

JESS GOLDBERG AS A LESBIAN IN LESLIE
FEINBERG'S *STONE BUTCH BLUES*

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Abstract

The self-consistency shown in the novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg is portrayed by a lesbian butch, Jess Goldberg. The researcher uses Prescott Lecky's concept of self-consistency in order to analyze the issue. This study aims to find the portrayal of Jess Goldberg's the causes, and effects of self-consistency. For further analysis, the researcher uses intrinsic and extrinsic approaches in delivering the results of this study. It shows that Jess Goldberg's self-consistency develops and enhances as she grows. Her competence and worthiness become the causes of her self-consistency. In return, it affects her psychological discomfort and emotional serenity. It is concluded that Goldberg's self-consistency helps her to stay on the line of preferences. A slight inconsistency may cause distress and questioning her self-competence.

A. INTRODUCTION

In today's society, the variations of sexual orientation are known by the abbreviation of LGBTQ that stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer. Like heterosexual relationship, lesbians as homosexuals have roles taken between partners and are commonly known as *femme* and *butch*. The risk entailed butches in their gender performance may include the threat of having their desire rejected or misread as male (Levitt & Hiestand, 2005). The dominant role that a butch gets may come from the masculine stereotypes in society (Wallace, 2022). It proves that being an anomaly requires additional strength in identity. Thus, it needs self-consistency in identity to firm such abnormality.

The novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg was released in 1993 and was awarded the *Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Book Award* in 1994. Goldberg discovers that she is different from most girls her age when she becomes a teenager. She starts to go into a gay bar and hang out with the LGBT community at Tifka, where she meets a stone butch called Al and her femme Jaqueline. Butch Al opens Goldberg's knowledge regarding the community and teaches her how to become a good butch. As she grows older, she meets another stone butch who develops herself into a butch by undergoing surgery and taking hormonal shots. Through

the knowledge from butch Al and Rocco, she realizes that to become a good butch, she does not need to follow everyone's standard and supposedly be herself.

Then, how is self-consistency illustrated on Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*? This study depicts dictation of Jess Goldberg as a lesbian butch who consistently stays with her identity throughout the story. She faces obstacles along her journey to stays on the line of consistency. The influence of her own mind and others become a consideration for her to stays as a lesbian butch. Comments: There is no former studies, no objectives-- pls revise. Introd should be ended with the objectives

B. RESERACH METHOD

The researcher conducts a qualitative research in which the research does not give priority to number and tables. Qualitative method has unique steps in analyzing data and drawing on diverse inquiry strategies. The strategy uses for this method dramatically influences its procedures, which are anything but uniform (Creswell, 2009). In addition, the ~~thesis~~ writers use two approaches. They are intrinsic and extrinsic approaches because they relate to each other. Intrinsic approach concerned with the form of the text, its structure and language. It also concentrates on the language of the text as the central object to work out what a text means. Meanwhile, extrinsic approach takes literary text as a whole because it is part of the world and rooted in its context (Eagleton, 2002). The Source of data is the is the novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg, released in 1993. The novel consists of 314 pages, from the cover to the page dedicated to the author. The source of data is taken from the form of words, phrases, and sentences shown in the novel.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A.The Portrayal of Jess Goldberg's Self-Consistency.

In order to know the portrayal of Jess Goldberg's shows her consistency as a lesbian, the writer analyzes the problem by using several forms of self-consistency. There are four forms indicating Jess Goldberg's self-consistency. They are, the general aspect of self-consistency, self-enhancement, self-esteem and self-evaluation.

1.The General aspect of self-consistency

In the novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg, Jess Goldberg, the protagonist, shows her consistency as a lesbian. Briefly, throughout the story, Jess struggles to maintain

her lifestyle as a lesbian. In this section, the thesis writer will explain her consistency by dividing it through her fashion, jobs, habit, and relationship.

At the beginning of her adolescence, Jess already knew what fashion she preferred. She takes an interest in masculine attire rather than the feminine dresses her sister likes to wear. The Roy Rogers uniform becomes something she likes the most, and she gets uneasy when her father throws it away.

Soon afterward my Roy Rogers outfit disappeared from the dirty clothes hamper. My father bought me an Annie Oakley outfit instead (Feinberg, 1993 : 19).

It is not only during her adolescent age that Jess discovers she likes masculine fashion. When she first tries to visit Tifka, a 25 percent gay bar in Niagara Falls, she finds out that she fits with the people there. They accept her looks and who she is. The shirt she wears does not bother them, making her look even more appealing. The thoughts of change frighten her during *butch* Ros funeral. The biological family allows the *butches* to attend the funeral if only they wear dresses, and it becomes a polemic in Goldberg's circle. The quotation can be seen in the following paragraph.

Wearing dresses was an excruciating humiliation for them. Many of their dresses were old, from another era when occasional retreats were still necessary. The dresses were outdated, white, frilly, lace, low-cut, plain. The shoes were old or borrowed: patent leather, loafers, sandals. This clothing degraded their spirit, ridiculed who they were. Yet it was in this painful drag they were forced to say their last goodbye to the friend they loved so much (Feinberg, 1993: 116-117).

The flat type of character Goldberg supports the quotation above. Her vows of not wearing any skirts or dresses if proven by her decision showing at the funeral wearing her usual cloth. She sees the other lesbian *butch* wearing dresses as something torturing instead of something that brings emotional serenity.

a. Self-enhancement

As it is stated above, self-enhancement is measured by three stages. The first measure is to compare with self-evaluation of different generality levels. The second measurement is based on the above-average effect. Last but not the petite measurement is based on self-characteristic. In analyzing the self- enhancement of Jess Goldberg, the thesis writer will give proof of how Goldberg uses the standard of being a lesbian in her environment as her own in becoming a *butch*.

But I knew it was the urgency Al felt to prepare me for such a difficult life that gave her lessons a sharp edge. She never meant to cut me. She nurtured my *butch* strength the best way she knew how. And, she reminded

me frequently, no one had ever done that when she was a baby *butch*, and she had survived. That was strangely reassuring. I had *butch* Al for a mentor (Feinberg, 1993: 30).

The quotation above proves that Al's knowledge regarding the LGBT community is slowly becoming Goldberg's standard. During her first stage as a lesbian, her knowledge is not as broad as before she meets Al. The understanding Al gives Goldberg a defense mechanism in coping with difficulties in her journey. Therefore, it becomes her first measure.

Jan heard that Rocco had taken hormones and had breast surgery. Now she worked as a man on a construction gang, half believed it. Jan said Rocco wasn't the only he-she who'd done that. It was a fantastic tale. I'd only half believed it, but it haunted me. No matter how painful it was to be a he-she, I wondered what kind of courage was required to leave the sex you'd always known, or to live so alone (Feinberg, 1993 : 95).

The second measurement is measured based on the above-average effect. *Butch* Al's knowledge revolves around Goldberg, which, over time, becomes the standard of her understanding regarding a lesbian *butch*. Meanwhile, Goldbergs later encounters Rocco, a stone *butch* who seemingly looks different due to the hormones and surgery she undergoes.

b. Self-esteem

As stated previously, self-esteem plays a significant role in someone's self-consistency. It is divided into two indicators: low self-esteem and high self-esteem. The effects of these two indicators will be explained as follows.

I sort of understood. But I was really worried about Al and I didn't know what was going to happen to me. This sounded like a philosophical discussion. I didn't know if I was going to live to an age where experience would change me. I just wanted to live through tonight. I wanted to know where Al was (Feinberg, 1993 : 35).

Goldberg's low self-esteem shows in the novel mainly after the cops sexually abuse her. During her time hanging out at bars, the police come and arrest the LGBT community in sight.

Mulroney was fingering his crotch. "Suck my cock, bulldagger. Someone hit the side of my knee with a nightstick. My knees buckled more from fear than pain. Mulroney grabbed me by the collar and dragged me several feet away to a steel toilet. There was a piece of unflushed

shit floating in the water. "Either eat me or eat my shit, bulldagger. It's up to you." I was too frightened to think or move (Feinberg, 1993 : 62).

Goldberg's low self-esteem comes from the external forces around them, leading her to suffer internally. The external forces may come from the feeling of loss when *butch* Al and Jaqueline disappear, are bullied and raped by her high school friends, and get molested by the cops. It leads her to feel less confident about herself. Although further through the stories, Jess finds her way to cope with her situation.

c.Self-evaluation

Self-evaluation has six categories to be considered in analyzing a subject's behavior, they are (1) objective information, (2) past selves information, (3) future selves information, (4) upward comparison, (5) downward comparison, (6) lateral social comparisons. In this section, the thesis writer will find the one categories in Jess Goldberg. Then the thesis writer will explain it according to first category.

Objective information may come as external information that individuals can approve. It is like human beings that sexual encounter in a relationship happens typically unexceptionally for Goldberg. To support her performance as an excellent lesbian *butch* lover to her significant others, she used to read magazines.

Honey, you can't learn to fuck from reading *Popular Mechanics*. That isn't what makes a *butch* a good lover." This was exactly what I need to know! "Well, what does make a *butch* a good lover?" I asked, trying to sound like the answer didn't mean all that to me. Her face softened. "That's kind hard to explain. I guess being a good lover means respecting a femme. It means listening to her body. And even if the sex gets a little rough, or whatever, that it's what she wants too, and inside you're still coming from a gentle place. Does that make sense?" (Feinberg, 1993: 31)

The quotation above proves that Goldberg accepted the external information from someone she sees as an expert. *Butch* Al and Jacqueline may not be scientists, but Goldberg sees them as someone in the community for long enough; she considers their ideas. It helps her to become a good lover as well throughout the stories. She approves the information and thus becomes Goldberg's standard for her sexual actions. She learns so much information from the couple.

Past self-information defines explicit comparison between the present and the past. Throughout Goldberg's life as a lesbian *butch*, she tends to compare herself with the child she used to be. Although many events happen in her life, Goldberg does not regret every decision she makes in the past. The quotations can be observed below.

Strong to my enemies, tender to those I loved and respected. That's what I wanted to be. Soon I would have to put these qualities to the test. But for the

moment, I was happy (Feinberg, 1993 : 34).

Goldberg does not see her past life as something to be mourned by her present self. She is proud to grow and become the person she has become. It also stated that despite the decision she made in the past, she still lives her life confidently. The quotation can be analyze through the paragraph below.

The next category is future self-information. After comparing her current self with her past self, Jess makes her expectation for her future. Natural human instinct will not only think about what not to do from her past towards the present. Goldberg's expectations towards the future or her dream of what kind of person she wishes to become can be analyze through the quotation below.

I sat on that crate all night long, looking up into the sky. Sometimes I cried, sometimes I just sat. I strained to look into my future, trying to picture the road ahead of me, searching for a glimpse of who I would become (Feinberg, 1993: 153).

Goldberg always has positive expectancy towards the future. The life that Goldberg has been living consists of ups and downs. Looking through a dear friend she used to look up to makes her expect how her future will turn up to be.

Another category in line is an upward comparison where the subject compares themselves with others who possibly do better than them. In her journey, Goldberg meets with two stone *butches* that give her perspective on becoming a *butch*. Al may introduce her to the cruel life of a *butch*, while Rocco, on the other hand, gives her options for expressing herself. The quotation can be seen below.

I wanted to know Rocco. I wanted to ask her a million questions. I wanted to see the world through her eyes. But most of all, I wanted her to be different than me. I was afraid to see myself in Rocco (Feinberg, 1993 : 95).

Goldberg compares herself with Rocco as she is brave enough to make a turning point in her life. Looking up towards Rocco, who makes such a decision with her life, Goldberg starts to contemplate herself regarding the decision she may take. Later in the story, Goldberg takes the same path as Rocco, although she drops out halfway.

Comparing herself does not always with someone that comes from above. Goldberg may compare herself upwards with *butch* Al, Rocco, and Duffy, but she also finds herself downwards with someone she sees as same, less or poorly than her. The proof can be analyze from the quotation below.

I worked with Jan in the trimming and folding division. Giant machines folded huge pieces of paper stock that were then trimmed into pages. Stacks of pages were loaded on skids near the massive collating machine. Women ran from the skids to feel fresh pages into the pockets of the collator. The pages dropped onto a moving belt. The women at the end added cover sheets and stapled them. I stacked the finished booklets onto skids (Feinberg, 1993 : 81-82).

Last but not least is the lateral comparison, where a subject compares themselves with others who may hold similarities with them without considering being outperformed or underperforming. In the novel, Jess compares herself with others without considering each performance. The quotation can be seen below.

I don't think femmes ever see *butches* as one big group. After a while you see how many different ways there are for *butches* to be. You see them young and defiant, you them change, you watch them harden up or be destroyed. Soft ones and bitter ones and troubled ones. You and Rocco were granite *butches* who couldn't soften your edges. It just wasn't in your nature." (Feinberg, 1993: 213-214)

From the quotation above, Goldberg is being seen equally with the lesbian *butch*. Previously, the figure of Rocco is someone Goldberg sees as an upward comparison. Through the perspective of a femme, however, Goldberg is seen as what a lesbian *butch* commonly looks likes.

2.The Causes of Jess Goldberg's Self-Consistency

a.Competence

There are causes of Goldberg's self-consistency as a lesbian *butch*, and this section will focus on her competence. She has a prominent appearance that readers can learn about her. In order for her to be consistent as a lesbian *butch*, Goldberg not only dresses the part but also takes jobs that consider as masculine as well. In her competency, her self- consistency will be successful if her self-esteem is fulfilled. To understand the state of her success, the thesis writer divides the analysis into two, competence from herself and others.

As mentioned previously, self-consistency is successfully achieved if self-esteem is fulfilled. Goldberg's competence from herself can be seen in how she thinks about herself as a lesbian *butch*. She is introduced to the lesbian-*butch*-world by *butch* Al, who gives her insight into the community. The proof can be seen on the following paragraph.

Al and Jackie groomed me. Literally. Jacqueline gave me haircuts in the kitchen. They took me to get my first sportscoat and tie at the secondhand stores. Al combed the racks, pulling out sports coats, one after another. I tried on each one. Jackie would tilt her head, then shake it. Finally, Jackie smoothed my lapels and nodded in approval. Al gave a low whistle of appreciation. I had did and gone to *butch* heaven! (Feinberg, 1993: 30)

Butch Rocco broads her knowledge on how to develop herself as a lesbian *butch*. Goldberg's curiosity mixes the two knowledge and decides to take action in her way, although it costs her the commitment she makes to Theresa. The proof can be seen on the following quotation.

I got a steady gig at a bindery as a mechanic's apprentice. The guy who interviewed me looked me up and down real hard. I felt color rise in my face. "You look like a clean-cut young man," he concluded. Only a short time before I had been a monster (Feinberg, 1993 : 174).

Stability becomes one of the supporting elements of Goldberg's self-consistency. She not only looks competent as a mechanic apprentice at the bindery, but she also convinces the people around her of her masculine look. It is proven through the quotation above.

When I thought you might die, I started to sketch your face. I wanted something more than my memories of you to remain. Your eyes were closed, but I could shut my own and remember the way the color of your eyes changes in the light." Ruth sat down next to me on the couch. We put our arms around each other and rocked. Esperanza and Tanya sat on the floor near us (Feinberg, 1993 :267).

From the quotation above, it is proven the statement previously on how the words of others help Goldberg to increase her self-esteem. Telling her that she is eventually looking great. She gives her confidence about her looks. Words of affirmation seemingly become one of Goldberg's love languages throughout the story. Ruth and Goldberg have not known each other long enough, but it is enough to prove the couple's attachment. Goldberg's gesture may not implicitly be stated as 'good', but through Ruth's reaction, it can be concluded that she is a competent *butch*.

b. Worthiness

The cause of Goldberg's self-consistency is also worthiness. It is one of the causal factors that support self-esteem to make an individual consistent towards their self-worth. Throughout the story, Goldberg has been questioning herself-worth. During the time she feels that she is unworthy, there are shifts in her attitude and feelings. To understand the state of her worthiness, the thesis writer divides the analysis into two, the

worthiness of herself and others. The explanation will be explained in the following paragraph.

A week later I caught up with one of the boys from the Scabbie gang. He made the mistake of wandering alone too near our house. I made a muscle and told him to feel it. Then I punched him in the nose. He ran away crying; I felt great, for the first time in days (Feinberg, 1993 : 18).

To prove her worthiness as someone who feel dominantly masculine, Goldberg stands for herself in front of the bullies. The quotation above proves that she is not showing signs of weakness. By punching his bully on the nose, she then feel great about it which elevates her self-worth even on herself.

Honey, my tone had changed, "I've got to do something. I've been fighting to defend who I am all my life. I'm tired. I just don't know how to go on anymore. This is the only way I can think of I can still be me and survive. I just dint know any other way. (Feinberg, 1993 : 148)

As someone who grows uncertain about herself, Goldberg's trauma of being questioned about her identity gives her a different perspective regarding her looks. She feels less unworthy of becoming a woman but does not belong as a man. Therefore, she chooses to return to herself as a woman and stop taking any hormones. She chooses to be a woman.

It was time for the most important test of all: the men's room. I walked around a department store until I couldn't stand it any longer. I paced outside the men's room. What would happen if I walked in? I'd have to find out sooner or later. I pushed open the door. Two men stood in front of urinals. they glanced at me and looked away. nothing happened. I found an empty stall and locked the door (Feinberg, 1993:172).

The reaction of other people toward her appearance gives her a boost of confidence. Although there is no conversation in the quotation above, it can be seen that the approval of Goldberg's surroundings helps her feel worthy. Appearance-wise, her lesbian *butch* look does not bother other people, which makes her feel normal like anyone else.

D. CONCLUSION

As a lesbian *butch*, Jess Goldberg shows consistency throughout the story in the novel *Stone Butch Blues* by Leslie Feinberg. The portrayal of her self-consistency can be seen through her fashion, hobbies, jobs, and lovers. Her basic preference of Goldberg is masculine; her fashion shows how she prefers to wear a suit and tie rather than dresses. Her hobby of motorbikes is also seen as masculine since women are rarely seen driving around on them. Goldberg's job requires her to use strength, such as becoming a frozen food truck unloader and working at the bindery in the small sweat plant. She also shows her consistency as a masculine lesbian *butch* by dating several femmes and engaging with one of them. Although she is being bullied by her high school friends and sexually abused by the police,

she still chooses to stand up for herself and not give up on the life she chooses to be. On the other hand, consistently being a lesbian *butch* gives her emotional serenity. It can be in the form of her pleasure romantically or the judgement of others. When people appraise her for being a good *butch*, it gives her a sense of pride and boosts her confidence to stay on the lifeline she chooses.

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