on the "bad side" are considered repulsive and purely pornographic. According to Rubin, the

² At least 6 states in the United States still automatically presume that gay or lesbian parent is unfit for custody (American Bar Association, 2017)

standards of how acceptable a certain sex act should not lie on gender or sexuality, but should be based on whether or not said sex act is safe, healthy, mature, and legal (Rubin, 1984: 152).

Because of the sex conflicts within the last several decades, some sexual behaviors have made their way from the bad side of the line to the good side of the line. Before, almost all acts of homosexuality were on the bad side of the line. By writing and presenting homosexuals as human with depth, conscience, maturity, and morals like what Highsmith did with *The Price of Salt*, society has begun to acknowledge that some forms of homosexual erotic behaviors might be on the “good side” of the line, such as the sex acts that Therese and Carol experienced, all of which include a full range of human emotions and interactions.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Patricia Highsmith's *The Price of Salt* portrays the life of a lesbian couple during the 1950's in the United States. The story features two lesbian women, Therese Belivet and Carol Aird. Therese in *The Price of Salt* is portrayed as a nineteen-year-old girl working at a department store. Unhappy and sexually confused, Therese falls in love with Carol Aird, a customer at the department store. The two then start a relationship and face many challenges caused by their sexual orientation together.

The analysis of this thesis is divided into two aspects, which are intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic analysis focuses on the plot, characters, and conflicts of the story, which is essential in analyzing the kinds of challenges that Therese and Carol face because of their sexual orientation. The extrinsic analysis focuses how Highsmith created the characters and conflicts to depict the real-life struggles and situation of lesbian women in the United States at that time. In addition, the extrinsic analysis also explores the impacts of *The Price of Salt* as a literary work on the lesbian feminist movement, as well as on society's perception and treatment towards lesbian women in general.

The theme analysis of *The Price of Salt* is sexual orientation and identity. It explores how Sapphic themes such as *The Price of Salt* was very popular at that time. The plot analysis of this thesis explores how *The Price of Salt*'s happy ending is a groundbreaking and revolutionary. As the first lesbian pulp fiction novel that

has a happy ending, *The Price of Salt* has a massive impact in triggering proper lesbian representation in American literature, giving hope to lesbian women, and ultimately, motivate the lesbian feminist movement.

The characters analyzed in this thesis are the four main characters in the novel; Therese Belivet, Carol Aird, Richard Semco (Therese's boyfriend), and Harge Aird (Carol's ex-husband). Richard Semco and Harge Aird play an important role in representing the challenges of homophobia, heteronormativity, and gender roles that Therese and Carol face as lesbian women and as a couple.

The conflicts experienced by both Therese and Carol are basically caused by their sexual orientation. Therese's conflict involves the invalidation of her feelings and sexuality by her boyfriend, as well as an internal struggle in finding her self-identity. The main conflict in the story is faced by Carol, who lost custody of her daughter solely because of her sexual orientation. Unjust treatment in court is a major form of systematic homophobia towards lesbian women in the United States.

The extrinsic analysis of this thesis explores the effects of homophobia and heteronormativity faced by lesbian women in the United States as depicted by the characters in *The Price of Salt*, as well as the impact of *The Price of Salt* as a novel for the lesbian community.

There are several effects of homophobia, gender roles, and heteronormativity on the lives of lesbian women that are depicted in the novel. There is a lack of understanding of one's own sexual identity and orientation, which

is depicted by Therese and her internal conflicts regarding her sexual orientation. Forced submission and the obligation to marry early is depicted by Therese, Carol, and their relationships with their opposite-sex partners (Richard and Harge). Therese is pressured to marry Richard soon, even though she is not ready, while Carol faces backlash from Harge's family for not being submissive and regrets her decision to marry early. Richard's disbelief towards Therese's sexual orientation is a depiction of the invisibility and invalidation of lesbian identity. The discriminative laws and unjust treatment in court is represented by Carol and her loss of custody because of her sexual orientation.

The Price of Salt has a major impact in changing lesbian representation for the better. The happy ending in *The Price of Salt* gives hope and visibility for lesbians couples in the United States. Furthermore, *The Price of Salt* encourages other authors to follow its path and write happy endings for lesbian characters in novels and movies, thus pushing forward lesbian and queer presence in literature and films. The realistic depiction of *The Price of Salt's* lesbian characters and their romantic relationship also fixes how lesbian fictional characters are portrayed in literary works. As a result, lesbian women are being treated better in real life, because they are no longer seen as deviance, obscene, or perverted.

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