

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **1.1 Background of the Study**

The existence of LGBT groups in the community is considered to have caused controversy because this group has a deviation of sexual orientation. LGBT people sometimes do not get support from various parties causing social discrimination to this group. LGBT and homosexuality issues are finally considered by most people to be negative and forbidden. Seif (2017) in his research also shows some survey data related to public opinion in the United States regarding homosexuality where there are still many people who consider homosexuality as a taboo and a threat. This conservative community's behavior is caused by the dominant religious beliefs there which states that only heterosexuality is normal. This is because most people have cultural values that uphold heteronormativity. For instance, a person with a male body must act in a masculine manner and have a sexual orientation towards women as the opposite sex. Heterosexuality is a natural obligation of every human being. Thus, what is different from the natural obligation is deviated and not in accordance with the norm.

Showalter (cited in Prajayanti et. al., 2015) explained that heterosexuality is a moral standard that prevails in the Victorian era that was also influenced by religious beliefs. It makes men and women practicing gender standards that are considered appropriate. This condition is inseparable from the influence of the church and society that determines an appropriate sexual behavior. Moreover, the

law at that time also prohibited sexual relations between men or a same-sex relationship so that all forms of homosexual behavior would be sanctioned. It is similar to McCabe et al. (2011) that explained that religious background influences sexual behavior, especially in youths. The major religions belief tends to prohibit non-marital and non-heterosexual sexual behavior, and it is used as moral guidance for society. He also explained that social normative plays a role in shaping sexual decision making, including decisions about engaging unusual behaviors. Therefore, all forms of sexual behavior that deviate from the heteronormative values will make the subject feel discriminated against, even considered as a "sin" in religion. This assumption leads to unpleasant treatments which includes the phenomenon of homophobia, discrimination, and deprivation of citizens' rights for LGBT people. While homosexuals, as if they do not have sexual rights because automatically sexual activity for them exists outside of marriage and is certainly distorted. Discrimination and guilt that are instilled in homosexuals cause them to cover up their sexual orientation, with the result that further mental stress is more severe. This makes them eventually choose to live a lie, sometimes to get married and have children, but are forced to live a "double" life, openly as a heterosexual, and secretly as a homosexual (Prajayanti et al., 2015). Homosexuality is found in many societies in world. Even so, it is still considered a disgrace and threat, even though it does not harm others. Although support for gays and lesbians is quite increasing in America and is starting to be accepted, yet the stigma remains. McCabe et al. explained that 85% of 7,261 lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders encountered verbal abuse because of their sexual orientation, 40% encountered

physical abuse, and 19% encountered physical assault. This shows that heterosexual behavior is still considered as the norm adopted by the society, and anyone who deviates from the norm is at risk of discrimination (McCabe et al., 2011).

The struggle in finding identity is packaged by the author into an interesting story in the graphic novel *Bingo Love*. *Bingo Love* is a graphic novel written by Tee Franklin, Jenn St-Onge, and Joy San (2018). This graphic novel presents a series of complicated love life stories, which cannot be separated from real life problems, as well as revealing the inconsistencies of self-identity to the characters in the *Bingo Love* graphic novel. The original edition of this novel previously won the Queer Press Grant in 2017 via Kickstarter.

The phenomenon that appears in the graphic novel *Bingo Love* is the same-sex romance represented by the characters, Hazel Johnson and Mari McCray. In this story, Mari McCray has a same-sex sexual orientation that she only discovered when she met Hazel who was originally a heterosexual. The fluidness in Hazel and Mari's identity made the story more interesting. On the other hand, Hazel had a normal heterosexual life with a man who was an air force pilot. However, the conflict began when Hazel was reunited with Mari who made her love life change.

In this story, Hazel is portrayed as a woman who has unfixed identity. The love story she lived was even more complicated when she was in a relationship with a man, but her true feelings were for a girlfriend she liked when she was thirteen, Mari. As a woman, Hazel still tries to be a normal woman by having relationships with a man and having a family. The friendship that exists between Hazel and Mari

and her household conflicts further supports her attitude to adore fellow women. These factors are the supporting factors for Hazel in determining her identity.

Lesbians usually have the opposite appearance and behavior even though they are both women. A woman who look masculine and act like a male is known as 'butch'. Conversely, lesbians who are feminine-looking, similar to women in common and dependent on her partners are called 'femme' (Levitt and Hiestand, 2005). The relationship between butch and femme lesbians can be said to be similar to the traditional relationship of male and female partners who share protection and compassionate toward each other.

The fluidness of self-identity in Hazel is an interesting thing to analyze by using queer theory. Queer theory is a theory that discusses the person's identity. Identity is not a permanent thing. It can be determined by interpreting the performance through lesbian conversation, appearance and physical, and sexual activity. In Queer's theory, sexuality is a series of actions, not natural things that are obtained by every human being (Butler, 1990). Hazel as a woman has a lesbian desire that shows sexuality is not natural, but it can change. In other words, queer concentrates on mixing up traditional assumptions regarding supposedly inevitable combinations of attributes of the self. For instance, someone with a feminine gender like Mari McCray can combine her identity as a masculine who is interested in other feminine gender, who are sexually as women.

In analyzing the novel, the researcher also uses previous research that is related to the topic. The first is titled *Lesbianism in Victorian Narrative Implied by*

Sarah Waters' *Fingersmith* written by Elok Rizqiyah Prajayanti (2015) that discussed the representation of ideal women in the Victorian era, the description of lesbianism, and the ideology in the novel by showing lesbian identity. This research showed that there are several regulations that describe the ideal woman in the Victorian era. According to her, the picture of lesbianism could be seen from being passive to active in society where the main female characters gained freedom through their relationship. Furthermore, there is an agenda to give a voice toward lesbianism through this novel. The second research titled "Between Butch/Femme: On the Performance of Race, Gender, and Sexuality in a YouTube Web Series" written by Faithe Day (2017) aims to find out how the performance of gender and sexuality is featured in the Black queer web series on YouTube. This research focuses on the viewpoint of the viewers, their responses and comments to the series shows. The third research titled *Ava's Gender Performativity in Lili Wilkinson's Pink* written by Vanny Bintang Pertiwi (2017) shows that there is transformation of identity via daily performance of the female character. The process of negotiating used by the female character to match the heteronormative values in the society. These negotiations are similar to those carried out by the main female characters in *Bingo Love* despite the conflict that arise from the society. One of the characters can act as masculine or known as 'butch', but this identity is not permanent given that her body as a whole is a woman who is also limited by her physical abilities. The last research titled *An Analysis of Devi in the Graphic Novels of India: A Feminist Case Study* written by Supriya Banerjee (2018). The focus of this research is on the representation of the main female character, Devi, a woman who has the

super abilities. This female character is often described as a tough, fierce, and fearless woman. Her physical appearance is depicted following 'the male gaze' by wearing tight costumes that show her curves. Both of these studies both use graphic novels, but differ in analyzing the research issues.

Those previous studies contributed in determining the focus of analysis in this study. Pratiwi's research focuses on physical appearance and behavior as a form of performativity. The same thing was found in Day's research which focused on performance and policing identity plays in the black lesbian community. In his interview, he explained that lesbian gender identity is formed through mannerisms, style of dress, and interactions with other women. Whereas Prajayanti's research focuses more on the views of normative people towards lesbians in the Victorian period and how the main characters oppose normative gender construction with their lesbian bodies.

Based on the explanation above, *Bingo Love* graphic novel written by Tee Franklin, Jenn St-Onge, and Joy San in this study can be examined using Judith Butler's theory. Queer theory is used to determine the identity of the person in the object of this study. This theory generally speaks of the absence of a permanent inner identity. A person's identity can be influenced by social and cultural factors. It is also an act that is repeated.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Based on the background of the study above, thus the statement of the problems that can be formulated is as follow:

- How is gender identity portrayed by the main female characters through their performativity in the *Bingo Love* graphic novel?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

Based on the statement of the problem, the objective of the study is as follow:

1. To describe gender identity portrayed by the main female characters through their performativity in the *Bingo Love* graphic novel.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This research is expected to provide theoretical and practical benefits including the following:

- a. Theoretically

This research is expected to be able to provide input for the development of literary science, especially in the study of gender. For the readers to be able to understand and provide knowledge on gender in accordance with the theory used.

- b. Practically

This research is expected to be useful for readers to understand the gender performativity used by the researcher in analyzing the novel.

### **1.5 Definitions of Key Terms**

Gender performativity : One of the important elements in Queer's theory and was popularized by Judith Butler (Maimunah 2012)

- Queer : A term that refers to sexual orientation that is outside the "normal" or heterosexual category (Maimunah 2012).
- Lesbian : A term that refers to the third gender that promises to transcend the binary restriction on sex imposed by the system of compulsory heterosexuality (Butler 1999, p.26).
- Gender identity : It is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo (Butler 1990, p.270)
- Graphic Novel : The graphic novel is a publication format for comics which rose to prominence in the 1990s. It generally refers to a comic which is published in its entirety, as opposed to serialized comic books which will later be collected into trade paperbacks (Kukkonen 2013, p.4).