LESBIANISM AS PORTRAYED IN JEWELLE GOMEZ'S SHORT STORY "DON'T EXPLAIN"

A GRADUATING PAPER

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Gaining
the Bachelor Degree in English Literature



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2016

A FINAL PROJECT STATEMENT

I certify that this research is definitely my own work. I am completely responsible for the content of this research. Other writer's opinions or findings included in the research are quoted or cited in accordance with ethical standards.

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Nomor: UIN.02/DA/PP.009/ 1239 /2016

Skripsi / Tugas Akhir dengan judul:

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LESBIANISM AS PORTRAYED IN

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ABSTRACT

The work under this discussion is a short story entitled "Don't Explain" by Jewelle Gomez. It tells about lesbian love life in 1959, Boston, America. The lesbian character is struggling to survive in heterosexual norms. Lesbian issues become a sensitive and controversial issue since a long time ago. The writer chooses lesbian issue because this is a kind of human discrimination. The writer uses library research with descriptive qualitative method to finish this research. The theory that is applied in this research is queer theory and post-structuralism as paradigm. The writer focuses on lesbian characters' dialogues and narrations from the narrator as the primary data. This research aims to reveal the portrayals of lesbian characters in Jewelle Gomez's short story and why the portrayals are in such a way. As a result of the analysis the writer found the portrayals lesbianism can be seen from Letty, Delia, and Terry. They hide their love feeling and their love relationship. There are no portrayals about sexual activities between lesbian because their process to fall in love and forget their broken heart is same as other humans. This is not provocative short story. In "Don't Explain" lesbians also human who have feeling of love.

Keywords: Lesbian, Don't Explain, Queer Theory, Heterosexual Norms

LESBIANISM AS PORTRAYED IN

JEWELLE GOMEZ'S SHORT STORY "DON'T EXPLAIN"

Oleh: Sekar Yolanda Azza

ABSTRAK

Karya sastra yang diulas dalam skripsi ini ialah cerita pendek berjudul "Don't Explain" karya Jewelle Gomez. Cerita pendek ini menceritakan tentang kisah cinta lesbian di Boston, Amerika pada tahun 1959. Karakter lesbian berjuang untuk hidup dalam norma heterosexual. Masalah tentang lesbian menjadi isu yang sensitif dan controversial sejak waktu yang lama. Penulis memilih lesbian isu karena ini adalah salah satu jenis diskriminasi manusia. Penulis menggunakan studi pustaka dan metode qualitatif deskritif untuk menyelesaikan penelitian ini. Teori yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah teori queer dan poststrukturalism sebagai paradigma. Penulis befokus pada dialog karakter lesbian dan narasi yang disampaikan narator sebagai data utama. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkapkan refleksi dari karakter lesbian di cerita pendek Jewelle Gomez dan kenapa gambaran tersebut bisa seperti itu. Sebagai hasil analisis, penulis menemukan gambaran lesbian dari karakter Letty, Delia dan Terry. Mereka menyembunyikan perasaan cinta dan hubungan percintaan mereka. Tidak ada gambaran tentang hubungan seksual antara lesbian dalam cerita pendek ini karena proses mereka untuk jatuh cinta dan melupakan patah hati sama dengan manusia lainnya. Ini bukan cerita pendek yang propokatif. Dalam "Don't Explain" homoseks wanita juga manusia yang mempunyai rasa cinta kasih.

Kata Kunci: Lesbian, Don't Explain, Teori Queer, Cerita Pendek, Norma Hetero

MOTTO

Judging a person does not define who they are

It defines who you are.

DEDICATION

For You and I

Lovely, Great, Brave and Tough person

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Assalamu'alaikum Wr. Wb.

First of all, my greatest gratitude to Allah SWT, who is bless me all the time. I give my deepest thanks for His guidance so that I could finish my graduating paper. I also need to thank Him for his abundant love that grants me a wonderful life, good friends and a beautiful family around me. This graduating paper will not be done if there were no wonderful people behind me who helped, encouraged, and motivated me to finish this research. Deepest appreciation and sincerest gratitude are given to:

- Wonderful partner of my whole life journey Mr. Sugianto, Mrs. Ruwani Hartanti, Silviana Nastiti Putri, and Sahnas Amalia Rosita for the eternal love, unconditional love, support and trust.
- The Dean of faculty of Letters and Cultural Sciences UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Dr. Zamzam Afandi, M.Ag
- Dr. Ubaidillah, S.S, M.Hum my academic advisor as well as the head of English literature UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta for teaching and helping me during my study.
- 4. My inspiring and admirable advisor, Danial Hidayatullah, S.S, M.Hum.

 Thanks for guide me in writing this graduating paper. Thanks for the valuable suggestions, guidance, ideas, inputs, patience, and thanks for the time that we spend together during the process of my writing.

 My Examiners Witriani, M.Hum, Ulyati Retno Sari, M.Hum and All lecturer English literature UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta for assisting me in going through the years of my study.

6. My extremely good people Izzuddin Ramadhan ASH, Widyaningsih Pamungkas Saputro, Anisa Intan Nurfadhilah, Cadipa Dyaksa Prawara, Wakhyu Arif Pambudi, Mahfud Sya'roni thanks for walking with me when I needed support, thanks for walking ahead me when I needed guidance, and thanks for walking behind me when I needed someone to watch my back.

7. Sabrina Umi Khabibah, Reza Fattah Ghalib Santoso, Gandar Mahojwala Paripurno and all Save Street Children Jogja volunteer thanks for a tons of good times, for show me the new world and new perspectives. Especially for children in street situation around Malioboro thanks for being a true inspiration in my life.

 All of students English literature chapter 2012, HIMASI, and ECC UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.

Yogyakarta, June 6th 2016

The Writer

Sekar Yolanda Azza

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Literature does not only entertain but also inform. Literature also develops from human imagination. Childs and Fawler in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* claims that "Literature in present times generally taken to be imaginative composition, manly printed but earlier (and still, in some cultures) was oral, whether dramatic, metrical or prose in form" (2006: 129). Literature can improve and increase reader's knowledge, wisdom, and moral instead of merely entertaining. Literature also would help the readers to understand some issues such as love, sexuality, gender, human relationship and life.

Human relationship and life become the idea in short stories as a branch of literature. In literary work, there must be a picture of society inside the story. Wellek and Warren in *Theory of Literature* points out that "literature represents life; and life is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary imagination." (1978: 94). The readers can get the information about the condition of society in the literature from the intrinsic elements such as characters characterizations, plot, setting time and place, and also theme.

A short story is a short literary form with the limited scope. Short stories are compact and it explains only what is absolutely necessary. Short stories have fewer characters than novel. These also do not have subplot. According to Poe

"as a narrative which can be read at one sitting of from half an hour to two hours, and is limited to a certain unique or single effect to which every detail is subordinate" (as cited in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 2009: 331). Although short story is short, it is not easy to be analyzed. Abrams states that "the short story writer introduces a limited number of person, cannot afford the space for a leisurely analysis and sustained development of character, and cannot develop as dense and detailed a social milieu as dies the novelist" (2009: 332).

One of the short stories that makes writer interested is "Don't Explain". Among thirty two short stories on *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Story* the writer chooses Jewelle Gomez's "Don't Explain" in the pages 273 until 283. This compilation of lesbian short story first published in 1993 by the Penguin Books. As a literary work this short story also has a unique title because the author used prohibition sentence. The kind of prohibition in this title is a sentence which command to not explain about the story. The uniqueness title makes the writer curious about the inside of story. Although this short story is about lesbian, the language is not vulgar.

This short story illustrates the lesbian characters with their main conflict about their sexual orientation. It tells about lesbian in Boston 1959. The example, the main character hides her real identity as a lesbian. Since she finds something similar among Billie Holiday, she connects herself closely with famous America black jazz singer in the 1950s. The main character also buries her own pains in her heart and is unwilling to let others access hers. At the end, she meets a friend who ultimately shows her, it is alright to embrace every aspect and introduces her to

women who accept the very thing she is afraid to show. Letty as the main character resembles lesbian in Indonesia who is afraid of other judgments.

Jewelle Gomez as the author writes about race and lesbianism in this short story. Hawthorne in the *The Age* Melbourne newspaper claims that "Jewel Gomez's story of black lesbian life in the late '50s evokes the sounds and strains of this era" (1993: 9). "Don't Explain" is the nominee of Triangle Award Lesbian Fiction 1999. Margaret Reynolds as an editor *The Penguin Book of Lesbian Short Story* has brought together this work with the other women from Britain, Europe and America. Reynolds defines that "Jewelle Gomez's bulldagger (lesbian) society survives far from the haunts of men." (1993: Cover)

This brilliant literary work demonstrates the anxiety of characters to fall in love and show their love relationship with the other women. The writer also defends the lesbian to show their love. This research is not a kind of propaganda. Furthermore, this issue is important to be discussed because the readers will get empathy about lesbian from literary work entitled "Don't Explain". As pointed out in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* "Empathy is often describing as an involuntary projection of ourselves into an object, and is commonly explained as the results of an inner mimicry." (2009: 94).

"Don't Explain" contains positive spirits and ideas of lesbian because the author tells the readers to be brave and confident to be one self. This short story is significant to the writer because as a women and human being, the writer realizes the human rights are for everyone and the writer against the prejudice and discrimination towards lesbian. The writer also tolerates and respect lesbianism.

Lesbian is not an illness or even contagious. Since 1975 the American Psychologist Association (APA) completely removed lesbian's stigma as a mental illness "Since 1975, the American Psychologist Association has called on psychologist to take the lead in removing the stigma of mental illness that has long been associated with lesbian, gay and bisexual orientations." (2002: APA Brochure).

In a narrower space, the phenomenon of lesbian exists in social modern phenomenon and Islamic society all over the world. For example, there is a brave Muslim lesbian whose name is Irshad Manji from Canada. Irshad ever come to Jakarta on 2008 and 2012 when she published her book entitled *Allah*, *Liberty and Love*. She travels the world speaking about Islam, lesbian issues and human rights. *The Jakarta Post* has selected her as a woman making a positive change in contemporary Islam. Another existence of Muslim lesbian is difficult to be detected and proven openly.

Lesbian people are afraid to admit their real self because the mentality of society that is not ready to accept their existence. Lesbianism also still becomes controversial and sensitive issue in society and religions. Since lesbianism is women homosexual there are no specific verses about lesbianism. In the holy Quran, the people of Prophet Luth who are gay or men homosexual have been discussed often. Quran discusses them in a number of verses, such as in verse An-Naml verse 55.

أَيِنَّكُمُ لَتَأْتُونَ ٱلرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّن دُونِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ بَلُأَنتُمُ قَوْمٌ المِنَّكُمُ لَتَأْتُونَ ٱلرِّجَالَ شَهْوَةً مِّن دُونِ ٱلنِّسَآءِ بَلُأَنتُمُ قَوْمٌ مَّ تَجْهَلُونَ النَّسَآءِ بَلُأَنتُمُ قَوْمٌ

It means: Do you practice your lust on men instead of women? Nay, but you are a people who behave senselessly. [27: 55, Translated by Translated by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al- Hillal and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan]

From the verses above it can be seen that homosexual is prohibited in Islam. However, in the eyes of Allah SWT all people are same and Allah only valued on their piety. In line with the lesbian phenomenon Allah SWT has been prohibited to judge someone, it is stated in Surah Al-Hujarat verse 11.

It means: O you who believe! Let not a group scoff at another group, it may be that latter are better than the former. Nor let (some) women scoff at other women, it may be that the latter are better than the former. Nor defame one another, nor insult one another by nickname. How bad is it to insult one's brother after having Faith [i.e. to call your Muslim brother (a faithful believer) as: "O sinner" or "O wicked"]. And whosoever does not repent, then such indeed Zalimun (Wrongdoers). [49: 11, Translated by Translated by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al- Hillal and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan].

Commonly, nobody wants to talk about lesbian publicly. Nobody wants openly to define themselves or their identity as a lesbian or live as a lesbian. Judgments toward lesbian make some people treat the lesbians differently. Lesbian is perceived as abnormal and immoral. Reynolds states that "officially, and legally, of course, lesbianism was always discouraged, sometimes forbidden, but generally ignored" (1993: xiv). Allah has raising critical awareness to build equal justice among each others. It can be seen in Surah Al-Maidah verse 8. Allah SWT has been told everyone to respect the diversity.

It means: O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah as just witnesses; and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety; and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is well-Acquainted with what you do. [5:8, Translated by Dr. Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din and Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan]

However, it does not mean that Surah Al-Hujarat verse 11 and Al-Maidah verse 8 support lesbianism. It only proves that Allah SWT and Islam love all creatures in the world as *Rahmatan Lilalamin*. Respect to each other without judging and bullying is the best way to make world more blessed. It is important

to analyze lesbianism because they still exist anyway. Sexual orientations are complex yet absorbing human aspect to explore. Yet, it is an unsolved problem because commonly people think that lesbian is completely taboo.

Reading about lesbian literature is political and ideological issue because lesbianism is real in the society. As a media, this research tries to give the readers better understanding about lesbianism from this short story. This research is focused further on lesbian characters in "Don't Explains" short story by Jewelle Gomez with queer theory and post-structuralism as paradigm.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the explanation above, the writer formulates the following questions to answer in the analysis:

- 1. How is lesbianism portrayed through lesbian characters in "Don't Explain"?
- 2. Why are the portrayals in such a way?

1.3 Objectives of Study

Considering the problem statement above, there are two objectives in this study. The first objective is to find out how lesbian is portrayed through lesbian characters in this short story. The second objective, the writer wants to reveal how lesbian portrayals can be explained clearly.

1.4 Significance of Study

This short story was published on England, New York, USA, Australia, Canada and New Zaeland. However, it does not mean that lesbian only live in that country. There are also any lesbians in Indonesia, but they hide their real identity.

They are afraid to admit their identity, because there are many judgments from society. Theoretically, for the other researchers who want to develop their own appreciation about literature this research is hoped to enrich knowledge and raise empathy about lesbian. The writer also hopes that this research can be used as the base for further research of "Don't Explain" short story, and might provide the next researcher a useful guidance to make a critical judgment, so they can achieve the aims of their study.

Practically, this research is hoped to inform the readers about lesbian character's feeling. They are also human beings who have feeling and emotions of love. Hopefully the readers will start to understand various sexual orientations and try to respect their existence. This research is also hoped that lesbian agent to be brave and stay strong because you are not the outsider.

1.5 Literature Review

The writer takes some studies which are related to the topic and the theory. The first study is a thesis entitled "Homosexuality as Seen in Grand Theft Auto IV" written by Yuniarti (2014). This thesis analyzes how the homosexuality is presented through the character of Tony Prince and how Tony sees himself as a homosexual. The researcher uses queer theory and film theory. The method of analyzing the game is qualitative with library research for collecting data. As the result of the analysis, the researcher found that the character is an openly homosexual. The character is not affected by the negative words of people around him.

Then, the writer also found a thesis entitled "A queer Study on the Struggle against Homophobic prejudice and Discrimination in Dustin Lance Black's *Milk*" written by Christiani Dwi Putri M (2014). This thesis discusses the characters and setting in the screenplay, and analyzes the homophobic prejudice and discrimination towards the homosexual through the character and setting. The researcher also used a descriptive qualitative method and library research for collecting data and used queer theory to analyze the characters' characteristic. The results from this research shows that Harvey Milk, as the major character, is successful to break the generalization stereotype of homosexual and this analysis also shows that the homosexual get negative treatment from heterosexual society.

The third study is a thesis entitled "The Struggle and The Effects of Being Transgender as Depicted in Julie Anne Peters' *Luna*" written by Alvita Abidati (2014). The researcher uses sociological approach, queer theory with a descriptive qualitative method, and library research for collecting data. The researcher wants to know how the psychological effects of society negative treatments toward transgender psychology represented by Luna. As the result of the analysis, the researcher shows that Liam is a transgender, named Luna. Every time he comes out as Luna, she gets some negative treatments and these treatments affect Liam's psychology. However, at the end Liam can encourage himself after meeting another transgender who supports him.

The fourth study is a thesis entitled "The Influence of Patriarchy in 20th Century Japan on Otoko and Keiko's Lesbianism in Kawabata's Beauty and Sadness" written by Angela Astrid S.C.A (2008). This thesis analyzes how

patriarchal oppression on Otoko and Keiko as women influences their sexual orientation as lesbians. The researcher uses lesbian feminism theory and patriarchy theory. The method of analyzing the novel is qualitative with library research for collecting data. As the result of the analysis, the researcher found patriarchal oppression functions as one of the psychological, social and cultural factors which trigger Otoko and Keiko's transition into lesbianism.

The last, the writer found an article entitled "Love and Desire in The Post-Modern Era: The Gilda's Stories or How Black Feminism Challenged Gothic Literary Traditions" written by Virginia Fusco (2014). In this article the author wants to account for the originality of Gomez's stories looking at them in context and explain the impact of how Gomez redesigns the symbolic and transform her narratives into potential guides for action. As the results of the analysis, the researcher found that Gomez took away violence and terror to the vampire from Gilda as the main character.

In brief, this research uses some of the ideas from the studies above. The first study, Yuniarti concerns about the gay homosexuality modern society on game by using Foucault's and Sedgwick's queer theory. The second study, Christiani's thesis uses the same issue and focus on homosexual. Christiani's thesis explores Novel Gayness Homosexuality with queer theory. The third study, Alvita focuses on Transgender Novel. Alvita and the writer of this study use the same theory. The fourth study, Angela concerns on the influence of patriarchy in 20th Century Japan on Japan Literature with lesbian feminism theory. The last, Virginia Fusco

analyzes Jewelle Gomez's short story entitled "Gilda Story". This article uses the same author and theory with the researcher.

This research, however, is different from the other analyses that have been done. The differences are their study uses English Games of homosexuality, English gay novel, English transgender film and Japanese lesbian novel as an object. While this study analyzes the lesbian character and the object from *Penguin Classic book compilation England's Lesbian Short Stories*. Explicitly, the object of this research is different, but all of these researches have the same similarity with this research in theory and topic. To sum up, this research will be conducted in the context of lesbianism in short story by using queer theory.

1.6 Theoretical Approach

1.6.1 Queer Theory

Since this research will analyze sexual orientation of lesbian characters, the writer uses Queer theory.

Childs and Fawler in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* claims that until the 1990s, queer was commonly a slang word, usually derisory, used to mean homosexual. since 1990s, queer theory and queer studies have been legitimate theoretical approaches engaged with in university departments, as Gay and Lesbian Studies had been somewhat earlier (2006: 195).

Queer theory is a set of statement about the field of critical LGBT (Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) studies since 1990s. Queer theory is one package with gender, sexuality and sex studies. Spargo in *Foucault and Queer Theory* argues that "queer theory is not singular or systematical conceptual or methodological framework, but a collection of intellectual engagements with the relations between sex, gender and sexual desire" (1999:9).

Queer theory also helps to break the binary stigma over LGBT and heterosexual. By queer theory there are not normal and abnormal, both heterosexual and homosexual are similar and there are no original. It is a constructed category of experience, historical, social and cultural rather than biological or origin. Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* points out that "Queer is a homosexual studies about lesbian and gay and liberation movements. Lesbian studies examine homosexual female desire and must deal with psychological, social, economic, and political oppression not only by patriarchy but also by heterosexual society" (2006:322).

Sex, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, sexual identity, and sexual behavior are included on sexuality. Moreover, the writer chooses queer theory because sexual orientation is talking about homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual. Gender and sexuality are fluid. Lesbianism can be seen along with the queer theory by Judith Butler. Based on Butler's statement above the writer could find the concept of lesbianism.

The assumptions about lesbianism are as follow: First, the ideas of lesbianism are also far from stable and fixed because sexual orientation is not biological

aspect and there are no original. Sexual orientation has not natural, not the characteristic from birth, inherent, or given meaning. Butler said "Sexual orientation might be the results of repetition specific acts. Heterosexual, or gay or lesbian acts are copies of which there are no originals; like gender, sexuality is a social construction" (As cited in Carter, 2 006: 128-129).

Second, gender and sexuality are not the results of nature but it is a social construction. Heterosexuality being normal is because they not allows and rejects homosexuality to express their feeling. Abrams points out that "Judith Butler undertook to invert the standard hierarchical opposition by which homosexuality is unnatural, by stressing the extent to which the ostensible normatively of heterosexuality is based on suppression and denial of same-sex desires and relationship" (2009:257).

This assumption will break the stigma that heterosexuality is normal and homosexuality is abnormal and sometimes called mental disorder or even trash, evil or both. Post-structuralism as a paradigm is used to analyze this short story. Post-modernism looks structuralism is as an illusion. While structuralism only looks sex based on biological, post-structuralism looks sex not only from biological but also social construction such as gender identity and sexuality. Queer theory is chosen to analyze "Don't Explain" short story. The writer will try to relate lesbian characters to the theory of queer to know characters' acts of lesbian. This thesis closely examines lesbian to know how the lesbian portrayals in this short story.

1.7 Method of Research

Since the descriptive qualitative are applied in this research, several steps are taken to conduct this study. The first method is the writer closely reads the short story namely "Don't Explain" by Jewelle Gomez, after that the writer formulates the questions as a research questions. The next step, the writer found the theory and defines the variable of the theory.

1.7.1 Type of Research

Library research with descriptive qualitative method is applied as the method of this study. Creswell points out that "Qualitative Method is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or group ascribe to a social or the human problem" (2007: 22).

1.7.2 Data Sources

The source of the data is the short story "Don't Explain" by Jewelle Gomez from *The penguin Book of Lesbian Short Stories*. The primary data is lesbian love feeling dialogue and narrations through the characters. The supporting data are references about lesbian and queer theory collected from relevant books, academic writings, and articles from the internet.

1.7.3 Data Collection Technique

The technique of collecting data is divided into some parts. The first, the writer turns the variable to categorize and find the data according to categories. This research is focused on lesbian indicator of the characters. The writer uses documentation technique for this research.

1.7.4 Data Analysis Technique

The first step is the writer tries to find the connection between the data which are never explained by the data itself. The next step is explaining the relationship of the data between categories such as causal, functional, intentional, dispositional, or genetic. The last step is answers the questions systematically and concludes the results.

1.8 Paper Organization

This research consists of four chapters and each chapter is subdivided in subsequent division. Chapter one is introduction. It consists of Backgrounds of Study, Research Questions, Objectives of the Study, Significance of Study, Literature Review, Method of Study, Theoretical Approach and Paper Organization. Chapter two presents character and characterization, setting place and time, themes, plot and point of view. Chapter three presents the discussion and analysis of the lesbianism with queer theory. Chapter four presents the conclusion of analysis and suggestion for next researchers.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

After analyzing the data, in this chapter the writer wants to conclude this research. The conclusion is drawn based on queer theory and post-structuralism paradigm that applied to analyze lesbian character portrayed in this short story. The writer also gives suggestion for the next researcher or the readers who are interested to analyze "Don't Explain" short story as their data sources.

4.1 Conclusion

From the analysis, there are several points to be concluded. The writer can conclude that lesbian characters cannot express their feeling and emotions freely because of social norm. This analysis is divided into two parts that are telling and showing to explain lesbian portrayals in this short story.

By showing, the writer is finding Letty, Delia and Terry emotions and feelings of love to the other women. How Letty protected Delia is stated implicitly. She protected Delia from customer's bad attitude. Delia very concerned about the conditions of Letty. It is the proved that Delia is interested and cares with Letty. Delia helps Letty to make a friend with the others in Sunday evening gathering. Letty come here and tries to break her isolation life. Delia invites Letty because she wants to give support and help Letty to be comfort with herself. The writer also found the differences lovely terms to call between the characters.

By telling, it can be concluded that Letty has much love to admire Delia and Billie as a secret admirer. Letty ever imagine and describe Delia's face completely and it make she feels little warm inside. Besides adores Delia, Letty also adores Billie Holiday. Billie as a hero for Letty and her song is the drug for Letty to ease her pain because the similarity between them. Letty still remembers her exgirlfriend and stuck in the old moment. Letty opens her heart again in Sunday evening gathering. She met Maryalice who plays Billie Holiday song in that place. Finally, Letty could find comfort zone in Maryalice's heart. They sit together and listening Billie's song together. The writer also found love relation between Delia and Terry. They come out as their real self without hiding their love relation.

By showing and telling the writer can see the lesbian portrayals in "Don't Explain". The writer is finding that Letty as the main character hiding her love feeling to Delia and Billie Holiday. There are no portrayed about sexual activities between lesbian because their process to fall in love and forgetting their broken heart is same with the other humans. They show their feeling from the heart as a secret admirer. It is common problem if someone cannot easily move on from her ex-girlfriend and fall in love again with the other. Homophobias will think that lesbian short story is extremely taboo, but not in this short story.

As the results, the relationship between the data is causal and functional. Those portrayals in this short story are not provocative. The author, Jewelle Gomez also gives positive spirit to the readers to not judge the others human and this short story telling about the sweet love between the characters. There are no normal and abnormal. In "Don't Explain" short story lesbians also human who have feeling of love. The difference between heterosexual and homosexual in this short story is they should hide their feeling.

4.2 Suggestion

This research is analyzing "Don't Explain" based on Queer theory to reveal about lesbian characters. The writer suggests for the future researcher in the same subject for analyzing it by using other theories. Actually this short story is not only talks about lesbian but also discrimination towards black people at that time by white people. The next researcher could raise their empathy and critical thinking for this social condition issue from this short story. It will be absorbing for the next researcher to know other black women characters' burden life based on binary opposition or feminism theory.



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