

Social Marginality and the Struggle for Belonging among LGBT Communities in Contemporary Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

LGBT people in Indonesia were often discussed through morality, health, law, or political controversy, but these approaches did not fully explain how marginality was experienced within ordinary social relations. This article examined social marginality through the problem of belonging, focusing on conditions under which recognition became uncertain or depended on silence, conformity, or selective disclosure. This research use integrative literature review with qualitative thematic synthesis. Indonesian studies were prioritized, while comparative literature was used only to clarify mechanisms visible in local evidence. The synthesis identified conditional belonging across public discourse, family relations, community networks, and digital spaces. LGBT people could remain socially visible and connected while being framed as morally suspect, pressured to conceal sexuality or regulate gender presentation, or exposed to surveillance and harassment. Evidence concerning Muslim gay men, lesbians, waria, youth attitudes, media framing, and online discourse showed that marginality did not require complete exclusion. Belonging was better understood as a social relation whose terms were negotiated across settings and whose security depended on unequal conditions of recognition.



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INTRODUCTION

Public controversy surrounding LGBT people in Indonesia rarely begins with ordinary social membership. Debate more often turns to religion, morality, law, health, or national culture. Daily life is less categorical. A lesbian daughter can remain closely involved with her family and still decide that naming a relationship would change how she is treated. A gay Muslim can continue to value religious belonging while encountering heterosexist expectations inside religious and family settings. Waria may build long-standing ties with neighbours and religious communities yet remain exposed to discrimination in other parts of social life. These situations are not well described by a simple division between inclusion and exclusion. They involve unequal terms of membership.

Recent Indonesian research makes those unequal terms visible in different ways. Arli, Badejo, and Sutanto (2020) found relationships between religious orientations and attitudes toward lesbians and gay men. Praptiningsih et al. (2024) documented homophobic attitudes among students in religiously based universities. Kelly et al. (2026), working with young people in villages in Java, found widespread rejection and stigmatizing views.

Public hostility is not uniform across Indonesia, and none of these studies can represent the country as a whole. Their value lies elsewhere. They show that judgments about sexuality and gender are embedded in institutions and close social settings where acceptance carries consequences for family reputation, peer relations, and everyday participation. The important variation is not only between supportive and hostile people. The same person may tolerate a distant LGBT presence and react differently when sexual or gender difference becomes part of a close family or neighbourhood relationship.

Syam et al. (2021) show that Indonesian news framing can reproduce stigma by placing LGBT identities inside narratives of deviance and social threat. Thajib (2022) traces how anti-LGBT

campaigns acquired force through emotional as well as political dynamics, so public hostility cannot be reduced to one doctrinal disagreement. Wijaya (2022) adds the technological dimension by showing how anti-LGBT sentiment and surveillance can be assembled through digital systems. Kinoshita (2025) finds a less uniform picture on Twitter, where criticism and allyship shift across political moments rather than moving in one direction. These findings make public visibility an unreliable measure of inclusion. LGBT issues can become highly visible because they are contested. People associated with those issues may then have more reason to manage who knows about their sexuality or gender, especially when public debate supplies negative categories that can be carried into family, education, and neighbourhood relations.

Social marginality is used here to describe a position in which participation remains possible but recognition is insecure, restricted, or dependent on conditions that are not imposed equally on others. Stigma is part of that process, but marginality is not identical to stigma. Stigma concerns devaluation and social marking. Marginality concerns where that devaluation places a person within relationships and institutions. Complete exclusion is only one possibility. A person may remain employed, attend religious activities, support parents, join family celebrations, and maintain friendships while having to conceal a partner or regulate gender expression. Belonging becomes conditional when continued membership depends on such adjustments. Socioecological work on sexual minority stigma supports this relational approach because stigma operates across settings and not only through individual prejudice (van der Star, 2024). Structural stigma research reaches a similar conclusion from a different literature (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2024).

Septarini et al. (2024) found different patterns of stigma and discrimination among men who have sex with men and waria in Bali, including differences related to family awareness and acceptance. Fadhlina (2024) shows another social position among Muslim waria in Yogyakarta, where precarity coexists with religious participation and collective welfare activity. Indonesian lesbians, gay men, bisexual people, transgender people, and waria cannot consequently be treated as one social category for analytical purposes.

Some forms of sexual difference can be concealed for long periods, whereas gender presentation can make other forms visible before a person chooses disclosure. The ability to control visibility changes how conditional belonging is negotiated because disclosure is not equally voluntary across groups. Intersectional research supports the same caution by showing that marginal positions are shaped through combinations of gender, race, class, and other social locations rather than one identity in isolation (Lett, Dowshen, & Baker, 2020). Heterogeneity is therefore part of the explanation, not a disclaimer added after general claims about LGBT experience.

Belonging provides the central question for this review because it directs attention to membership, recognition, and the security of participation. A person can experience attachment to family or community without receiving full recognition of sexual or gender identity. Evidence from other settings shows that belonging varies across family, peer, and community contexts rather than following one stable level (Van Matre & Schubotz, 2024). Social safety research also suggests that anticipated hostility can shape conduct before direct rejection occurs (Diamond & Alley, 2022). Indonesian studies allow those mechanisms to be examined locally rather than assumed. Conditional belonging describes membership that remains valuable and real but becomes less secure once a stigmatized identity is known. The article asks how marginality is produced across public norms, family relations, and community life, and how people negotiate belonging when those settings impose different conditions on visibility and recognition.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research using a structured integrative literature review with qualitative thematic synthesis. Integrative reviews are suited to bodies of evidence that cannot be reduced to one research design or one effect measure, provided that searching, selection, and synthesis are reported transparently (Oermann & Knafl, 2021). Qualitative synthesis was used to compare meanings and mechanisms across studies instead of aggregating prevalence estimates. Johnston, Barrett, and Stenfors (2020) note that such synthesis is most useful when the review moves beyond description and makes the analytic process visible. Study design, sample, location, and the type of claim supported by each article were considered during interpretation, so a national survey was not treated as equivalent to a small qualitative study and neither was dismissed for being methodologically different.

The search covered publications from 2020 through 2026. Sources were identified through DOI and bibliographic searches, PubMed, Taylor and Francis Online, SpringerLink, Cambridge Core, Wiley Online Library, and backward citation tracing from relevant Indonesian studies. Search combinations used LGBT, LGBTQ, sexual minority, transgender, waria, lesbian, gay, Indonesia, stigma, marginality, belonging, family, disclosure, community, religion, media, and digital terms. Indonesian studies were screened first. Regional and wider international studies were considered only when they clarified a mechanism that could not be adequately developed from the local literature. Duplicate DOI records were removed before title and abstract screening. Full texts were retained when they addressed a social condition relevant to marginality or belonging and were published in a peer-reviewed journal with a verifiable DOI. Biomedical studies without a direct social mechanism were excluded. The process produced thirty articles. No claim of exhaustive systematic coverage is made because the design was integrative and conceptually focused.

Initial coding used marginality, belonging, recognition, disclosure, and social safety as deductive concepts, followed by inductive refinement as recurrent patterns appeared across the studies. Findings were coded according to the social setting in which recognition was granted, withheld, or made conditional. The comparison then focused on how similar processes changed when they occurred in public discourse, family relations, community networks, or digital settings. Contradictory evidence was retained rather than harmonized. Family warmth could coexist with identity-specific rejection. Digital participation could provide support and surveillance. Community membership could reduce isolation without removing wider stigma. Indonesian evidence carried greater interpretive weight whenever the article made a claim about contemporary Indonesia, and comparative studies were used only to clarify a mechanism rather than supply an Indonesian prevalence estimate. Three connected areas of analysis emerged from this process, with conditional belonging used across all three to keep the synthesis focused on one social problem rather than a catalogue of themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Public Norms and Conditional Recognition

Arli et al. (2020) found that religious fundamentalism and forms of religious orientation were related to attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in Indonesia. Praptiningsih et al. (2024) identified homophobic attitudes among students in religiously based universities. Khoir (2020) approaches the same social environment from the experiences of Muslim gay and bisexual men, showing that heterosexism is negotiated by people who may continue to value Islamic identity and religious belonging. The evidence does not justify treating religion as a uniform source of rejection. Religious institutions, families, and individual believers do not respond in one way. The stronger inference concerns social expectations. When heterosexuality is tied to moral respectability, disclosure can affect more than one relationship at a time because family membership and religious standing may overlap. Conditional belonging develops under those circumstances even where a person remains active in religious life. Fadhlina's (2024) work with Muslim waria later in the review shows why the opposite assumption is equally misleading. Religious participation can also become a setting in which marginalized people create recognition and support.

Village research in Java shows how those expectations can become difficult to avoid. Kelly et al. (2026) found strong stigmatizing views among many of the young participants they interviewed across nine villages. The study does not support a claim that rural Indonesia is uniformly hostile. Close social networks matter because anonymity is limited and a change in reputation can affect more than one relationship. Family standing and peer membership are connected. Anticipated judgment can therefore restrict disclosure before anyone directly excludes the person concerned.

Public discourse reinforces these social boundaries without producing one stable national attitude. Syam et al. (2021) found that ideological media framing can stigmatize LGBT people by linking identity to wider moral and social concerns. Thajib (2022) shows that anti-LGBT campaigns draw force from affect as well as doctrine. Fear, disgust, anxiety, and claims about social protection can turn a minority into a symbol of a larger political problem. The social consequence is not confined to political debate. Public language provides categories that relatives, teachers, neighbours, and peers can use when they interpret sexual or gender difference. Legal status is only part of that environment because social sanctions can operate through reputation and relationship loss even when no formal rule directly excludes the person.

Wijaya (2022) describes digital homophobia in Indonesia as an assemblage of anti-LGBT sentiment, technological practices, and surveillance, which means online participation can extend the reach of social monitoring rather than simply weaken local boundaries. Kinoshita (2025) finds changes in Twitter attitudes that do not fit a simple story of continuous hostility. Allyship became more visible during some periods of anti-LGBT political statements, and criticism intensified in other moments. Digital visibility can provoke opposition and solidarity at the same time, leaving users with more opportunities for connection but also more audiences whose reactions have to be anticipated.

That instability matters for belonging because recognition can be offered only under particular conditions. Someone may be accepted as a colleague or family member when sexuality remains unspoken, yet the same relationship may become uncertain once a partner is named. Public norms make this possibility imaginable before disclosure occurs. Diamond and Alley (2022) describe social safety as an expectation that one can participate without anticipating devaluation or threat. The concept helps explain why direct discrimination is not required for marginality. Repeated assessment of whether a setting is safe enough changes how people participate in it. Silence can be produced by uncertainty about a future reaction, not only by a rejection that has already occurred.

Evidence from Bali shows that stigma is also distributed unevenly within groups often placed under the same LGBT label. Septarini et al. (2024) reported substantial stigma and discrimination among both men who have sex with men and waria, but the patterns were not identical. Family awareness and acceptance were associated with stigma among MSM, and waria reported particularly high discrimination. Different forms of visibility matter here. Sexual identity may sometimes be withheld, whereas gender expression can be read by others without voluntary disclosure. Conditional belonging is consequently shaped by how much control a person has over when difference becomes socially legible. The difference also cautions against using gay men's disclosure experiences as a general model for transgender and waria social life.

Structural approaches help connect these findings without assuming that every source of marginality points in the same direction. Hatzenbuehler et al. (2024) show that institutional conditions influence the environments in which LGBTQ people live. Philbin et al. (2023) similarly explain how social policies can alter interpersonal treatment and longer-term opportunity. Those studies do not establish Indonesian effects. Their usefulness lies in showing why public discourse and institutional signals should not be treated as background. They affect what kinds of treatment seem normal in smaller social settings. Repetition across institutions can make unequal recognition appear ordinary even when no single institution fully determines the person's social position.

Marginality in contemporary Indonesia is therefore better understood as insecure social membership than as simple absence from public life. LGBT people are already visible in political debate, media coverage, universities, villages, workplaces, religious settings, and online platforms. Visibility can coexist with low social safety. Public recognition may even increase the need for careful self-presentation when the dominant form of recognition is negative. Participation can continue under those unequal terms. The issue is not whether society sees LGBT people. The issue is whether being seen changes the terms on which ordinary membership is granted.

2. Family Relations and Unequal Terms of Belonging

Family relationships show most clearly why belonging cannot be reduced to acceptance or rejection. Subekti et al. (2025) examined Indonesian lesbians who disclosed their identities directly or chose not to disclose them to friends and family. Their decisions were shaped by anticipated reactions and the value placed on close relationships. Disclosure did not function as a universal endpoint of identity development. People weighed what could be gained against what might change in relationships that remained important to them.

Khoir (2020) reaches a related problem through Muslim gay and bisexual men. Heterosexist environments require negotiation because religious identity, family membership, and sexual identity are not experienced as separate compartments. A person may reject hostile judgments without wanting to abandon the social relationships through which those judgments are communicated. Conditional belonging captures this tension more accurately than a model in which people either accept stigma or escape it. Staying connected can involve compromise, silence, or selective disclosure without implying agreement with the norm that created the pressure.

Septarini et al. (2024) provide an important Indonesian distinction between family ignorance and family acceptance. MSM whose family members were unaware of their status or did not accept it reported higher stigma than participants whose status was accepted. The result does not establish a simple causal route from disclosure to well-being, and the study should not be read as an instruction to disclose. Family awareness can produce support, conflict, or a mixture of both (Kadir, 2026b).

The sociological significance lies in the security of membership. A person who receives acceptance has evidence that the relationship can accommodate sexual difference. Someone who remains concealed may preserve family continuity without knowing whether that continuity depends on silence. Subekti et al. (2025) show the decision process more directly among Indonesian lesbians, where disclosure or non-disclosure was shaped by anticipated reactions from people whose relationships remained important. Conditional belonging is visible in the need to calculate that risk before recognition can be tested.

International family research clarifies this coexistence without replacing the Indonesian evidence. Meanley et al. (2021) found that familial warmth and LGBTQ-specific rejection can occur together. Ghosh (2020) describes parental acceptance after coming out as a process that can change over time. These findings are useful because they challenge the assumption that affectionate families necessarily provide identity recognition. A parent can offer care and practical support and still insist that a same-sex relationship remain unspoken. The family bond is real, yet one part of the person's social life is allowed only under restriction. Such evidence is used here as a relational comparison, not as proof that Indonesian parents follow the same sequence of response.

Expectations concerning marriage can intensify that restriction because heterosexual marriage is not only a private romantic choice. In many Indonesian families it is linked to adulthood, kinship continuity, religious respectability, and obligations between generations. The review does not support one national family model, and the available Indonesian literature remains uneven across class and region. Even so, Subekti et al. (2025) and Khoir (2020) show why disclosure cannot be analysed apart from family expectations. Recognition may be postponed through an assumption that present difference will eventually give way to a socially conventional future. Conditional belonging can change over the life course as marriage expectations become more immediate and private ambiguity becomes harder to maintain.

Waria experiences complicate the disclosure model because gender difference may be visible without a single moment of coming out. Fadhlina (2024) documents the precarity faced by Muslim waria in Yogyakarta and the collective welfare practices developed around Pondok Pesantren Waria Al-Fatah. Religious participation and transgender identity are not presented as mutually exclusive social positions. Waria can seek recognition within religious life while dealing with economic and social insecurity outside it. Marginality here concerns unequal access to security and respect, not lack of community attachment. Family and community recognition may also operate through different standards, so acceptance in one setting cannot be used to infer security elsewhere.

The distinction also matters because the umbrella term LGBT can hide different relationships to family visibility. Lesbians and gay men may sometimes manage disclosure through selective information. Waria and other transgender people can encounter scrutiny linked to clothing, names, appearance, or public gender presentation. Lett et al. (2020) show more broadly why gender minority experiences must be read through intersecting social positions. Indonesian evidence makes the same caution necessary even when the available studies use different population categories. One account of family belonging cannot be assumed to fit all groups.

Family membership remains important even where recognition is incomplete, which explains why concealment should not automatically be described as failed authenticity. Wilson and Cariola (2020) found in qualitative research with LGBTQI+ youth that concealment can be difficult, yet supportive relationships remain central to how young people manage stigma. In Indonesia, selective disclosure can also be read as a response to unequal consequences. A person may tell a sibling and not a parent, disclose to friends and not colleagues, or allow family members to know indirectly without forcing an explicit conversation. Such choices can preserve valued ties. They also reveal that the cost of openness is not distributed equally.

3. Community Life and Digital Belonging

Fadhlina (2024) shows a specific waria network in Yogyakarta where religious practice and welfare activity are organized collectively under conditions of continuing precarity. The network offers practical assistance, but its social significance is not limited to service provision. Waria participants can take part in religious and communal activity without treating transgender identity as an exception that must constantly be explained or defended. Such recognition does not remove discrimination in employment, public life, or other settings. Community belonging instead gives people relationships through which some consequences of marginality can be managed. Indonesian evidence does not support an image of one unified LGBT community, and the specificity of the Yogyakarta case is important. A waria religious community addresses needs and forms of recognition that may differ from those found in lesbian friendship networks, gay social groups, or digital communities. Belonging is built through particular relations rather than supplied automatically by a shared umbrella identity.

Langlois (2025) shows that LGBT rights claiming in Southeast Asia develops inside political environments that do not follow one linear path toward inclusion. Collective visibility can create political language and alliances, yet it can also sharpen opposition. Indonesian anti-LGBT campaigns demonstrate that effect directly (Thajib, 2022). A regional scoping review from Thailand likewise shows that institutional inclusion can advance unevenly across social domains rather than as one national transition (Newman et al., 2021). For Indonesian communities, the relevant lesson is limited. Public organization can expand recognition, but the social costs of visibility depend on the political setting in which claims are made.

Berger et al. (2022) found across a systematic review that social media can support identity exploration and peer connection among LGBTQ youth, and Fisher, Tao, and Ford (2024) describe the same environment as both supportive and harmful. Indonesian studies make that ambivalence more concrete. Wijaya (2022) shows how digital technologies can facilitate surveillance and homophobic mobilization, whereas Kinoshita (2025) identifies changing patterns of criticism and allyship on Twitter. Online participation can therefore broaden access to supportive publics and make identity more searchable, shareable, and contestable at the same time. The relevant social boundary is not simply online versus offline. A disclosure made in a digital setting can move into family, university, or workplace relations if audiences overlap. Conversely, a person whose local environment offers little recognition can use digital contact to find language and peers that are unavailable nearby. Conditional belonging follows users across those settings because control over audience and context is never complete.

Identity management across platforms should not be treated as evidence of confusion. Colosi, Cowen, and Todd (2023) show that sexual and gender minority users actively manage identity presentation in digital settings. The Indonesian evidence on digital homophobia makes such management understandable as a response to audience risk. Private accounts and selective networks can reduce exposure, but no platform guarantees that context will remain contained. Screenshots and cross-platform circulation can move information beyond its intended audience. Digital belonging is useful precisely because offline recognition can be limited, yet the same technical features that connect people can weaken control over disclosure. Kinoshita's (2025) findings also suggest that the audience itself changes across political moments, making the risks of visibility variable rather than fixed.

Frost et al. (2022) found that minority stress and community connectedness vary across cohorts and changing social conditions. Ünsal, Demetrovics, and Reinhardt (2023) show that the relationship between community participation and depression differs according to structural stigma. These studies come from other settings and cannot establish Indonesian outcomes. Their narrower contribution is to show that contact with other LGBT people does not by itself create secure belonging. The same caution applies when Indonesian networks are interpreted. What a network provides, how visible participation becomes, and which forms of support are available matter more than contact alone.

Class, religion, gender expression, urban location, and access to digital technology can affect whether a particular community offers usable support. Fadhlina's (2024) study is valuable because it shows a waria community formed around needs that cannot be reduced to generic LGBT identity. Religious practice and welfare support are central to the collective life described there. A network organized around gay men in a large city may produce a different form of membership. Treating these settings as interchangeable would hide the social differences that can make some people marginal even inside minority spaces.

Changing online attitudes in Indonesia further complicate the assumption that public hostility and community support move in opposite directions. Kinoshita (2025) found that periods of political anti-LGBT statements could coincide with stronger expressions of allyship on Twitter. Opposition can generate counter-speech. The result is not straightforward inclusion because online support does not guarantee safety in family or neighbourhood life (Kadir, 2026a). Public contestation can nevertheless create new audiences in which LGBT people are recognized differently. Belonging becomes distributed across settings rather than secured by one of them. A supportive digital audience may matter greatly without changing the conditions attached to recognition at home.

The three areas examined in this review converge on conditional belonging. Public discourse shapes the social meanings attached to difference. Families decide whether those differences can be acknowledged without threatening membership. Community and digital networks provide other forms of recognition, but their protection is partial. LGBT people can occupy several of these settings at once and make different disclosure decisions in each. Such variation should be expected in a society where social relations do not impose one uniform level of acceptance. Marginality persists when participation depends on managing who knows, what can be named, and how visibly difference can be expressed.

CONCLUSION

Social marginality among LGBT people in contemporary Indonesia is not adequately captured by the image of a group located outside society. Indonesian studies show LGBT people participating in families, religious life, villages, universities, media debates, community networks, and digital spaces under unequal conditions of recognition. Anti-LGBT campaigns and stigmatizing representation can make sexual and gender difference socially suspect. Family ties may remain strong even when disclosure is restricted. Waria communities can create religious and welfare support without escaping wider precarity. Marginality is present in these cases because membership is less secure and more conditional than it is for people whose sexuality or gender does not require comparable management.

Conditional belonging links those findings without treating LGBT experience as uniform. Indonesian lesbians making disclosure decisions do not face the same visibility as waria. Muslim gay men may negotiate religious identity in ways that differ from people for whom religion is less central. Family acceptance can reduce some pressures without changing public stigma. Digital spaces can widen access to peers and expose users to monitoring at the same time. Fine et al. (2025) document mental health disparities among sexually and gender diverse adolescents in Indonesia and Vietnam, but such outcomes are better read here as consequences of unequal social conditions than as the organizing explanation. The common feature across the social evidence is the unequal burden of managing recognition across settings. That burden is social because its costs depend on other people's power to grant or withdraw ordinary forms of membership.

Recent Indonesian work now covers public attitudes, media framing, anti-LGBT campaigns, Muslim gay men, lesbians, waria, stigma in Bali, adolescent mental health, and digital discourse, but longitudinal evidence across family and community settings remains limited. Research is also uneven across regions and groups. More qualitative longitudinal work would help show how belonging changes as people move through education, work, family dependence, partnership, and later adulthood. Comparative research within Indonesia is more important than importing prevalence estimates from countries with different institutional and religious contexts.

A sociological account should consequently focus on the conditions attached to participation. Belonging becomes more secure when family membership does not depend on silence, when religious participation does not require the denial of gender or sexuality, and when community connection does not create disproportionate exposure. The present literature cannot establish that such conditions are shared across Indonesia. Available evidence nevertheless shows that marginality can operate inside relationships that people continue to value. That finding shifts attention from whether LGBT people are present in Indonesian social life to how securely they can remain there when difference is known.

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