

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE RIVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

In analyzing novel as a literary work, it is important to use an approach to make the study clear and specific. In this subchapter, the writer will points out the theories that will be used to analyze Leslie Fienberg's novel entitled *Stone Butch Blues*. The writer uses queer theory to explore what are the forms of heteronormativity experienced by butches as portrayed in the novel, and how they negotiate the heteronormativity.

2.1.1 Queer Theory

One of the theories that is used in the study is queer theory. Yet, since there is no postmodern theorist that specifically discussed about butches as the maintopic, the writer uses queer theory in general and not specific. In order to understand queer theory clearly, it is important to comprehend basic premises of it.

Queer theory is radically antiessentialist theory, arguing that everything – desire, sexual norms and gender, certainly – is interpretable as social construction and open to challenge and change (Hall 107). As stated in *Critical Theory Today*, the use of the term *queer* is adopted by some lesbians and gay men as ‘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). There are certain forms of sexual expression that were excluded and marginalized such as butch-femme lesbian couples because they 'resemble heterosexual couples in terms of clothing, grooming and personal style' (Tyson 337). Butches, also known as "he-she", may be described as wearing men's clothes, playing a dominant role in relationships, or adopting other traditionally male or masculine qualities whereas femme lesbians would embody an exaggeration of the traditional roles of women and femininity (Yep 18). In other words, it can be said that the term *butch* means a lesbian who adopt male attire, mannerism, and sex role; as opposed with *femme*, a lesbian who adopt female attire, mannerism, and sex role. Therefore, as Tyson said, they were criticized for 'reproducing the same power imbalance generally found in heterosexual relationship' (337). In Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, the main character, Jess Goldberg, is a butch. The writer categorizes her as a queer instead of a lesbian because as a lesbian, she adopts the heterosexual value usually used by heterosexual couples. Butch plays the dominant role in relationship, while the femme is the passive one. It causes imbalance position between butch and femme. The butch possesses the privilege usually possessed by man as the result of patriarchy. She also combines feminity and masculinity. As Tyson also said, 'the word *queer* offers a collective identity to which all nonstraight people can belong' (337).

Defining butch's sexual identity is problematic because according to Michael Foucault, sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience which has historical, social and cultural, rather

than biological, origins (Spargo 12). Thus, sexuality is socially constructed and not innate. In one hand, butch can be categorized as lesbian. However, according to Alison Eves, ‘within the lesbian’s subcultures, butch and femme are recognized as types of performances that are available to anyone; this is often the source of humor as well as sexual role-play’ (429). She also argues that butch and femme are used to describe gender identities, sexual identities and emotional styles and that these vary independently (429). Theresa de Lauretis, in her article entitled *Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation*, calls butch as mannish lesbian. She argues that the identity of butches is not simply imitating the heterosexual man. It goes more than that. It is said:

Gender reversal in the mannish lesbian, then, was not merely a claim to male social privilege or a sad pretense to male sexual behavior, but represented what may be called, in Foucault's phrase, a "reverse discourse": an assertion of sexual agency and feelings, but autonomous from men, a reclaiming of erotic drives directed toward women, of a desire for women that is not to be confused with woman identification (162).

Besides, in her book entitled *Gender Trouble*. Judith Butler describes the gender identity of butch lesbian. It is said:

The “identification” with masculinity that appears as a butch identity is not a simple assimilation of lesbianism back into the terms of heterosexuality.... As a result, that masculinity, if that it

can be called, is always brought into relief against a culturally intelligible “female body” (123).

In other words, the adoption of male attire, mannerism, and sex role done by butches, is not merely to imitate the heterosexual role of male-female relationship. It is also one of the ways to ‘escape’ from their female body. In *Stone Butch Blues*, the act of ‘escaping’ from female body is one of the aims that the main character, Jess Goldberg, wants to achieve. By ‘escaping’ from her own body, she assumes that she would not become the one who always become the powerless one.

One of the characteristics of butches is the adoption of male attire. This act is known as cross dressing. According to Tyson, cross dressing does not seem to be for lesbians the major issue it is for gay drag. The first reason is that women’s adoption of masculine attire and grooming is not considered outrageous or even fashionable (332). The second reason is that the lesbian community’s adoption of male clothing and grooming has tended to be a matter of personal self-expression and/or quiet political statement that that has not had the theatrical quality of gay drag (332). Therefore, although butches frequently beaten and raped, especially during such repressive periods as the 1950s, their cross dressing never drew the national attention in America focused on gay drag (332). In *Stone Butch Blues*, which is set in 1960s, butches are often become the victim of discrimination and harassment especially carried out by the male characters in the novel. They suffer from physical abuses as well as sexual.

2.1.2 Heteronormativity

According to Tamsin Spargo, queer theory uses a number of ideas from poststructuralist theory, including Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic models of decentred, unstable identity, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of binary conceptual and linguistic structures, and Foucault's model of discourse, knowledge and power (40-1). One of the topics explored by queer theorist is the opposition between heterosexuality and homosexuality. This binary opposition brings up the idea of heteronormativity. According to Berlant and Warner, heteronormativity refers to:

The institutions, structures of understanding, and practical orientations that make heterosexuality seem not only coherent—that is, organized as a sexuality—but also *privileged*. Its coherence is always provisional, and its privilege can take several (sometimes contradictory) forms: unmarked as the basic idiom of the personal and the social; or marked as a natural state; or projected as an ideal or moral accomplishment. It consists less of norms that could be summarized as a body of doctrine than of *a sense of rightness* produced in contradictory manifestations—often unconscious, immanent to practice or to institutions (Yep 18).

In short, heteronormativity means that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality and other kinds of non-normative sexual practice.

Heteronormativity is used to describe the assumption that heterosexual relation as the norm, and all other forms of sexual behavior as deviation from this

norm (Spargo 73). From heteronormative perspective, it is generally believed that everyone is heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is more valuable to homosexuality. 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). In Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, butches are suffered from heteronormativity.

People are not permitted to cross the standard that is created by heteronormativity, it is reflected in social institutions and social policies that legitimize and benefit heterosexuality and heterosexual relationships as basic and normal within society (Heteronormativity Online). In Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, heteronormativity is the main cause of the discrimination and oppression of butches. Butches are suffers from many harassments as have done by friends, family, and people around them. The most horrible physical harrasements were done by police officer who supposed to protect them.

The basic premise of heteronormativity is that heterosexuality is more valuable to homosexuality and bisexuality. It is also superior to all nonstraight people. Because of its superiority, heteronormativity creates what is called *homophobia*. It is generally used to refer to institutionalized discrimination (discrimination that is built into a culture's laws and customs) against homosexuality, and the privileging of heterosexuality that accompanies it, is *heterosexism* (Tyson 321-22). Homophobia is one of the forms of heteronormativity that experienced by many nonstraight people. It is also

experienced by butches. Related to the victimization of butches because of *homophobia* and other kind of discriminations as the results of heteronormativity, the writer would like to describe Jess Goldberg attempts to negotiate heteronormativity. In this case, her attempts are joining butch community, becoming transgender, having a relationship with heterosexual woman, and coming out and becoming an activist.

2.2 Review of Related Studies

In order to make a brief analysis, the writer collects lots of information from printing media. The materials are in the form of journals, thesis, and reviews that include comments and criticisms related to the topic of the study.

Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues* is one of the novels that brings up the transgender issue as the main theme. Many critics and essays had been written about it. One of the studies is written by Elissa Warkentin. In her essay entitled: *Building our own Homes: Frustrated Stereotyping in Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues*, she analyses how the binary gender male/female distinction failed to explain the gender identity of the butches. In her study, it is showed that the main character, Jess, exists outside of the male/female stereotypical gender binary.

Another study about Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues* is written by Monika I. Hogan. The study is entitled *Still me on the inside, trapped: Embodied Captivity and Ethical Narrative in Leslie Feinberg's Stone Butch Blues*. In the study, she argue that Feinberg's revision of the captivity narrative is a pioneering

and significant example of narrative that manages to represent a “minority” body without allowing that body to become rhetorical, symbolic, or displaced.

The characteristic that distinguished this study from those related studies is this study focuses on how heteronormativity is opposed against butches. This study also focuses on how the main character, Jess Goldberg, negotiates heteronormativity.