

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

As the homosexual minorities, gay men and lesbians in America still face discrimination in the military; in obtaining jobs and housing; in using public facilities, such as hotels and taverns; in areas of family law such as the right to marry, retain custody of their children, adopt children, or provide foster care; as victims of police harassment and violent hate crimes; and in AIDS-related discrimination (Tyson 320).

Not only gay men and lesbians who still face discrimination in America, but also transgender people, especially female to male transgender, still faces many kinds of discrimination. Transgendered people are individuals of any age of sex whose appearances, personal characteristics, or behaviors differ from stereotypes about how men and women are supposed to be (Currah 1). A report said that transgendered people often become the object of oppression because of their gender nonconformity. It is also said that they often be discriminated in public space, such as in public accommodations, hotel and restaurants; being denied employment, fired from their jobs, and often being harassed, beaten, even murdered because of their choice for being transgender. The report also said that on average, one transgender is murdered in the United States each month; 60% of all transgender people have been victimized by hate violence (Currah iii).

One of the examples of queer people is butch. There are many negative myths about butch. Along with other homosexual minorities, they are assumed to be sick, evil, or both and it is therefore in their “nature” to be sexual predators, to molest children, and to corrupt youth by “recruiting” them to become homosexual (Tyson 320).

Butch is a lesbian who adopt male attire, mannerism and sexual role. Some of the butches take hormone therapy, have breast reduction surgery, and pass as a man. As a butch, she appears in masculine dress, mannerisms, speech patterns and social interactions. Thus, she belongs to the queer people. The word *queer* is used to describe an inclusive category for referring to a common political or cultural ground shared by gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and all people who consider themselves, for whatever reasons, nonstraight (Tyson 336). As queer people, butches challenge the social construction about the traditional gender role of what they do and be. Therefore, butches face a lot of oppression because of heteronormativity. This idea is applied in the novel that is going to be analyzed.

Heteronormativity is based on the belief that there are only two distinct and opposite categories of human beings, male and female, and that the only natural or normal personal relationships are those between two people of the opposite sex (Heteronormativity Online). Additionally, heteronormativity creates roles and norms for each sex, while asserting that a person’s sex, gender identity and gender roles should follow to either all-male or all-female norms (Heteronormativity Online). These norms may be explicit, implicit or implied. People are not permitted to cross the standard that is created by heteronormativity.

Heteronormativity is reflected in widespread social institutions and social policies that legitimize and advantage heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as basic and natural within society (Heteronormativity Online).

Heteronormativity is used to describe the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and bisexuality (Currah iv). This assumption leads to homophobia, the irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. It is this fear that enforces sexism as well as heterosexism (Currah iii).

The issue of heteronormativity towards butches can be found in the novel entitled *Stone Butch Blues*. This novel is written by an American author, Leslie Fienberg. The topic of the novel is about the discrimination against minorities in United State in 1950s until 1970s. The novel is about a butch named Jess Goldberg, who tries to find her place among the heterosexual community. As a butch, she is always questioned for entire of her life by people around her and by herself whether she is a man or woman. Common people may easily be able to answer that simple question, but for her, the answer of that question is vague. In fact, Jess Goldberg is physically a woman. However, unlike an ordinary woman who supposed to be feminine, she adopts masculine qualities such as wearing male outfit, having a very short haircut, having breasts reduction surgery and taking male hormones to grow beard and harden her muscle to have more masculine appearance. Her act of altering her body is not simply claimed that she is a man because she had no penis and does not change her sexual organ. Living

as a butch, Goldberg has to struggle to survive through many kinds of complexities; frequent lost employment, difficulties in maintaining relationships, police harassment, and many kind of discrimination in her community. Although this novel is not best seller, this novel has won the American Library Association Gay & Lesbian Book Award and the Lambda Literary Award in 1994 (Transgenderwarrior Online). The novel receives a wildly popular response in the United States and is translated into Chinese, German, Italian, Dutch, Turkish, Slovenian and Hebrew language (Transgenderwarrior Online).

Stone Butch Blues is a novel that is written by Leslie Feinberg. It is published in 1993. There are two novels she has written so far. The first is *Stone butch Blues*, and the second is *Drag King Dreams*. Instead of being a novelist, she is also noted as an activist and a speaker on transgender issues. She is known as the author of non-fiction books entitled *Trans Liberation*, *Trans Gender Warriors* and *Transgender Liberation* (Transgenderwarrior Online). As an activist, Feinberg is also noted as a national leader of Workers World Party, and a managing editor of Workers World newspaper (Transgenderwarrior Online). She is well-known in the U.S. and many other parts of the world as an activist who works to help build a strong union between the lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans communities.

The story of *Stone Butch Blues* is closely related to Leslie Feinberg's personal experience as a butch. As a female to male transgender, she tries to share some of her experiences of being a butch in Buffalo, a small city near New York before and after the Stonewall Rebellion. The Stonewall Rebellion is known as

the mark of revival of Gay Liberation Movement that began in 1969. In this rebellion, two thousand strong gay and lesbian patrons of Greenwich Village's Stonewall Inn bar, during two nights of rioting, finally responded to police brutality by fighting back. This momentous event has great symbolic significance because it marks the turning point when gay men and women renounced their victim status and stood up, collectively, for their rights as American citizens (Tyson 320).

Based on description above, the writer considers that it is interesting to analyze Leslie Fienberg's novel entitled *Stone Butch Blues* because the novel shows how the condition of America before and after the Stonewall Revolution. At that time, homosexual and other non-straight communities are often be discriminated. The novel tries to exhibit those minority groups as the victim of oppression in the form of heteronormativity.

Another reason why the writer takes the study of heteronormativity towards butches is that there are still a few studies that are done in discussing butches as the main subject. The novel *Stone Butch Blues* gives a good example of how the society marginalizes queer and homosexual people such as butches. The novel also gives a brief description about butch's life from the butch perspective.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The study will finally come out with two main points to be discussed within the analysis:

1. What are the factors that influence Jess Goldberg to become a butch portrayed in Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*?
2. How is Jess Goldberg's struggles to negotiate heteronormativity presented in Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*?

1.3 Objective of the Study

Based on the statement of the problems, the writer comes to the aims of the study:

1. To portray the factors that influence Jess Goldberg's to become a butch.
2. To figure out Jess Goldberg's struggle to conform to heteronormativity as presented in Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The writer's expectation of studying *Stone Butch Blues* is to bring understanding about heteronormativity that bring about oppressions toward butches as experienced by the main character of the novel, Jess Goldberg. Related to the topic and the title of the study, *Heteronormativity towards Butch in Leslie Fienberg's Stone Butch Blues*, the main point of the study is to present the oppression against butches as a result of heteronormativity. The study also aims to portray the complexity of being differently gendered as experienced by butches. Furthermore, the writer hopes that this study can give any contribution to the study of literature in general, especially in English Department of Airlangga University.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

In order to gain comprehensive analysis, a scope and limitation will be applied in analyzing the novel. In discussing *Stone Butch Blues*, many issues and conflicts can be analyzed. However, the writer considers that by attempting to analyze the whole issues, the study will probably become unfocused. Therefore, despite those interesting issues, the writer decides to limit the study in the discussion of the heteronormativity that marginalized butch. The study is also limited in the discussion of butches experiences in negotiating heteronormativity, not including the discussion about femmes that are usually related to butches in personal relationship. Moreover, the complexity of butch gender identity is analyzed by using queer theory. The limitation on the analysis is expected not to narrow the analysis, but gain a deeper analysis.

1.6 Theoretical Background

The point of the study is about the complexity of butch identity as portrayed in Leslie Fienberg's novel entitled *Stone Butch Blues*. To analyze the issue in the novel, the writer uses queer theory concerning with heteronormativity and homophobia against queer people, especially butches.

Butches can be categorized as queer people. The word *queer* is used as an umbrella term, or an inclusive category for referring to a common political or cultural ground shared by gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and all people who consider themselves, for whatever reasons, nonstraight (Tyson 336). Butch have been theorized and reclaimed, along with drag and certain transgendered

practices, as transgressive, queer and examples of gender performativity in action (Eves 2). Their role challenges the traditional gender opposition. Therefore, a lot of oppressions appear as a result of heteronormativity. In this study, the form of heteronormativity and the struggle to negotiate it, will be analyzed deeper by using this theory.

1.7 Method of the Study

1.7.1 Technique of Data Collecting

The technique of data collecting is applied in certain steps. The first step is library research. In analyzing Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, library research is used to gain adequate information about queer theory especially on heteronormativity toward butches. It is applied by collecting important information from printed materials such as books, dictionaries, and critics. Collecting information from internet is also applied to gain critics, reviews and commentaries toward the issue in the novel included printed materials related heteronormativity and queer theory about butch identity. Afterwards, the next step is close reading to explore certain data in order to understand the content of the novel and the meaning behind it. The third step is classification. The writer will make the classification of the data to differentiate the kind of the problem and determine the data that can be used in the analysis.

1.7.2 Technique of Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis is used as the technique of data analysis. It is applied to give descriptive explanation of the problem found in the text through the

dialogues, events, and narrations in the text. In addition, the writer will use some quotations from a variety of sources to validate and support the analysis.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

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| 1. Butch | Masculine-appearing lesbian. |
| 2. Stone butch | Butch who does not let her body to be touched by other people. |
| 3. Femme | Feminine-appearing lesbian. |
| 4. Lesbian | Woman whose sexual orientation is toward other woman. |
| 5. Transgender woman | Woman who adopts masculine appearances, personal characteristics, or behaviors through hormone therapy and breast reduction surgery. |
| 6. Homophobia | The irrational fear or hatred of homosexuals, homosexuality, or any behavior or belief that does not conform to rigid sex role stereotypes. |
| 7. Queer | An inclusive category for referring to a common political or cultural ground shared by gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and all people who consider themselves, for whatever reasons, nonstraight. |

8. Homosexuality Same sex sexual orientation
9. Heterosexuality Opposite sex sexual orientation