



Family Disharmony and Identity Narratives of Lesbian Adolescents in Digital Societies

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Abstract. Family disharmony is a significant factor influencing adolescent development. This study explores how family conflict contributes to the identity formation of adolescents who identify as lesbian and places their experience within the broader context of digital society. Researchers conducted in depth interviews with adolescents who identify as lesbian. Data were analysed thematically to capture the interplay between family dynamics and identity narratives. Findings indicate that parenting discord, inadequate fathering, traumatic family encounters, and unfavourable parenting styles significantly impact adolescents' emotional wellbeing and identity development. Adolescent often seek alternative spaces outside the family, including digital platforms, where online communities and participatory media provide both support and risks. These digital interactions foster identity exploration, offering solidarity but also exposing adolescents to stigma and privacy concerns. Family disharmony remains a key driver in adolescent identity formation, but digital society now plays an equally important role in shaping narratives of belonging and self-expression. This study highlights the need for ethical communication, digital literacy, and family support to foster healthier identity development. It is hoped that this research will contribute to interdisciplinary discussion on gender, identity, and communication in new media within an algorithmic environment.

Keywords: Family Disharmony, Identity, Lesbian, Digital Society.

1 INTRODUCTION

The family is a fundamental entity in shaping individuals in society. Adolescents are in a complex developmental phase, where the search for identity is a key aspect. However, families often face complex challenges that can affect their stability and harmony. One increasingly prominent phenomenon within the context of family dynamics is disharmony, which can be a primary trigger for the emergence of unusual behavior or behavior considered taboo and controversial in society. This unusual behavior can occur because, for some children experiencing family disharmony, it is often seen as an emotional escape.

The background and context of this research are rooted in the broader field of sexuality and gender studies. The study of sexual oriented has been a hot and interesting topic and has been debated for many years, with researchers striving to

understand the complex interesting topic and has been debated for many years, with researchers striving to understand the complex interaction between biological, psychological and social factors that contribute to the development of sexual attraction and behavior. In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the importance of family dynamics in shaping individuals' sexual orientation and identity. This study aims to contribute this growing body of research by examining the specific ways in which family disharmony can trigger the emergence of female-to-female sexual orientation or lesbian behavior in adolescents.

Lesbianism, which is an emotional or sexual attraction between female individuals can be the result of a complex combination of factors, including those related to disharmony and family dynamics. Previous research has shown that often disharmonious family environments can significantly contribute to the development of adolescents' sexual identity, including those related to disharmony and family dynamics. Family disharmony often disrupts adolescents' psychological wellbeing. When emotional support from the family weakens, adolescents tend to seek identity validation outside the home, including through digital communities.

Pérez-Torres emphasized that social media functions as a digital mirror that strengthens adolescents' identity exploration, while simultaneously posing a risk of internalizing stigma. This aligns with the Avci, Baams & Kretschmer [2] whose systematic review demonstrated that social media use is closely related to adolescents' identity formation, encompassing both positive aspects such as social support and self-exploration and negative aspects such as social pressure and anxiety.

Furthermore, family factors remain a key determinant of adolescent's digital literacy and identity development. Lou et al. [3] found family sociodemographic factors and parental mediation patterns significantly influence adolescents' digital literacy. When parental mediation is weak, adolescents are more susceptible to exposure to content that reinforces identity confusion. Thus, family disharmony and weak parental support exacerbate adolescents' vulnerability to the dynamics of digital society.

In recent years, a growing body of research has examined the various factors that contribute to the development of same sex attraction and behavior among adolescents. This study has several fundamental objectives, some of which are as follows. First, this article attempts to provide a detailed analysis of how family disharmony can contribute to the development of same sex attraction and behavior among adolescents. Second, this article aims to identify potential strategies and interventions that can be implemented to address and mitigate the negative impact of family disharmony on adolescent sexual development and wellbeing. To achieve these objectives, this study has the potential to play a significant role in the field of sexuality and gender studies and can provide input for policy and program developers aimed at promoting healthy sexual development and wellbeing in young people.

The research problem arises from the fact that family disharmony adolescents' identity formation disrupts adolescents' identity formation and increases the risk of identity confusion. While social media serves as an arena for identity exploration, it also amplifies the risk of stigma and psychological distress. Weak parental mediation further increases adolescents' vulnerability to algorithmic bias and negative content. The interconnection between family, identity, and digital society is

not yet fully understood in educational and family policies in Indonesia, necessitating a more in-depth study.

2 Literature Review

2.1. Family Disharmony as a Triggering Factor

The family is the primary social institution that shapes an individual identity, values, and orientation. When family functioning is disrupted, through conflict between parents, a less-than-ideal father role, dysfunctional parenting patterns, or relational trauma. The family's internal social structure is disrupted. Prioste et al. [4] emphasized that a negative family climate exacerbates identity confusion, while a positive climate supports healthy identity exploration. Guevara et al. [5] added that the quality of parent child relationship significantly determines adolescent well-being.

In the Indonesia context, Alfiasari, Salsabila & Khairunisa [6] showed that the covid-19 pandemic weakened family resilience and increased the risk of domestic conflict, thus worsening adolescents' resilience building challenges. Another research confirms that family conflict is correlated with increased depression, anxiety, and emotional disturbance (Johnson, [7]; Santiago, Lopez & Hernandez, [8]). Demetriou [9] added that poor family functioning increases mental health problems in both community and clinical contexts. In fact, Zahra, Wilodati & Wahyuni [10] found that family disharmony can trigger lesbian behavior in adolescent girls in Indonesia.

2.2. Lesbian Identity as a Coping Narrative

Lesbian identity as a coping narrative lesbian identity in adolescents is formed through a complex interaction between psychological, social, and familial factors. Erickson [11] introduced an eight-stage framework of psychosocial development, emphasizing that each life stage is marked by a developmental crisis that individuals must overcome to achieve a healthy identity. The most relevant stage in the context of this research is identity vs. role confusion, which occurs during adolescence.

Furthermore, Erikson [12] emphasized that adolescence is a phase of identity discovery. During this stage, adolescents require a "sense of sameness and continuity" to establish a stable identity. Family failure to provide emotional support and continuity can lead to role confusion, a confusion of identity that makes adolescents vulnerable to psychological distress. Situations of family disharmony exacerbate this condition, making it easier for adolescents to seek identity validation outside the family.

Eriksons concepts were later expanded by Marcia [13], who developed identity statutes (diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement) to explain variations in identity exploration and commitment. Klimstra & van Doeslaar [14] added that adolescents facing family disharmony are more likely to reconsider commitment, including regarding sexual orientation. In this context, lesbian identity often emerges as a coping narrative for the emotional distress caused by family disharmony.

Recent research confirms that family plays a major role in the formation of LGBT identity. Fatimah & Nurillah [15] showed that family failure to provide affection, open communication, and sexual minority adolescents improves

psychological well-being, while rejection exacerbates the risk of depression and risky behavior.

In this context, lesbian identity often emerges as a coping narrative for the emotional distress caused narrative by family disharmony. Lesbian identity is not simply a sexual orientation, but rather a narrative that provides a sense of belonging and solidarity, especially when family support is lacking

2.3 Digital Society as an Arena of Expression

The digital era provides a safe space for lesbian adolescents to express their identity. Bandura [16] through social learning theory, emphasized that behavior can be shaped through observation. In the context of digital societies, adolescents experiencing family disharmony internalize lesbian identity through interactions on social media, community forums and virtual spaces.

Recent research shows that digital spaces function as both an arena for identity expression and a coping mechanism. Fisher, Tao & Ford [17] highlights that social media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it provides community support and opportunities for identity exploration but on the other, it also poses the risk of stigma and online harassment.

Chen & Taylor [18] add that social media algorithms like TikTok and Instagram play a role in curating representations of LGBTQ+ identities, which can either reinforce pride or foster bias. Ofreneo et al. [19] assert that LGBTIQ+ youth navigate their identities through relationships with family, culture, and the social environment. Acceptance, rejection, or tolerance from the family can influence the process of accepting their identity. In these conditions, digital spaces can provide opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals to find representation and an environment that supports the expression of their identity. Thus, digital space can be an alternative space for lesbian women to express and negotiate their identity when facing limited acceptance in the social environment.

2.4 The Interconnection of Disharmony, Identity, and Digital Societies

Recent literature confirms the close relationship between family disharmony, lesbian identity, and digital society. Family conflict has a significant impact on adolescent identity formation, including sexual identity. Mastrotheodoros, Van der Graaff, Dekovic, Meeus & Branje [20] demonstrated that parent adolescent conflict is not only related to intensity but also to differences in perception between parents and adolescents. This mismatch in perception is related to personality type and can exacerbate identity confusion. Similarly, Chiang & Bai [21] asserted that family conflict increases adolescents' emotional sensitivity and is associated with internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety.

Furthermore, Cheng, Cheung & Chung [22] emphasized that family conflict and cohesion play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' social responsibility, with emotion regulation weakens due to family disharmony, adolescents are more vulnerable to seeking identity validation outside the family. In this context, lesbian identity can be understood as a coping narrative for the emotional distress arising from family disharmony.

Digital society then becomes an arena for expression that reinforces this identity narrative. Digital platforms provide safe spaces for lesbian youth to express

themselves, but they also pose risks of stigma and algorithmic bias. Thus, family disharmony drives the search for alternative identities, lesbian identity emerges as a psychosocial strategy, and digital communities provide an arena for expression and support that reinforces these narratives.

3 Methods

The study used a qualitative approach with a case study method to deeply understand the experiences of lesbian youth in the context of family disharmony and digital society. Qualitative approach was chosen because it can produce a comprehensive and complex picture of social phenomena and allows researchers to capture the subjective perspectives of informants in a natural setting [23]. According to Smoyer [24], qualitative research allows researchers to explore individual experiences in detail, particularly on sensitive issues that are difficult to measure quantitatively. Qualitative research allows researchers to comprehensively explore social phenomena through narratives, interviews, and observations (Creswell & Poth, [25]).

Furthermore, this study utilized open ended, semi structured interviews as the primary data collection technique. Semi structured interviews allow researchers to prepare key questions while still allowing informants to freely express their views. This aligns with the guidelines of Harrison Ginsberg, Babbott & Serlachius [26], which emphasize the importance of flexibility in qualitative interviews to capture the nuances of informant's experiences.

Participants were identified using nonprobability techniques, specifically snowball sampling, which is useful for finding, identifying and recruiting samples in a network of relationships (Nurdiani, [27]). This technique is effective for reaching difficult to access groups such as lesbian youth who may be reluctant to appear in public places. Initial informants were recruited and then asked to recommend other relevant participants (Braun & Clarke, [28]). This technique is particularly effective for reaching difficult to access groups, such as lesbian adolescents who tend to hide their identities. The approach is consistent with the practices recommended by Sharma, Khanal, & van Teijlingen [29], which emphasize building trust and fostering community engagement when conducting research with vulnerable populations.

The informants in this study consisted of ten adolescent girls from diverse backgrounds. NZ, 19, the second of two siblings, experienced trauma due to a father who was not attentive enough and therefore sought comfort outside the family. RD, 26, the eldest of three siblings, experienced abuse from a former boyfriend and was influenced by her environment and social media. VA, 17, a high school student, chose to come out as a lesbian after being cheated on by her boyfriend, while her parents were unaware of her identity. KR comes from a broken home, actively advocates for LGBT+ rights, and experienced trauma from her parents' infidelity. GS, 25, grew up in a patriarchal family, felt trapped by heterosexual norms, and ultimately chose to live authentically. RA, having had a crush on a female friend since childhood, experienced depression when the relationship ended, and later identified as a lesbian.

ML, a recent graduate, came out as a lesbian during the covid-19 pandemic after interacting through social media. WN, a college student, experienced depression due to parental conflict and felt calmer when in a same sex relationship. HN nearly

committed suicide after a breakup then entered a same sex relationship as a form of emotional coping. BI experienced abuse from her father who has a mental disorder and began to realize her sexual orientation through interactions with a psychiatrist. The informants' profiles demonstrate diverse backgrounds, but common threads include traumatic experiences, family disharmony and the influence of social and digital environments that fuel the search for alternative identities.

The data analysis process involved data reduction, data presentation, inference, and verification. Data reduction aimed to filter relevant information and identify initial patterns. Data presentation was done in thematic narrative, illustrating key findings. Inference was used to identify significant trends and themes, while verification was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the analysis results. This analytical process is consistent with the thematic analysis approach proposed by Nowell et.al. [30], which emphasizes validity and transparency in qualitative research. It is also supported by Chandrasekar et al. [31], who highlighted the importance of using thematic analysis for managing large qualitative datasets, including interviews and personal narratives.

Therefore, this research method combined semi structured interviews, observations, and document analysis to obtain a comprehensive picture of the impact of family disharmony on the identities of lesbian adolescents. The qualitative approach allowed researchers to capture subjective experiences in dept while ensuring validity through a rigorous verification process.

4 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

This study found that lesbian sexual orientation in adolescent is the result of a complex interaction between family and non-family factors. Of the ten informants, six cited family disharmonies as the primary trigger, while the other five emphasized external factors such as the social environment, peers, and digital media.

4.1 Family disharmony

Interview results indicate that family disharmony is one of the dominant factors driving adolescents to identify as lesbian. Family conflict was the most frequently cited trigger. NZ (19 years old) said that her father rarely cared for her and often caused her fear, making her feel like she had no safe place at home. This led her to seek comfort outside the family, ultimately leading to closer relationship with women. NZ experience demonstrates that a lack of emotional support from a father can create psychological vulnerability that leads to the search for an alternative identity. This situation led her to seek comfort outside the family, ultimately leading to a same sex relationship.

BI experienced physical and verbal abuse from her father. She said,

“My father often hit me and said harsh things. I often consulted a p psychiatrist and from there I realized that I felt more comfortable with women.”

This quote illustrates how family trauma can transform into sexual orientation as a form of emotional coping.

WN, a college student, described constant parental fighting as leading to depression. She felt calmer when she was in a same sex relationship. WN case demonstrates that prolonged family conflict can drive adolescents to seek emotional stability outside the home.

Besides conflict, ineffective parenting patterns also emerged as a significant factor. Lack of attention, poor communication, and harsh parenting styles make adolescents feel insecure at home. KR, form a broken home, emphasized that she never felt cared for by her parents, but received support from female friends. This situation demonstrated that the absence of a supportive family figure drives adolescents to seek emotional surrogates outside the family.

These findings align with research by Berman et al. [32], which emphasized a reciprocal relationship between trauma and adolescent identity. Family trauma not only impacts psychological stability but also exacerbates identity confusion. Furthermore, Fallah Tafti [33] demonstrated that dimensions of childhood trauma are associated with identity disturbance in adolescents, suggesting that family disharmony may be a significant factor in the formation of alternative sexual orientations as a form of coping.

4.2 Non-Family Factors

In addition to family factors, several informants emphasized the influence of the social environment, peers, and digital media. RD (26 years old) experienced harassment from a former male boyfriend. She stated,

“I was traumatized because I was harassed by my boyfriend. Since then, I don’t trust men. I prefer women.”

RD experience demonstrates that negative experiences with the opposite sex can trigger lesbian orientation.

ML, a recent high school graduate, began a same sex relationship through social media during the covid-19 pandemic. She explained that at first, she was just experimenting, but then she felt comfortable. This demonstrates how social media serves as a safe space for teenagers to explore their identities.

VA (17 years old) felt more comfortable with female friends after being cheated on by her boyfriend. She said that the experience made her more trusting of women, even though her parents didn’t know her identity. RA has had feelings for female friends since childhood. At first, she thought they were just normal feelings, but as she grew older, she realized they were part of who she was. HN, who nearly committed suicide after a breakup, explained that she found emotional support from a woman who promised not to hurt her. This relationship helped her overcome her grief.

These findings are consistent with recent literature. Oliva, Parra & Arranz [34] emphasized that parental relational styles significantly influence adolescent adjustment. When parenting patterns are dysfunctional or conflict ridden, adolescents tend to experience emotional distress and difficulty. Furthermore, Peçi [35], which emphasized the crucial role of peer influence in shaping adolescent sexual behavior and by Syam & Iba [36] which demonstrated that social stigma in Indonesian digital media significantly influence the formation of LGBT+ adolescent identities.

In the context of this research, lesbian sexual orientation can be understood as a narrative of coping with emotional distress. RA stated:

“Since I was little, I’ve liked female friends. At first, I was confused, I thought it was just a normal feeling. But as I grew older, I realized it was part of who I was. HN, who nearly committed suicide after a breakup, explained,

“I was drunk every day because of the breakup. Then a woman said she wouldn’t hurt me. I believed her, and I ended up dating her. That helped me get out of my sadness.”

GS, who grew up in patriarchal family, stated:

“My family really pushed me to follow heterosexual norms. But I felt trapped. In the

end, I chose to live my life authentically, even though my relationship with my family was difficult.”

This process aligns with the identity development theory proposed by Kroger & Marcia [37], in which adolescents form identities through exploration and commitment to values they deem appropriate. Some informants chose to hide their identities, while others were more open in digital spaces. This demonstrates differences in adaption strategies influenced by levels of family and social acceptance.

4.3 Comparative Analysis

Comparatively, informants influenced by family factors tended to use lesbian orientation as a form of escape from trauma. They experienced violence, conflict, or a lack of emotional support, making same sex relationships a means of finding security.

Conversely, informants influenced by non-family factors more often used lesbian orientation as a form of identity exploration. Lesbian orientation in this group was more related to the search for emotional comfort and curiosity, rather than solely family trauma.

This difference suggests that while family disharmony can be a powerful trigger, non-family factors also play a significant role in strengthening or even triggering lesbian orientation. In other words, lesbian identity in adolescents is formed through a combination of internal and external factors

Table 1. Comparative Table.

Category	Informant	Key Trigger	Meaning Orientation
Family factors	NZ, BI, WN, KR	Parental conflict, violence, lack of support	Escaping from trauma, seeking safety
Non-Family factors	RD, ML, VA, RA, HN	Peer influence, social media, negative experiences	Identity exploration, seeking emotional comfort

Traumatic experiences and the search for identity are life narratives that demonstrate how adolescents adapt to the circumstance they face. The findings are consistent with recent literature. Cummings et al. [38] showed that family conflict may be related to emotional insecurity and adjustment problems in adolescents. These findings indicate that family conditions are an important context that can influence adolescents’ emotional experiences in facing the process of developing and accepting their identity. Furthermore, Ghodke et al. [39] explains that identity formation in generation Z is influenced by the interaction of various factors, including family influence, social stigma, relationships with peers, digital culture, and psychological conditions. These

findings show that adolescent identity development is a complex process and cannot be understood through one factor alone. In the context of this research, this perspective is the basis for understanding lesbian identity by considering the relationship between the family environment, social relationships, experiences in digital spaces, and individual psychological process.

4.4 Discussion

This study demonstrates that lesbian sexual orientation in adolescents is formed through a complex interaction between family, peer, and digital media factors. Findings from informants indicate that family disharmony, traumatic experience, and social support from the environment and online media play a significant role in identity formation process. Informant NZ, BI, and KR described how family conflict, verbal and physical abuse, and lack of emotional support led them to seek comfort outside the family. This situation demonstrated that family disharmony can create psychological vulnerability that leads to the search for alternative identities. This is consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of family relationship patterns in maintaining adolescent emotional stability.

In addition to family factors, peer influence is also significant. Informants RA and HN found emotional comfort through same sex relationship supported by their social environment. These findings are consistent with Brown & Larson [40], who emphasized that peer relationships play a crucial role in the formation of adolescents' social and sexual identities. Peer influence not only influences behavior but also strengthens identity exploration as part of psychological development. From a development perspective, Steinberg & Morris [41] emphasized that identity exploration is part of the normal development process of adolescents. In this context, lesbian sexual orientation can be understood as a form of identity exploration that emerges when adolescent face emotional pressure or lack social support.

Digital media also plays a significant role. Informants ML and VA used social media as a safe space to express their identities. This is consistent with Best, Manktelow & Taylor [42], who highlighted that online communication and social media serve as a means of identity expression while also influencing adolescent psychological wellbeing. Online social support can reduce stigma and strengthen self-confidence, although it also carries certain risks. Theoretically, this study adds to our understanding of how internal and external factors contribute to the formation of adolescent sexual identity. Practically, the results of this study provide input for counselors, education, and policymakers to develop more inclusive youth mentoring programs, emphasizing family support, digital literacy, and safe spaces in schools and communities.

5 CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, the experiences of family disharmony were perceived by the informants as influential in the process of identity formation. Parental conflict, ineffective communication, lack of emotional support, and experiences of verbal and physical abuse created psychological conditions that drove the informants to seek

security, acceptance, and emotional closeness outside the family environment. For some informants, traumatic experiences involving parental figures became an important part of the life narrative they interpreted during the identity formation process.

In addition to family experiences, the social environment, peers, and digital media, also shaped the process of identity exploration. Social media was seen as a space that allowed informants to obtain information, find communities with similar experiences and express themselves more openly. Support from peers and digital communities provided a sense of acceptance and helped informants understand their perceived identity.

This research also shows that identity formation among informants occurs through a complex and dynamic process. Family experience, interpersonal relationships, social interaction, and digital media use interact to shape how informants interpret themselves. In this context, identity does not emerge because of a single factor, but rather is formed through the accumulation of life experiences that differ from individual to individual.

On the other hand, stigma and discrimination remain a part of the informant's experiences. Some choose to hide their identities in social settings due to fear of rejection, while others feel safer expressing themselves through digital media or specific communities. These differences in strategies demonstrate the effort of adaption in facing social demands while maintaining one's identity.

Overall, this case study demonstrates that the informants' experience in forming their identities are influenced by the interaction between family dynamics, social environment, peer relationship, and digital media. These four aspects are interconnected and form a unique subjective experience for each informant, thus understanding the process of identity formation as complex, contextual, and cannot be explained by a single factor.

Disclosure of Interests. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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