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SOCIAL NEUROCOGNITIVE ANALYSIS ON THE FAMILY ROLE IN FORMING A LESBIAN MINDSET

Ambar Sulianti ^{*1}, Jamilah Laela Apriyani ¹, Dadang Sahroni ¹, Wida Adila ¹, Yiyin Karlina ¹, Hasya Fadhila Riyadhi ²

^{*1} Faculty of Psychology, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Indonesia

² Faculty of Science and Technology, UIN Sunan Gunung Djati, Indonesia



Abstract

Motivation/Background: The formation of a lesbian mindset does not happen immediately. This study aims to explore the process of family roles experienced by research subjects who have a lesbian sexual orientation even though it is not accordance with their religion.

Method: The research method used was a qualitative research of phenomenology in two subjects who had lived lesbian sexual orientation for more than 2 years with different backgrounds. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was conducted to analyze the role of the family as a model, how the subject perceives the stimulus, direct or indirect environmental contributions, and how close family experiences form a lesbian mindset about the subject.

Results: The results of this study indicate the subject "I" had a model of his father's behavior and reinforces the general perception of his mother that men had bad behavior. The social Environment made the subject felt ostracized and entered the domain of the lesbian community who can accept the subject with the circumstances as she was without much demand. A female friend in this environment became modes and informants experienced being lesbian. Meanwhile, "R" was growing psychologically with a style of parenting that is too spoiled by her mother and got a model and informants experienced from her older sister.

Conclusions: Both subjects get different experiences in the process of forming a lesbian mindset. From a neurocognitive social perspective, the formation of a lesbian mindset is very complex. Neurocognitive response of the experience of getting too many rough touches or too long getting a hug of comfort, both can trigger perceptions that supported by the environment will form a lesbian mindset.

Keywords: Social Neurocognitive; Family; Lesbian Mindset; Sexual Orientation.

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1. Introduction

Lesbian is a term of women having a sexual orientation to the same gender [1]. It also refers to women who physically, sexually, emotionally, or spiritually love other women. Crawford's theory states that lesbians have sexual and emotional desires for women and they consciously identify themselves as lesbian [2]. There are some factors making individual become a lesbian. According to biological theories, genetic and not balance in hormonal have a role in homosexuality formation [3], [4]. That statement is based on research finding which studies homosexuality in the family. Besides, according to hormonal study, homosexuality is lower than heterosexual among individuals with HIV. However, there is still no research proving that genetics is a natural predisposition to homosexual orientation.

Based on psychoanalytic (psychodynamic), Sigmund Freud argues that individuals who become homosexual or heterosexual have resulted from their experiences with parents. He added that homosexuality is not a disease, but rather a variation of sexual development in the individual. That variation in sexual orientation is influenced by the environment of childhood with their parents [5].

In contrast, some opinions deny biological and genetic factors responsible for the process of homosexual orientation. Byne and colleagues suggest that there is no significant difference in the number of nerve cells in the brain of sexual orientation function [6]. Sociocultural and environmental factors have more influence in the process of homosexual orientation [7]–[9]. There is homosexuality in twins reported but it is not many. Some homosexuals choose to become lesbians since they fail in fostering heterosexual relationships. Most of them find homosexual orientation when they are adolescents. Alves, J.S. Parente, and G.A. Albuquerque research on 2016 revealed that respondents had an identity crisis during teenagers since they were looking for an identity as homosexuals and that crisis happened again when they had pressure in the form of prejudice and social discrimination against homosexuals [10].

Bandura's social cognitive theory acknowledges the role of evolutionary factors in human adaptation and change. However, it denies one-sided evolutionism in which social behavior is a product of evolved biology, but social and technological innovations that create pressure for environmental selection for adaptation do not affect biological evolution. Based on a view of two ways of the evolutionary process, evolutionary pressure drives changes in body structure that enable individuals to manipulate, change, and construct new environmental conditions [11].

This study looks at the phenomenon of two Moslem teenagers who become lesbians coming from different family backgrounds but both of them have heterosexual parents. In Islam, regarding same-sex relationships, both male and female, Allah has warned people on the prophet Luth period. Allah Almighty, says in Surah Al-Naml: 54-55:

“...And [mention] the prophet Luth, when he said to his people, "Do you commit immorality while you are seeing? Do you indeed approach men with desire instead of women? Rather, you are a people behaving ignorantly."

Both subjects explain that even though their sexual orientation was not suitable for their religion but they felt comfortable in being lesbian. Their parents had no homosexual experiences and they didn't know that their daughters have a lesbian orientation. However, they argued that they still had a desire to get married to a man. Considering potential conflict between sexual orientation and religious beliefs, this study aims to analyze the family role in the process of the lesbian mindset from a social neurocognitive view.

2. Materials and Methods

This is phenomenological research to understand the phenomena experienced by subjects through behavior, perception, motivation, and action in holistic and descriptive related to the process of forming a lesbian mindset.

2.1. Subject Research

"T", the first subject, 18-year-old has had lesbian mindset since she was 13 years old. She is the second child of 3 siblings. Her parents had divorced. She hides her lesbian identity from his family and friends.

"R", the second subject, 23-year-old had decided to become lesbian since she was a college student and still being lesbian when a data collected. She had had a lesbian relationship for almost 5 years. Besides, R is one of the members of LGBT organizations in Indonesia. She has a religious family, where her father is a leader (ustadz) of praying community surrounded. She also has a religious education since she was a child.

2.2. Measurement Tools

This study used some techniques in collecting data. One of them was an in-depth interviewer since this technique deeply explores the personal experiences of each subject. Besides, observation is also very helpful to find out information that cannot be expressed during the interview since the topic is sensitive so that body gestures and facial expressions can be an additional data. Semi-closed interviews were conducted to explore the subject's self-awareness in reflecting on what they see, think, remember and expect until they have a lesbian mindset. In phenomenology research, the aim is to find in-depth a detailed understanding of the phenomenon. Interviews and observations were conducted to analyze the role of the family as a model, how subjects perceive stimulus, direct or indirect environmental contributions, and how close family experiences shape the lesbian mindset about the subject. Figure 1 described a flow of data analysis.

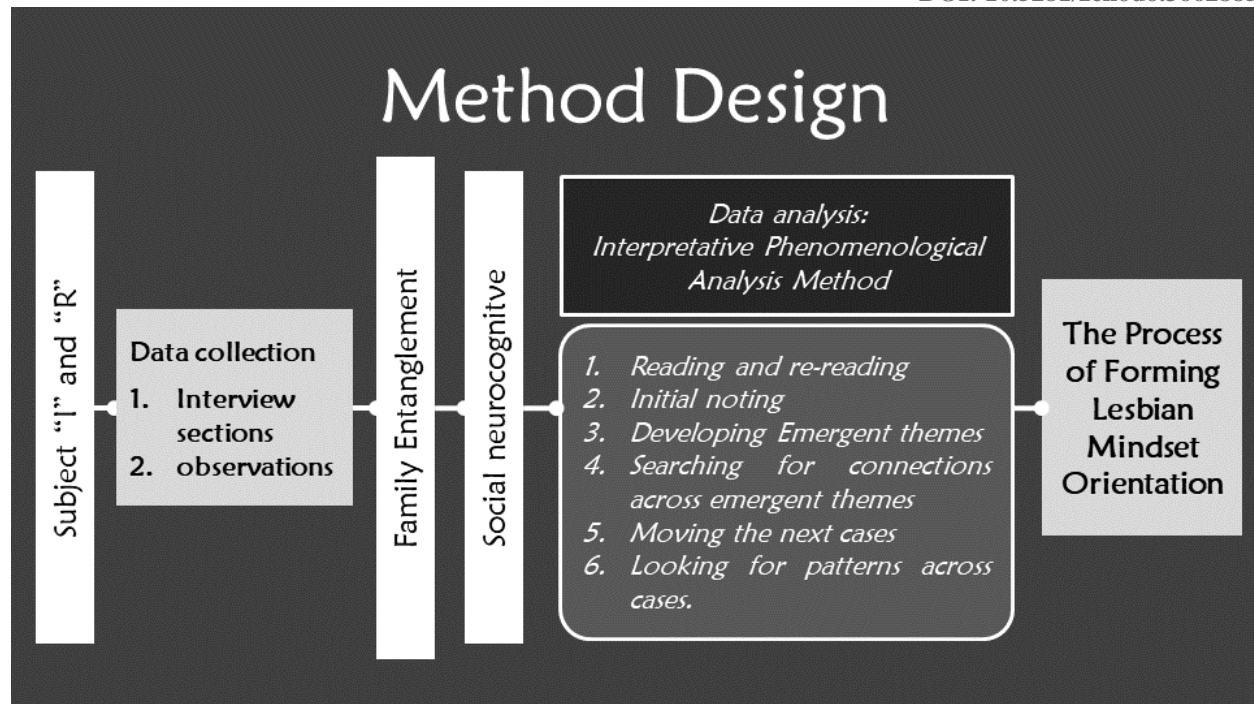


Figure 1: The Method Design

Data from in-depth interviews were then analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The IPA approach was used since data analysis procedures are detailed. The procedure focuses on what experience that the subject had through personal and social life. Data from social phenomena can be collected from observation and interviews like in-depth interviews.

2.3. Term Literature Review

Sexual identity. Genital identity is an individual's awareness of having a body as male or female. It depends on the biological sexual characteristics such as chromosomes, external and internal genitalia, hormonal composition, testes, ovaries, and secondary sexual characteristics. Normally, the development process has united pattern so that the individual does not doubt about their sexual identity since they are 2 or 3 years old.

Gender role behavior. Gender role behavior is association of what an individual does and states as man or woman. Although biological factors are important in having appropriate roles in sexual identity, the main factor is learning. When husband and wife getting older, then sexual activity has an important role in maintaining their marital stability. Even though women's sex desire increases at 30-40 years old, but orgasm still can be achieved above that age. A man can also engage in sexual activity until having old age. The most important factor in maintaining effective sexuality is active sexual expression. Freud, with libido theory explains that human sexual instincts have started from childhood until adolescent through oral, anal, phallic and genital phases. Each phase is dominated by a somatic organ. If one particular phase cannot be fulfilled then fixation will be happening in that phase. A woman with a lesbian mindset has no problems in gender identity, but she expects other sex orientation.

The Mindset. Mindset consists of two words which are mind and set. "Mind" means the seat of thought and memory; the center of consciousness that generates thoughts, feelings, ideas, perceptions, and stores knowledge and memories. "Set" means a reference for or increased ability in a particular activity. Thus, a mindset is beliefs that affect somebody's attitude; a set of beliefs people a way of thinking that determines one's behavior and outlook. There are some resources that can influence human thought namely parents, relatives / family, community, school, friends, media, and own self. This study aims to find out how family involvement forms a lesbian orientation mindset from two subjects having different family backgrounds.

Social Neurocognitive Approach. In this paper the social neurocognitive approach includes the role of family act as a model, direct or indirect environmental contributions, how the subject perceives and responds to the environment and family, as well as how close family experiences form a lesbian mindset on the subject.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Subjek "I"

"I", 19 years old, has been a lesbian since he was 17 years old. She has one brother. She found that his father had an affair when she was 12 years old and studying in grade 6 of elementary school. Her parents often quarreled. Her father even had violated her mother several times so that "I" and her brother defended her mother. She also gets violence from his father when she defends his mother. Besides, her brother also fights against their father. After being hurt, the mother liked to say that it was the nature of a man, likes to hurt. When she was in grade 1 of senior high school, she found out that her father had an affair with an older student at her school. She intentionally kept it as a secret since she was fear of violence to her mother and her brother. However, a few months later her mother knew that relationship so that her mother decided to have a divorce after having a big quarrel.

After the divorce of her parents, "I" likes be alone and returns home at night. Her mother was absorbed in sadness that she didn't care what "I" did. She feels being neglected by her parents. Besides, she was ashamed of neighbors and school friends gossiping about her family. Then she likes to meet new friends out of school and spends a lot of time with them. She often skipped school just to sit around chatting with his new friends. One of her buddies had a heart on her. At first, that buddy always listens to her and makes her forget the sadness. When "her female friend" invites her to have a special relationship then she accepts it. She has been 2 years having that relationship and feels comfortable. They loved each other. She said that she gets a kind of love needed and has no longer interested in men.

In social neurocognitive theory, gender development is promoted by three main modes which are first are parents, peers, important people in social, education, and occupational contexts. Then the second modes are an inactive experience related to social reactions of the community towards behavior raised. Finally, direct guidance is the third influence. Invitations, information, and direct experiences from people around affect the formation of the sexual orientation concept [11]. The stages of social neurocognitive experience are described in Figure 2.

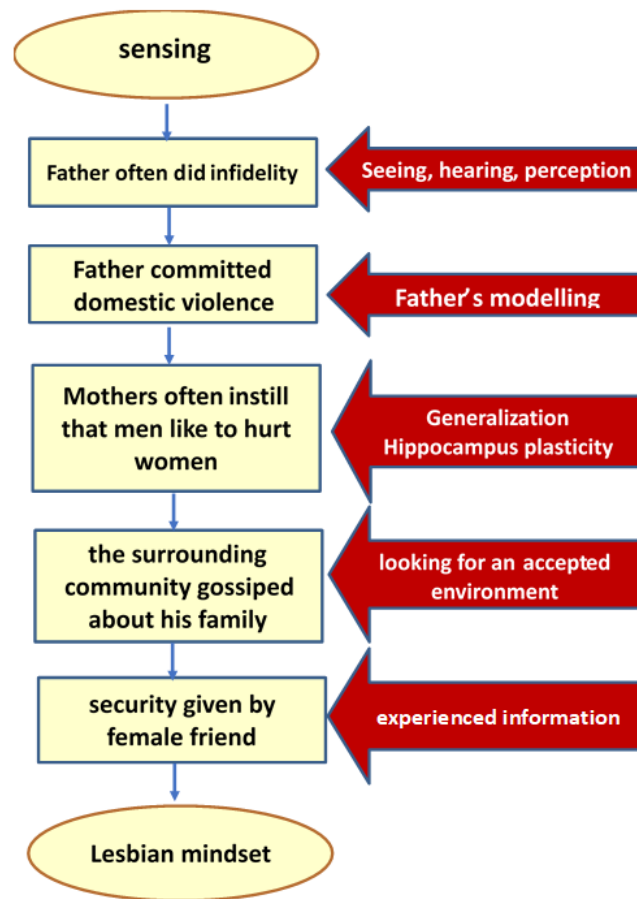


Figure 2: The mechanism of the role of the family in forming a lesbian mindset on the subject "I".

Based on “I” case, modeling was obtained from the bad relationship represented by her father in which the father often hurt her mother. Close relationship between ‘I’ and her mother send a perception that male had unpleasant behavior to female. That perception was created not only from what she saw, heard, and felt but also strengthened by her mother sentences saying the nature of man. This happens repeatedly so that it was attached to her long-term memory.

Hippocampus is an area in the brain that functions to change short term memories into long term memories. Plasticity can occur in the hippocampus. Merzenich said that if one system in brain changes, then the system connected will also be changed. The "plastic rules, use it or lose it, or neurons that fire together wire together, apply throughout." It can cause a mistake in generalizing the statement. “I” called all male are the same, will behave like her father after being married. Then it makes her feels afraid and avoids if there is a man interested in her.

Besides, community reaction gossiping about her family also makes "I" often avoid them and find other friends. Then in her searching effort, she meets a female friend whom considered able to accept her, give affection, and love her. That female friends have been a lesbian for a long time and given her a direct experience of how to love and to be loved. Considering religion, “I” realizes

that what she did is not in line, but she argues its oke as long as it does not hurt others. That statement is the subject's self-defense mechanism against conflicts occurred.

When she was asked whether she still wants to get married to a man then she stressed that she still has that will but it just for being accepted in the community. This finding can be explained by Vailant's self-defense concept in examining homosexuals facing a conflict between sexual objects and their religiosity. They create negotiation for self-defense mechanisms to persist in Islam and practice worship as usual [12].

3.2. Subject "R"

"R", attractive and cute female with fair skin, round face shape, and wide eyes, is the second subject in this research. Although she wears a hijab when outside the home every day, she likes to dye her hair. R is the youngest child in her family with three sisters and one brother. R's brothers and sisters are married, where the only R is still single. The education of religion has been attached to all children in her family. R's father often traveled out of town and abroad for business. Since R's parents are religious figures so that it requires them able to educate all their children well and make them behave properly according to religious rules they believe. R not only get an education in the family but also from a boarding school (*pesantren*) when she was in junior and senior high school. That all her parent's effort to keep R from a bad environment. R's mother is a housewife who raises all her children with love.

As the youngest child, R often had a feeling of inferiority and lack of independence. R often cries for simple reasons, like being stared by other children then she runs into her mother and cries. She was spoiled by her mother. When she had a problem, she runs into her mother's hug and breastfeeds. Therefore, she often gets a bully from her friends. At school, she also feels that other students abused her.

When R was 6 years old, her mother sends her to elementary school and stop the habit of breastfeeding. She remembered that she had an imaginary female friend until she was in grade 5 and enjoyed playing with her rather than the real friend. Her parents had checked R condition and the doctor stated that it was natural for her age having imaginary friends. The birth space between R and her older siblings, 13-14 years, can be a reason that makes R feel lonely and have no friends to play.

R had breastfeeding from birth to 6 years old although when she was 3 years old his mother didn't have bread milk anymore. She used to find out her mother's nipples whenever she felt anxious. Normally exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for 2 years in Islam. However, what happens to R, the oral phase in which she had her mother's nipples had been beyond her developmental limit. Feel of comfort while breastfeeding such as what she saw, touched, and felt when touching the mother breast are attached to perception formation of comfort. Codorow developed a theory that explains the girl's self-concept characterized by togetherness and a sense of connection that directs to interpersonal relations [11]. The habit of relieving anxiety by having a nipple is a series of observations and preconception experiences that shape perception.

When R was in grade 1 of elementary school, the mother asked her to stop breastfeeding habits. It makes her anxious because she must come out of her comfort zone. Amygdala, a structure in the brain that processes emotions and anxiety, has been studied to have neuroplasticity ability when it is triggered with constant stimulation. The hippocampus, located in the midbrain, coordinates the memory system of the thalamus and amygdala. Thalamus is responsible for gathering information from the sense organs and distributing the information to related parts of the brain. Amygdala is responsible for building connections between feelings; like the hard disk in a computer. Hippocampus is responsible for the encoding data transferred from other structures to short-term memory and then preserving the durability of information [13]. In the theory of neuroplasticity, brain cells will respond to repeated environmental demands and stimuli. The brain will recruit healthy nerve tissue to perform damaged functions if it repeatedly responds to a distorted stimulus [14]. To overcome his anxiety, R reflects on her fantasy female friend. This imaginary friend slowly disappears when R goes up to 6th grade.

In family, R's parents live in harmony and rarely quarreled. However, R's father has expressed his desire to get married again (polygamy) for several times. Her mother always refuses the request and reacts in silence. Whenever the mother keeps silent in sadness because of that proposal, then the father takes over housework to cover up his guilty feeling. When data collecting conducted, her father hasn't got married yet but the habit of doing housework whenever making his wife disappointed still keeps continuing. This behavior becomes modeling for R's subconscious. Since the father often has business abroad or in other cities, the mother's role in educating children is very dominant. It affects a strong emotional relationship with the mother.

Having a period of puberty, R is getting closer to a different gender. She has ever had boyfriends for more than 20 times since the beginning of studying in university, according to her experience, all her boyfriends not only fulfill what she wants but also never treat her harshly. Having relied on her face, she believes in making all men obey her requests. However, she thought that all men cannot be relied on when she feels anxious and want protection. Even though she always dominates in relationships, but it all ended with the reason that R can only give boredom. R felt that all her male partners giving her good treatment because of her beauty. When R started studying at university she was approached by a lesbian and feels a different sensation of closeness. She feels that the partner more listen to her opinion, can be a sparring partner for sharing ideas, respects and treats her like a princess. Having a relationship with her girlfriend, R found out that her sister also had a female partner.

After discussed with her sister, she felt that having a female partner not only fun especially in sharing ideas but also comfortable in touch when she feels anxious. At first, there was a conflict felt regarding Islam as her religion which he believed in throughout his life from family and school. However, when she found her sister also had a girlfriend, then she made it as a self-defense mechanism in legalizing what she did. Her sister plays a role in three main social neurocognitive processes that strengthen the subject's homosexual orientation. Her sister not only giving a modeling, enactive experience, and direct experience as an informant but also strengthening her feelings as natural towards sexual orientation as a lesbian.

Bell states that homosexual orientation in women does not reflect a lack of heterosexual experience or unpleasant heterosexual relationships. Freud's theory argues that individuals can be fixed in the

homosexual phase since having certain experiences in their lives such as close relationships with mother. That statement was confirmed by some researches. Beiber and Socrarides, reported that homosexuals coming from individual who has dominant and overprotective mothers with weak and even no father’s role. Those parent-child relationships can make a guilty feeling and anxiety that encourage homosexuals or lesbians.

When the mother gets hurt in feeling because of the proposal to get married, the father does all housework to attract her mother’s attention back. In having a romantic relationship with her lesbian girlfriend, R often asks to be hurt even though the girlfriend often refuses it. She likes to imagine that when she gets hurt, her partner will love her more, give her more attention and even give whatever she wants such as buying expensive items. She had an analogy that is a way to get what she wants and she cannot do it with her previous boyfriends. Her lesbian girlfriend likes to hold and squeeze R’s wrist firmly or push her against the wall as a form of hurting her. R gets what she wishes to have valuable objects by utilizing the guilty feeling of her lesbian partner. The role of family involvement in the social neurocognitive process of forming a lesbian mindset on "R" is presented in Figure 3.

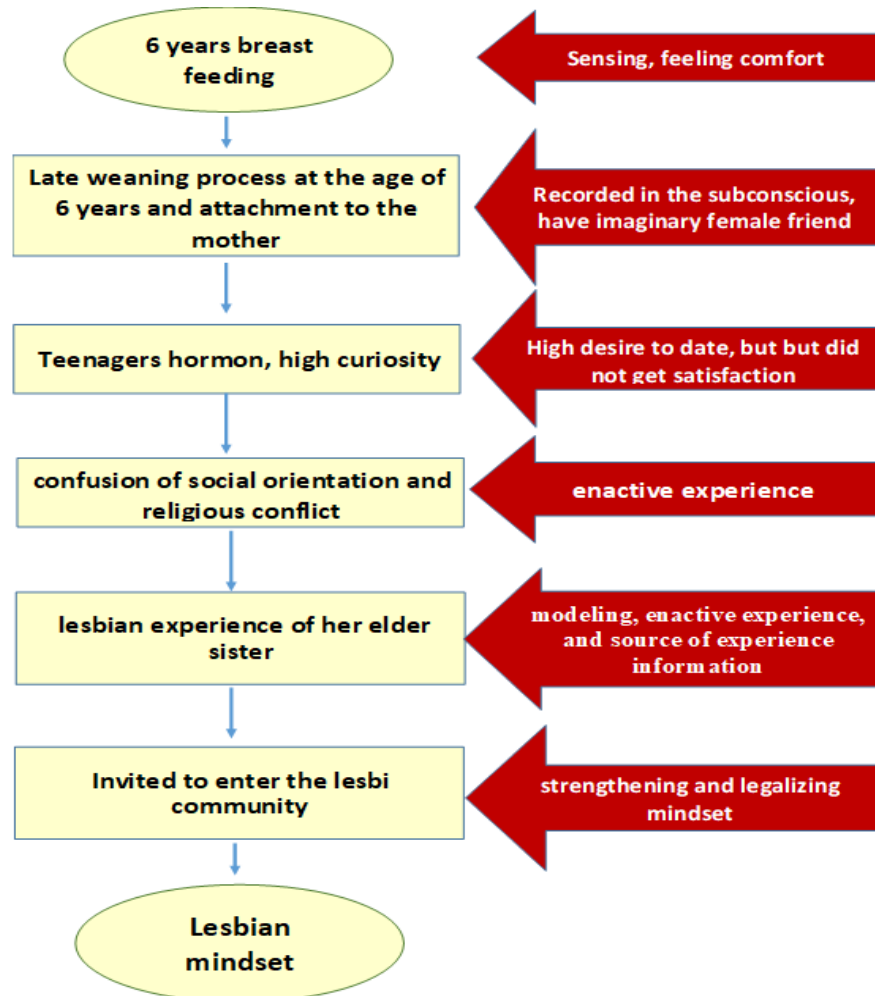


Figure 3. The mechanism of the role of the family in forming a lesbian mindset on the subject "R".

“R’ enjoys having a girlfriend and likes joining LGBT society. However, she denied if she was asked whether she hated men. She still has a will to have a good husband later who can fulfill his needs and made her happy.

Hypothalamus, a brain structure managing instinctive behavior including sex, has plasticity ability. Dweck (200) describes his research conducted in twenty years that when individuals’ views for themselves, it will influence the way to direct their life. In this case, R adopted the comfort which is caused by the role of her lesbian partner. Mindset directs what R does and what she decided to encourage her to have a habit as a lesbian [15].

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on social cognitive theory, the formation of homosexual orientation involves multi-antecedent. "I" had modeling from his father’s behavior and reinforcement of general perception from her mother that men have bad behavior. Gossiping about her family forced her into the lesbian community. Friends who truly accept her share experiences as a lesbian. Meanwhile, "R" gets a perception from her subconsciousness about the comfort of 6 years of breastfeeding experience, modeling from her siblings, and sharing experience from her lesbian friends.

Human function and development depend on the social context which is manifested in condition. Resources, social functions, and personality are interconnected subsystems that forming sexual orientation. However, a human is not only a product of social forces but also a reflection of contribution toward the social environment.

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*Corresponding author.

E-mail address: ambarsulianti@uinsgd.ac.id