



The Image of Lesbians in the Short Story "When Everyone Rejected My Presence Nearby" by Yael Stefany Sinaga

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Abstract *This paper aims to describe the image of lesbians in the short story "When Everyone Rejects My Presence Nearby" by Yael Stefany Sinaga, which was published in 2019 on the Suarausu.co.id page. This short story was criticized by the rectorate of the University of North Sumatra (USU) for telling the life experience of a lesbian woman who fell in love with her female friend. This short story was chosen as the object of research because there is a depiction by the author of the life of being a lesbian and provides several views on lesbians. This research uses qualitative research methods. The data is analyzed through words, sentences, and dialogues that show the image of lesbians narrated in this short story. The results of this study show that the author describes a lesbian as someone who is considered despicable and disgusting by others. The author also portrays lesbians as not feeling that being a lesbian is wrong because she also loves her female partner seriously.*

Keywords: *imagery, lesbian, When Everyone Rejects My Presence Nearby*

1. Introduction

The short story "When Everyone Rejects My Presence Nearby" by Yael Stefany Sinaga tells the story of a woman named Kirana Cantika Putri Dewi and her crush on a woman named Larasati Kesuma Wijaya. The story opens with the blasphemy Kirana receives. Then, the author recounts Kirana's family circumstances when Kirana was young and the reason why Kirana became afraid of the outside world. Then, Kirana felt that she started to change after meeting Laras. Kirana liked Laras because her character was very similar to her mother's, making her feel comfortable and helping her to be brave in her outside life. Finally, Kirana ventured to confess her feelings at Laras engagement ceremony. Although Laras was engaged to another man at the event, Kirana still dared to declare her feelings in front of the many people present. Suddenly, Kirana was blasphemed and judged unilaterally by the people at the event. Kirana was insulted and spat upon by the people around her. Laras, who had heard Kirana's confession, could do nothing but stare at Kirana with a faraway look. This short story was chosen as the object of research because there is a depiction by the author of the life of being a lesbian and contains some views on lesbians. The formulation of the problem posed in this research is how the author displays the image of lesbians contained in the short story "When Everyone Rejects My Presence Nearby". Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify and describe the portrayal of lesbians in this short story.

Lesbian is one part of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community that is still considered taboo by some Indonesians because it is considered

deviant and violates religious and social norms (Boellstorff, 2020; Dewi & Hutapea, 2020). In the KBBI, lesbians are women who love or feel sexual stimulation of the same sex, or homosexual women. Unlike gays, who are always the center of attention in the LGBT community, lesbians are not given much attention in Indonesia because many people see two women walking together as friends, nothing more. Moreover, many lesbians go into hiding, saying that they are just friends, so the public notices the community less. However, this situation can change if someone admits that they are a lesbian. Some people still view lesbians as despicable and immoral.

So many people look down on lesbians. Many also think that lesbians are just there to satisfy their lust for women. People think that a lesbian's love is insincere and just a joke. If people are willing to understand a little and not just speculate, they will know that there are many lesbians whose love is sincere (Rahmawati & Retnowati, 2019; UN Women, 2020). A similar opinion was expressed by Linda Christanty, the author of the short story "Lighthouse", that I revealed the lives of lesbians, not for erotic purposes. I portrayed the relationship of homosexuality as beautiful, moving, and sincere, as true love. So far, people have assumed that being gay or lesbian is only for sex. That is a very wrong assumption (Laksmi, 2004:2007).

The lesbian community is a fascinating community to explore. This community is marginalized in social life. Culture has long created constructs that corner them in a minority corner of life. They do not have free breathing space. They are deprived of the freedom to actualize themselves. The lesbian community is like living "guerrilla" in the light or living openly in the dark (Chudori, 1999:121; Manalastas et al., 2017; Tan et al., 2021).

Lesbians have to live with their identity hidden if they want to move around like other people (UNDP & USAID, 2018; Dewi & Hutapea, 2020; Tan et al., 2021). This is because not many agencies or institutions accept lesbian employees. It is not only the surrounding environment that rejects the presence of lesbians; some families reject their family members as lesbians. Although some other lesbians have begun to be accepted by the environment and their families, many are still considered sick and their families try to treat lesbians with religious medicine, shamans, and go to psychiatrists. Of course, lesbians do not feel that they are ill. They realize that they are special because they are attracted to other women. The feeling that lesbians have is also the same as the feeling of liking people in general. Therefore, some lesbians will isolate themselves and live in hiding.

There are many views of lesbians in society, some are positive, some are neutral, and some are negative (Chong, 2019; ILGA World, 2020). People who view lesbians positively usually think that people who dare to say they are lesbians are people who dare to be themselves and dare to express what makes them happy. People are inspired and learn from lesbians. Then, people who view lesbians casually think that it is the business of each individual, and there is no need to interfere in other people's affairs. As long as the lesbians do not interfere with their lives, they do not mind the presence of lesbians. Finally, people who look negatively at lesbians think that lesbians are a disease, despicable, a curse, and disgusting. These diverse lesbian image problems have led to many new views aimed directly at lesbians and the surrounding community.

1. Method

This research uses qualitative research methods. The data is analyzed through words, sentences, and dialogues that show the image of lesbians narrated in this short story. The data source of this research is the short story "When Everyone Rejects My Presence Nearby" by Yael Stefany Sinaga, which was published in 2019 on the Suarausu.co website. However, because the USU rectorate felt that this short story was inappropriate for publication and did not reflect academic content, it was republished on the andreasharsono.net website, allowing others to see, re-read, and analyze its contents.

Based on the researcher's search for previous research, a study was found that had a similar discussion. Researchers use this research as a basis for their literature review. The research that forms the basis of the researcher's literature review is as follows. Kasnadi in his study entitled "Lesbian Imagery in Indonesian Novels of the Early 2000s by Women Writers". The results revealed four aspects as markers of the image of lesbian characters in Indonesian novels from the early 2000s written by female authors. The four aspects are the elaboration of the focus and proof of the research objectives. The four aspects that accumulate in the lesbian image include (1) the identity of lesbian characters, (2) the interaction of lesbian characters, (3) the struggle of lesbian characters in maintaining their lesbian existence, and (4) the views of other characters towards the existence of lesbian characters.

Based on this literature, the research conducted by the researcher differs from the research that became the subject of the literature review. The research conducted by the researcher focuses primarily on the portrayal of one lesbian character in a literary work, allowing for a more specific analysis of the author's depiction of lesbians.

2. Result & Discussion

In this short story, we can find at least two depictions of lesbians: (1) lesbians are considered despicable and disgusting by others, and (2) lesbians do not feel that being a lesbian is wrong because they also love their female partner seriously. Lesbians are portrayed as someone who is considered despicable and disgusting by others, and this is narrated in the opening and closing of the story. Their words and actions when they recognize a lesbian turn into hatred and disgust. Perhaps this is because seeing a lesbian is unusual or abnormal in society. For more details, let's look at some of the narratives in this short story:

"You're a disease to us. You don't deserve to live. Even in hell, people will shy away from you. Curse you, cursed woman!"

"Did you hear? No man is going to put his stuff in that place of yours. You're so disgusting. Your uterus will be closed. Trust me, any man's sperm can't stand you."

Let us examine the character's remarks against Kirana as a lesbian character. To them, someone who is a lesbian is considered a disease. In fact, according to KBBI (Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia), lesbian is defined as a woman who loves or feels sexual stimulation of the same sex; a homosexual woman. According to Neurology

expert, Dr. Ryu Hasan, quoted from *bbc.com*, said that lesbian, gay, and bisexual are not diseases and are not disorders. Unless the person feels uncomfortable, it can be considered a disorder, and then therapy is done. So, as long as the lesbian feels happy and comfortable with being a lesbian, then it is not a disease or disorder. Then, the following statement is made: "*You don't deserve to live.*" This quote illustrates that being a lesbian makes the person unfit to live, and their presence is not needed in life. The statement, "*Even in hell, people will be reluctant to get close to you. Curse you, cursed woman!*" also emphasizes that lesbians are so despicable and cursed that even sinners in hell would not want to be near lesbians. Finally, the dialogue closes with a curse against a lesbian who is equated with an abominable woman. According to KBBI, a curse is a curse or a person who is cursed. Being a lesbian is not a curse, but the author writes from the view of others that a lesbian is a curse and a disease.

Now we see in the following dialog, "*You're so disgusting.*" To others, being a lesbian is disgusting because it doesn't fit the mold of what is normal in society. Not satisfied with expressing her disgust, the character says, "Your womb will be closed. Trust me, no man's sperm can stand you." This can illustrate that being a lesbian will make the person so disgusting that her womb is closed, and no sperm can survive in the womb of a lesbian. This exaggerated expression illustrates that ordinary people overestimate a lesbian. If someone becomes a lesbian, it does not necessarily mean that the person's womb becomes closed, and it does not necessarily mean that a lesbian wants male sperm to enter her body. A lesbian is a woman who is attracted to other women, so there is no guarantee that male sperm will enter a lesbian's body. Not only does this sentence exaggerate, but it also shows that ordinary people do not know much about lesbians. They only condemn and insult lesbians because they don't conform to society's general standard of women liking men.

Meanwhile, the concluding narrative in this story also depicts the adverse reaction of the people towards the lesbian character who is expressing her feelings to her female lover at the woman's engagement ceremony:

Suddenly, someone dragged me by force. The shirt I had just sewn was partially torn. I was pushed into the middle of the guests. A million eyes looked at me with anger. The blasphemy and spit that came out of my mouth kept coming.

In this narrative, it is directly explained that people were angry at Kirana's expression of love and his proposal of marriage to Laras. The people around began to get angry, and the culmination was to start hurling insults and spitting at Kirana. The expression of blasphemy and contempt is evident at the beginning of the story, as described at the start of this discussion. The story closes with no one helping Kirana, not even Laras. Laras, who heard Kirana's expression of love and her invitation to marry, and the treatment of Kirana by the people around her, could only stare at Kirana.

Now we notice that people spat at Kirana just because Kirana, who is a lesbian, dared to express her feelings and ask Laras to marry her in front of the people present. Spitting at another person can be interpreted as a form of hatred and contempt for that person (UNDP & USAID, 2018; Tan et al., 2021). Then, this is what the author wants to show through people's reactions to Kirana's statement. The people who spat directly at Kirana were their response of hatred and contempt towards Kirana, who

admitted herself as a lesbian. Once again, the author portrays lesbians, through the eyes of ordinary people, as disgusting and contemptible.

Not only does the author portray a negative view of lesbians through the actions and words of the commoner characters in the story, but the author also shows another view of lesbians. The author depicts that the character Kirana, who is a lesbian, does not feel that there is anything wrong with her. She does not think that being a lesbian or liking a woman is bad. She feels normal. She doesn't feel sick. Instead, she is happy when she likes Laras. This statement was narrated at the beginning of the story.

What went wrong?

The difference is that I don't like men, but I like women even though I was born male sex.

From this narrative, Kirana questioned what was wrong with her if she dared to confess her feelings to Laras and ask her to marry her (Tan et al., 2021; Dewi & Hutapea, 2020). She questions why she has to accept all the blasphemy, curses, and insults from others just because she is a lesbian. She also questions what is wrong with her if she becomes a lesbian. Examining the following sentence can provide insight into Kirana's thoughts. *The difference is that I don't like men, but I like women even though I was born male sex.* Kirana does not feel that being a lesbian is wrong because she also likes someone. It is just that the person she likes is not a man, but a woman. She felt that it did not matter that she liked a woman because the most important thing for her was the feeling of liking. Kirana did not mind that her crush was a woman. As long as what she feels is love, she will love that person. Kirana has her reasons why she likes women and has become a lesbian. Not only that, Kirana also has her reasons for the courage to express her feelings to Laras and ask her to marry her. The following is some evidence of the short story narrative:

It was her uniqueness that evoked this feeling. The feelings I was experiencing were worsening. I don't know why it's so comfortable being around her, feeling happy when I see her passionately painting on paper. She is beautiful. Even extraordinarily beautiful. Many men are waiting for her, including women like me.

Upon examining this narrative excerpt, we can see that Kirana began to develop feelings for Lara. Kirana began to like Laras because Laras reminded her of her mother. Lara's character, who dares to uphold social justice, is very similar to Kirana's mother's character, and this is what Kirana is referring to with this quote: It was her specialness that brought out this feeling. It started with admiration, then developed into a fondness for Lara. The following quote represents the shift from Kirana's initial admiration for Laras to her liking her: The feeling I had was growing. I don't know why it's so comfortable to be around her. This quote shows that Kirana began to have feelings for Laras. Although Kirana does not mention it directly, she states that she feels comfortable around Laras. Whereas in the short story, Kirana has vowed not to be friends with anyone. Kirana has also assumed that all humans only come when they are in need, after which they will be discarded. Therefore, she began to withdraw and was reluctant to make friends. However, after Kirana met Laras, felt comfortable around Laras, and admired Laras, Kirana began to open up and even liked Laras. She also admitted this in the following sentence: She's beautiful. Even extraordinarily beautiful. Many men are waiting, including women like me. Kirana begins to realize

that she likes Laras like a man likes his woman. Kirana competes with many men for Lara's attention. Furthermore, this narrative explains how Kirana expresses her love for Laras:

I dared to admit it. I couldn't keep this strange feeling in for long. First, give a sign. I often bought her bottled coffee to keep her awake in class. Then, she would eat chocolate whenever she felt sad, hugging her and stroking her head when she cried. I did everything because I was already in love.

He held his hand when we went around the mall to buy something, often leaning on his shoulder to unwind. It was wonderful at that time. Everything has changed since then. The majority of rulers came to oppress.

In this narrative, Kirana tries to admit that she is in love with Laras. Kirana tries to win Laras' attention through the coffee and chocolate she buys. Kirana also shows her passion, as seen in the quote, by hugging her and stroking her head when she cries, holding her hand when they go around the mall to buy something, and often leaning on her shoulder to unwind. From this quote, we can see that Kirana is trying to show that she can always be there for Lara and is trying to make Lara happy. Kirana has also admitted that she is in love with Laras, and it is a genuine feeling, not one she has fabricated. Kirana also felt that the things she went through with Laras were happy. Next, let's discuss this chapter: Everything has changed since that incident. The majority of rulers came to oppress. We discover that they are not always happy. The "majority rulers" Kirana refers to are the people around Laras who set her up with a man named Aryo. The meaning of "majority" itself is people who think that women should like men, and vice versa. Kirana considers herself a lesbian as a minority who is oppressed by the "ruling majority".

But as if I didn't want to be crushed too deeply, I dared to be honest with Laras. I went to her engagement ceremony. I shouted in the crowd of people. Everyone was silent, looking at me in surprise. Even Laras looked confused. I walked onto the stage, took the microphone, and began to speak.

"I apologize. Thank you for everything, Laras. But how should I be called a human being? You remind me of my mother. I've loved you ever since and loved everything about you. It hurt so much when I found out you would be happy with Aryo instead of me. You can call me crazy. You can say I'm a shameless woman. But allow a slut like me to say what I feel. Didn't you teach me to express my feelings? Now I'm proving it, Laras. I can make you happy. Marry me."

Let's examine the narrative above. In the quote, "But as if not wanting to be crushed too deeply, I dared to be honest with Laras; Kirana has dared to confess her feelings to Laras." Kirana felt that Lara should know about it, and Kirana just wanted to be honest with herself to admit that she liked Laras. Kirana did not want to harbor her feelings and give in just because Aryo had matched Laras. At least, Laras could know Kirana's feelings. Whether or not Laras accepts it is a later matter.

Now we will unpack the dialogue spoken by Kirana. You remind me of Mom. From that moment on, I began to fall in love with you. Loved everything about you. In this quote, Kirana admits how she came to love Laras. Kirana also admits that she loves everything about Laras. This shows that Kirana sincerely loves Laras. Furthermore, Kirana expresses her sadness and disappointment in the quote: It hurt

so much when I had to know you would be happy with Aryo instead of me. In this quote, Kirana expresses her disappointment with the word "hurt". Kirana had hoped that Laras would know her feelings and choose to live with Kirana. However, Lara followed her parents' words and was married to Aryo. Following quote: You can call me crazy. You can say I'm a shameless woman. But allow a woman like me, who is not wealthy, to express my feelings. Didn't you teach me to express my feelings? In this quote, Kirana had not considered the possibility that she might be rejected or hated by Laras. At that time, Kirana only thought of being honest about her feelings with Laras. Through Laras, Kirana learned to open herself and started to be brave in facing the outside world. It was also through Laras that Kirana dared to admit that she was a lesbian. Lastly, I prove it, Lara. If I can make you happy, marry me. Kirana closes her words with a promise and an invitation to marry Lara. Kirana shows that she is serious about her feelings for Laras. Kirana doesn't care about other people's views or Aryo's views, whose engagement was interrupted by Kirana. The most important thing for Kirana is that she confesses her feelings to Laras.

3. Conclusion

From the explanation above, there are two ways the author describes lesbians. The first is from the views of others towards lesbians. Through the opinions of the characters who are the people around Kirana and Laras, the author makes the image of lesbians into someone who is considered despicable, cursed, disgusting, and even unfit to live. Lesbians are portrayed this way because society believes that lesbians are deviant and considered abnormal in society. Second, the author also describes the image of lesbians through a character who is also a lesbian named Kirana. The author portrays lesbians as people who do not feel that being a lesbian is wrong because she also loves her female partner seriously, just like a man who loves his female partner seriously. Lesbians are also portrayed as a woman who competes with other men to win the woman she wants.

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