CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

American society use race and gender in labeling the social status identity of both individual and group. These bases of categorization subsequently carry out the issue of superiority and inferiority. It is believed among a portion of American society that White is superior and high-class and others are inferior and low-class. Consequently, there is inequality of power between White and others that is so called people of color. This inequality is easily found in most organizations and institutions in America. It makes institutions and organizations in America are highly racist and people of color will have different experience and opportunity from the White. As Zuberi states that in American society; race, racism, and discrimination became bases and mechanism of hierarchical differentiation that shape the ordering of social relations as well as the allocation of life experiences and life chances (2001, p.319).

The interconnected race and gender produces the problem of inequality in term of sexes; men and women. It involves White men and men of color as well as White women and women of color. However, since the homosexual community arises in America, scope of the problem of race and gender expands. The system of racism in homosexual community is similar with heterosexual community. Nonetheless, the oppression obtained by the homosexuals particularly people of color is much more complex because of two facts. The first is American society is predominantly heteronormative. They believe that homosexuality opposes religion, norm, believe and culture. They are in convinced that heterosexual is a choice of life; a normal way to live in this world. The
second is the homosexuals is positioned in the lowest social class and they bear double oppression because their identity as others and homosexual.

The homosexuals are often called as “queer”. For most of the 20th century, the word is used to humiliate the abnormal people or often identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). However, in these current years, this word is used to mention people whose sexual orientation and gender identity against heteronormativity. Drag itself is part of queer. It is simply understood as a man who dresses up in women’s clothes, typically for the purposes of entertainment. Drag refers to gay identity therefore gay is always overrepresented in drag culture, for example; Divine (Harris Glenn Milstead), RuPaul Charles, Miss Understood (Alex Heimberg) and Lady Bunny (John Ingle), as well as Dutch drag queen Lady Galore (Sander den Baas) to name but a few (Oostrick, Sven, 2014, p.15). Drag can be categorized into two kinds; drag king and drag queen. Drag queen is a person identifies as a man but he dresses in feminine or gender-marked clothing, makeup and mannerisms. Steven Schacht and Lisa Underwood define drag queen as individual performing being women in front of an audience who knows that the individual is actually man (cited in Oostrick, Sven, 2014, p.16). The definition of drag king is on contrary; it is a person identifies as a woman but she dresses in masculine or gender marked clothing, makeup and mannerism.

Drag is different from cross-dressing and transvertism. Cross dresser is not necessarily drag even though doing drag is similar with cross dressing. Drag is simply understood as performance by performing gender performativity in contradiction. Therefore, the same as LGBT, the existence of drag breaks the system of normalcy in America. Their identity is not fit to social norms, thus, the queers often experience discrimination and denial identity both as individual and part of community. For an example, when a Black self-identified as queer, he/she obtains oppression and
rejection from society which is highly racist. Moreover, he/she might be exiled from his/her family as well as Black community that homophobia.

Drag identity is not fixed and stable. It is problematic because it is neither masculine nor feminine, but rather a complex collective of characteristics that challenges society’s traditionally polarized view of gender (Struubel, Jessica, 2011, p.13). It makes their identity is ambiguous and confusing. While performing as drag, people create new temporary identity that could be put on and take off. They emphasize that identity is fluid rather than fixed.

The ambiguous identity of drag is the symbol of rebellion towards heteronormativity. It is a protest against belief about binary nature of gender and sexuality systems, and also challenges compulsive heterosexuality (Leila and Taylor, 2010). They challenge systems of sexuality and gender by imitating social image of what it means to look like as man and woman in drag show. They combine image of both man and woman to assert that gender is socially nurtured. By gender bending, drags makes gender is only a construction and it potentially be changed.

Drag queen exists in America as the version of third gender. He constructs his identity by replacing man characteristics with woman characteristics. Rupp and Taylor state:

Drag queen” emerges as a kind of third-gender category in a society that insists there are only two.... In that sense, drag queens are like others who fall between or bridge or challenge the division between masculine and feminine… [However], these are people who create their own authentic genders, and those constructions are important in helping us think in a complex way about what makes a man a man and what makes a woman “ (2010,p.44).

As Rupp and Taylor state, drag queen identity is complex and unidentified. Drag queen still embraces man characteristics in his performance. He is not fully both man and woman but the combination of it. He is personally lack of masculinity and subsequently power as man. However drag queen can still maintain his power whilst he performs as woman in drag show. Drag show is
not merely an entertainment stage; it is a stage for self-empowering. As Wilchins says (2004), drag performance should be looked as the way to empower identity as a gay and also challenge the dominant structure of society and question straight male privilege.

Balls is a part of drag community and gay subculture. As an institution, drag community is racist. It is part of gay culture which belongs to the White gay. People of color, in this case; Blacks, face racial problem when they enter drag community. As mentioned by Bell Hooks in her work entitled Race and Representation, within the world of drag culture, the idea of womanness and femininity is totally personified by whiteness. This belief certainly becomes big problem for Black drag queen to make himself exists in White subculture. To fulfill the idea, the Black drag queen has to deny any power within Black masculinity. The Black queen consequently loses his masculinity as black male and become hypothetically castrated (Wray, Kate, 2013).

Black drag queen representation in media shows that drag culture itself is strongly contaminated by the issue of whiteness. The Blacks face in media does not reflect the image of Black woman but White woman. Kate Wray explains the reason in her work entitled Why It Gotta be Black? – How Race Impacts the Representation of Black Drag Queens, she says:

This is because drag does not go unnoticed within the hierarchy’s of a white dominated society. There is a freedom within whiteness that allows the white drag queen the ability to mock the female identity whilst also maintaining their masculinity. And where the black drag queen is acknowledged, it can be seen that to succeed within drag culture she must mask her blackness with white femininity, whilst being deprived of any form of sexualisation - ultimately becoming emasculated, resembling the stereotypical character of the ‘coon’ (p.5).

As seen in reality show RuPaul Drag’s Race and documentary movie Paris Is Burning, the appearance of Black drag queen is close to the portrait of White woman. One of character’s Paris is Burning states that the more they look like as White women, the more they feel empowered
Former academicians have been performed several researches about drag queen. Sven Oostrik (2014) in *Doing Drag; From Subordinate Queers to Fabulous Queens, Drag as an Empowerment Strategy for Gay Men* states that when a drag queen successfully performs feminity better than a woman could, it becomes drag queen’s power to make visitors notice him. He then states that as a gay, drag queen realizes that his feminity is rejected, thus by doing drag, he can embrace and develop his feminity. Moreover, by doing drag in the balls, a drag queen has opportunity to gain power of his queerness by stealing attention from visitors. As Sven states, he transforms it from something suppressing into something empowering (p.50). Kate Wray in *Why It Gotta be Black?* – *How Race Impacts the Representation of Black Drag Queens* provides an investigation of a famous Black drag queen; RuPaul Andre Charles. She says that White influences Black drag queens in constructing their image. Wray finds that RuPaul, as a Black drag queen does not embody the images of Black women in his appearance, she further states:

RuPaul abides to these personifications of whiteness. She masks herself in a hyper-feminised form of whiteness which resembles the imagery of a super model - wearing long blonde wigs, constructing a slim figure and large breasts, as well as whitened skin. Therefore, although RuPaul’s intentions are to create an image that transcends typical notions of gender and race, by embodying herself in whiteness she ultimately masks her African American identity within white femininity in order to become successful. (p.2)

Based on the background, this thesis traces and explores the image of Black drag queen constructed in a documentary film; *Paris is Burning*, which is directed by Jennie Livingston and produced in 1990. In looking the image of Black drag queens, this research investigates the issue of whiteness in drag culture and how it impacts to their performance. I am considerate to use the documentary because it contains the issue of racism within.

This documentary is significant to analyze because it reveals the issue of LGBT, especially Black drag queen. It presents drag queen community in New York City that hold their “house culture”; Balls. The ball is a space where the performance of drag queen is brought to a stage. The
drag queen is required to elaborate showgirl costumes and to duplicate the forms and essence of a straight person in perfect way. The ball represented in this film proclaims the issue of whiteness in drag culture. It is reflected through scenes, images, narration and *mise en scene*. Through those elements, *Paris Is Burning* serves interesting scene and narrative about the effort of Black drag queen serves in drag community by conforming to the Whites.

It is substantial to observe Black drag queen as my thesis object because it is so interesting to know deeper other problems of men of color in the field of homosexuality. In my thesis, I particularly investigate the way of Black queens empower their identity as gay and how they negotiate masculine and feminine identity. Because my research more concerns with the image of Black drag queen, it will be so interesting to investigate the norm, role and ideologies in drag culture so as the conclusion related to the representation of Black drag queen can be understood through documentary movie entitled *Paris is burning* (1990).

**B. SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This research is under the framework of American Studies, so it is close to the aspect of American culture and American society. This research examines the image of Black drag queen by investigating the issue of whiteness within drag culture. Therefore, this research focuses on the gender and white study to find out the issue of Whiteness within drag culture, I observe a documentary movie entitled *Paris Is Burning* (1990).

**C. RESEARCH QUESTION**

The research problem of this research is solved by answering the question below:

1. How does the LGBT documentary movie entitled *Paris is Burning* constructs the image of black drag queen by conforming the issue of whiteness within drag culture?
D. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This research aims to answer the research question; therefore objective of the study is to describe the image-construction of Black drag queen as they conform to the issue of whiteness in drag culture reflected in *Paris Is Burning* (1990).

E. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

American values and belief predominantly is White construction. The construction itself institutionalizes in most organizations in America. For this reason, people of color often experience discrimination because of their status as inferior. Therefore, having privileges as White’s is part of their dream. Moreover, in America, the distinction of gender also becomes base of racism aside from race. This makes people of color identifies as homosexual obtain more oppressions from society that is heterosexual. As part of homosexuality, drag obtains rejection from mostly American society. Indeed, Black drag queen has to face double rejections because of his race and gender. Being subordinated, Black drag queen needs to find a way to enable them to empower identity that is balls. However, the Balls itself is strongly influenced by White construction that makes Black appearance is problematic. The whiteness within drag culture produces the problem of imitating. Therefore, in this research, I investigate the image of Black drag queen which is presented as a White woman instead of Black woman.

Based on the objective the study above, this research hopefully will give a further benefit for:

1. English Department Students : to give deeper knowledge about whiteness and hegemony in drag culture, especially the influence of whiteness towards Black drag queen in
constructing their identity as a drag and also encourage a deeper critical research about the representation of Black drag queen in media

2. Other researches: to give more information to researchers who might be interested in researching the same theme and want to continue this research. Hopefully, the information, input and knowledge in this research can support their related research.

F. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Type of Research

This research is descriptive qualitative research. As descriptive qualitative research, it focuses on exploring and discovering issues and nature of social phenomenon and then answers the questions by analyzing and making descriptive summary of the information from the data that is organized in logical manner. Sandelowski says:

Qualitative descriptive research should be seen as “a categorical, as opposed to a non-categorical, alternative for inquiry; is less interpretive than an interpretive description approach because it does not require the researcher to move as far from or into the data; and, does not require a conceptual or highly abstract rendering of the data, compared to other qualitative designs“(cited in Vickie and Clinton, 2012, p.255).

Since this research is descriptive qualitative, it does not require calculations, figures, and graphs (Moleong, 2010 as cited in Debora, 2015). To answer research question, this research makes descriptive answer in the form of written about the image of Black drag queen which is constructed in the lens of White as reflected in source data.

2. Data and Source of Data


Since the type of research is descriptive qualitative method, the data does not attach to formula and number, thus the data can be reports, films, photographs, documents and so on. There are two kinds of data will be used in this research. The source of main data is a semi-documentary film entitled *Paris is Burning* which is directed by Jennie Livingston and produced in 1990. The primary data are dialogues, narrations, images and *mise-en-scenes* that are taken purposively to understand and reveal the message from the source data. The secondary data are images, and information that are taken from website and articles related.

3. Technique of Collecting and Analyzing Data

In collecting data, it needs to consider the organization of the data. In organizing data, one may employ categorization of the data that is considered to be suitable for the intended analysis, so that it will be easier to analyze the data to solve the research question (Woods, 2006). Thus, in this research, the data collection comes from the ways as follows:

a. Watching the documentary repeatedly to get deeper scrutiny

b. Cutting and saving important scenes

c. Making important notes while watching the documentary

d. Reading journals, books, articles, previous researches a lot and watching repeatedly the reality show entitled “RuPaul Drag’s Race” to support the data

e. Recollecting them by selecting the most proper groups of data to be displayed and analyzed

After collecting data finished, the next step is a process of analyzing data. As the study belongs to descriptive qualitative research, the analysis is conducted in these ways:

a. Scrutinizing the classified data which have been categorized into some groups
b. Identifying the symbolic signs that may refer to the image of black drag queen as the result of whiteness in drag community represented in the film

c. Signifying the signs from the film to find out the meaning represented through character, plot, cinematographic and *mise-en-scenes*. Those elements are examined textually by applying the documentary film and semiotic theory

d. Analysing the sign by contextual analysis. Socio cultural approach is examined to find out the image of black drag queen in specific social and cultural circumstances within the film. The social construction of reality theory, the queer and Marxism theory, the performativity and act gender theory, post human body theory, and postmodern identity theory are applied in this research.

e. Formulating the conclusion after the research question is answered.

**G. THEORITICAL APPROACH**

In 1930, the beginning American Studies focuses on myth, symbol and history. It makes the scope of American Studies only concerns with the meaning of American national identity and the way in which America might be distinguished from other nation (Campbell and Kean, 1997, p.1). In its development, American Studies extents its focus to broader area and puts concept of culture as its center. It connects American studies to other important topics; race, gender, ethnic, class and identity (Berkhofer, 1989). Since the issue of gender and race take more attentions in the field of American studies, this research is conducted under the American Studies framework. This research concerns to the interconnection between race and gender in defining identity of the individual and community. Theories and approaches related further are applied in analyzing the
interconnection. Since American Studies is interdisciplinary study, this research is allowed to borrow and crosscut some disciplines and theories which relate to the topic and data (ibid).

In the era of Globalization, American Studies extends its focus to the interconnection and co-implication of gender, race, ethnicity, class sexuality, and nationality. It also links to immigration, technology, hegemony, multiculturalism, globalization and hemispheric knowledge. American Studies today moves into transnational approach and makes geographic areas become dynamic, fluid, and multilayered. George Lipsitz argues that American Studies is not simply American Studies, but the political culture and national imaginary of the United States (as cited in Wiegman, Robyn, 1998, p.8). Since American studies is political culture and national imaginary, it is important to conduct a research towards the existence of queer in American society. It is important to investigate political culture and social imaginary of queer. Queer exists in American society and results the bivalent politics of race and gender. Its existence produces political behavior in form of discrimination and rejection. Kevin Floyd (2009) in Marxism and Queer theory says that queer produces the system of class. Therefore, this research investigates the interconnection of queer and race as well as the system of class in drag culture.

The diverse culture of American reflects in America cultural products; high culture and low culture (popular culture). Cultural product is a text, thus it relates to other texts and brings social reality as a context. Moreover, it is also unlimited because it is not only written works (literature) but also popular culture products such as music, film, food, statue, advertisement, video and so on. Skyes (1963) states that cultural product is not only cultural artifacts but also innovation of other arts, and products of science and technology (p.255-256). American Studies looks cultural products as an inter-textual form. Both high culture and popular culture reflect society in the
contemporary culture. They can be used to read the transformation of society from decade to decade and to reveal the plural, complex, and multifaceted of American Cultural Studies.

This research intends to investigate the image of black drag queen when they are confronted to whiteness within drag culture as reflected in Paris Is Burning (LGBT Documentary Film – 1990). As a documentary film, Paris Is Burning represents reality within. Jonathan Kahana says that documentary is a democratic form of culture; it often presents real people (belonging to the lower part of society) and raises social discussion, addresses a public belonging to all spheres, and imposes itself as a form of mass communication (as cited in Roberto, 2011, p.5). Documentary is about reality; however, it is also an art that needs creativity and manipulation in the process of making the film. Therefore it needs the selection of topic, editing, mixing sounds, and technology.

In this research, I employ documentary film theory of John Grierson. Grierson (1966) says that documentary is nothing more than a creative treatment of actuality, therefore, the editing of sequences must include not only description and rhythm, but also comment and dialogue” (Grierson, 1966). I look Paris Is Burning not only as reality representation, but also as construction and manipulation that need critical thinking to investigate it. In this reason, it is essential to question whether representation of Black drag queen in documentary is a truthful or not. Furthermore, in the process of analysis, the cinematography, sound and mise en scene are observed.

In general, documentary raises the issue that is close to society. To understand one issue in documentary film, it needs background knowledge. In this research, I apply the social construction of reality theory of Berger and Luckman. This theory is about knowledge, reality, consciousness and attitude. Berger and Luckman (1966) say that reality is socially constructed, and that sociology of knowledge must be used to analyze the process in which this occurs; those terms of reality and
knowledge are not only in everyday speech, but that have behind them along history of philosophical inquiry (p.7). I use theory of Berger and Lukman to analyze the relation between Whites and Blacks in White subculture. White is understood as norms, ideology, privilege and superiority, and this construction exists in drag community. Therefore, Black drag queen follows the belief as a form of natural attitude as reflects through their attitude and performance. To give complete understanding of this connection, I also involve the historical approach to investigate how the White becomes norm and belief which is naturally and consciously followed by Black drag queen.

Film is part of text and it consists of sign and every sign has meaning. To understand the meaning delivered by film maker, critical thinking is needed. In this research, I apply semiotic theory of Rolland Barthes. Roberto E. Pearson and Philip Simpson (2001) in *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television* say that semiotics is a theoretical framework for the study of meaning in films, television program and other cultural texts, which approaches them as a language (p.551). The same as language, film also relates to the set of codes and sub-codes. However, film has its own language and it is different from the system of language. Film speaks through visual images and pictures. It has signified and signifier which are similar with reality it refers to (Pearson & Simpson, 2001). Semiotic theory is used to obtain denotation and connotation meaning in *Paris is Burning*.

As a text, film cannot be separated from the context. As a context, *Paris Is Burning* reflects belief, life value and reality belongs to American society. To see the context, American Studies needs other disciplines. Basically, American Studies offers new perspective and several of viewpoints to view any given subject of investigation and involve other disciplines of study. Context can be inscribed in some intentional model by author; it can also be constructed by the
reader in some reader-response model; depending on self-interpretation of the reader (Berkhofer, 1989, p.588).

The existence of Black drag queen in America becomes problematic because of their physical appearance. People are getting difficult to distinguish between the real women and the fake women. It is increasingly hard to explain between the original and the artificial. Therefore, I involve theory of performativity and act gender theory of Judith Butler. Butler states:

> Gender is in no way a stable identity tenuously constituted in time- an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, hence must be understood as mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (1988).

Body is a set of signifies which its appearance is not pre-determinate and a concrete expression. It is a historical situation rather than natural fact, thus, sex is biological fatuity and gender is cultural interpretation. In this research, I use Butler’s theory of performativity acts because basically drag queen itself is performative; it is something that meets the need of the physical and body, an act both intentional and performativity.

To create the image of woman in his appearance, Black drag queen is free to manipulate and reconstruct his body. Therefore, I use post human body theory to analyze the body of Black drag queen. Post human bodies are queer body, the techno body and the contaminated body; bodies that rupture a coherent narrative of the human subject in favor of the body in crisis (Halberstam and Livingstone 1995, p. 3–4). Post human bodies are the causes and effects of postmodern relations of the power and pleasure, virtuality and reality, sex and its consequences (ibid). While doing drag, Blacks live in fantasy of being models, executive and so on. They are in the process of reconstructing fix identity. They do not only reconstruct their gender performance but also physical appearance through breast and vagina operation.
Drag queen is a gay, thus, he is partially men and women. Gay is considered as part of White subculture; therefore, Black is excluded in gay community. When Blacks enter into drag community, they cannot keep their Black masculinity. On the contrary, they become sissy and subsequently powerless. In the concept of postmodern, identity is unstable and fragile. Bell Hooks in Postmodern Blackness,” from Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics says that Postmodernist discourses are often exclusionary even as they call attention to, appropriate even, the experience of “difference” and “Otherness” to provide oppositional political meaning, legitimacy, and immediacy when they are accused of lacking concrete relevance. In this research, I examine the drag queen as part of contemporary culture to reveal the identity of Black male essentially can be re-thought and re-constructed.

H. THESIS ORGANIZATION

1. Chapter I

   Chapter I is introduction. It consists of Research Background, Scope and Limitation, Research Question, Objective of The study, Significance of the Study, Research Methodology, Theoretical Approach, and Thesis Organization.

2. Chapter II

   Chapter II is called Literature Review. This chapter includes many researches and works of previous researches and scholars which are used as supporting data. This chapter consists of six subchapters.
The first is Theory of Queer and Performativity. This subchapter further is divided into 2 sub-subchapter; Queer, Drag and Drag Queen and Post human Body Theory. The second is The House and Ball Complexities. The third is The Social Construction of Reality. The rest subchapters are Identity and Post Modernism Theory, Semiotic Theory, Documentary as Construction, and Previous Researches on Drag Queen.

3. Chapter III

Chapter II is analysis which provides the answer to research question. It is classified into 3 subchapters. The first subchapter is The Balls as the Strategy of Empowering Black Drag Queen. The second is about the White Domination in Drag Culture which is divided into two sub-subchapters; The Reflection of Beauty Standard in the Ballroom Culture and The Black Drag Queen Limitation in Ballroom. The last subchapter is The Identity of Black Drag Queen Gay and Transgender which divided into 2 categorized that are Black gay male and Black Male to Female (MTF) transgender.

4. Chapter IV

This Chapter consists of Conclusion and Suggestion.