AN ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS' IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE NETFLIX SERIES *HEARTSTOPPER* SEASON 1

Theresia Laura Febiola Sinaga[1], Parlindungan Purba[2], Fikry Prastya Syahputra[3]

[1,2,3]Universitas Sumatera Utara

[1]*theresiasinaga847@gmail.com*

Abstract

The issue of homosexuality and LGBTQ+ themes is growing rapidly in literary works and other media. This research aims to describe the main characters and stages in identity formation in the Netflix series *Heartstopper* season 1. This research adopts descriptive qualitative methods and focuses on dialogue and scenes by Nick Nelson and Charlie Springs as the main characters. Data collection is done by observation and documentation techniques. The selected data will be analyzed by classifying them into each part of characterization and stage of identity formation, then interpreting them in a narrative form. By using M.J. Murphy's theory, researchers found that there are 8 of 9 methods that reveal the personality of the main characters: personal description, speech, character seen by another, past life, reactions, thoughts, mannerisms, and conversation of others, while there is no direct comment is found. By using Fassinger's theory, researchers found that Nick went through 4 stages of identity formation: awareness, exploration, deepening, and internalization while Charlie had reached the internalization stage since the beginning of the show. The findings shed light on the characterization as an intrinsic element of literary work and the intricacies of adolescent identity formation, particularly in the context of LGBTQ+ experiences.

Keywords: *characterization; fasssinger; identity formation; murphy; series*

INTRODUCTION

Homosexuality has become something more common to be known. The efforts of the movement of the homosexual agent put homosexuality as the object to be studied. Homosexuality has faced severe stigmas, discrimination, and criminalization across many cultures and societies. However, the representation of homosexuality in novels, media, TV, music, film, and other popular cultures has increased nowadays. As a popular form of entertainment, many song lyric use figurative sentence which give listeners a different understanding (Syahputra & Mendrofa, 2022). Music is one of the media that people listen to the most may deliver LGBTQ+ messages implicitly or explicitly through its lyrics, representation, themes, and symbols which lead to promoting visibility or raising awareness. So the media needs to represent the LGBTQ+ community in the right ways because representations matter. By giving the right representation, the media is taking part in reducing discrimination, violence, and negative stereotypes against the members of the community, leading people to show less hate and self-hatred because of better understanding, giving opportunities to teach tolerance and acceptance, and starting a conversation with friends and family (Sahrani et al., 2022).

A series is a set of episodes of a television program/show that run under the same title, possibly spanning many seasons. Series also has intrinsic and extrinsic elements like other literary works. The distinction is that series provide the visual representation and dialogue between the characters. In this research, the researcher will examine the characterization of the main characters

and the homosexuality in the *Heartstopper* series season 1. Characters are the primary way for the audience to emotionally connect with the story. A character shown without a strong character, the impression created in the film will not be strong and can be forgotten easily (Wanggay & Sugihartono, 2023).

Netflix series *Heartstopper* Season 1 based on the webcomic and graphic novel by Alice Oseman, exemplifies this recent development in literature and its adaptation to visual media. *Heartstopper* season 1 was released on Netflix on Apr 22, 2022, with 8 total episodes. The series has received widespread critical acclaim, with a Metacritic score of 85 out of 100 based on nine critics and a Rotten Tomatoes rating of 96% with an average rating of 8.5/10 (Rotten Tomatoes, 2022). *Heartstopper* Series Season 1 follows the journeys of Charlie Spring, an openly gay teenager, and Nick Nelson, a seemingly straight classmate who gradually comes to terms with his bisexuality. *Heartstopper* Series Season 1 introduces the core characters and their journeys in a way that is heartfelt, authentic, and engaging. The combination of strong character development, positive LGBTQ+ representation, and a unique visual style creates a compelling and impactful viewing experience that makes Season 1 particularly memorable and significant.

Through their individual and shared experiences, the *Heartstopper* Series Season 1 explores the LGBTQ+ theme especially the self-discovery in a nuanced and authentic way. Self-discovery reflects that a person has found an appropriate trait, personality, or something that defines his or her true self (Bench et al., 2015). The series depicts the various stages of identity development, from initial awareness and exploration to deepening or commitment and internalization.

Several studies are relevant to the data sources and topics regarding homosexuality in the *Heartstopper* series season 1. First, "This is not easy": Unveiling the nuances of discrimination experienced by LGBTQ+ teenagers in *Heartstopper* Season I (2022) by Trisnawati, R. K., Sutikno, E. U., Agustina, M. F., Prameswary, P. B., & Mutyas, S. H. This study aims to examine the portrayal of discrimination experienced by LGBT+ teenagers in *Heartstopper* Season 1 and identifying its causes, including the character color and those identifying as lesbian and gay. Another study entitled "Identity and Self Image in Alice Oseman's *Heartstopper* Comic and Series" was written by Hagby Dahl, K. (2023). This study discusses identity and self-image themes find expression in a series of scenes important to *Heartstopper*'s plot, also explores how the Netflix series uses animation, music, sound, color, and lighting to convey the same themes as the comic does through expressive lines, indexical and iconic signs, panels, composition, and layout. The present research places greater emphasis on character description or characterization as one of the intrinsic elements of literary works. This research also explores the stages in identity formation and how they experience and struggle through these stages. *Heartstopper* resonates with a wide audience, particularly adolescents and young adults. So it is important to understand how its characters' identity formation is depicted can offer insights into current cultural narratives and societal values.

The researchers decided to analyze the characterization of the main characters and their sexuality to show the depiction and the struggles of characters in a story to explore and find their identity. This research focuses on the identity formation stages of the main characters Nick Nelson and Charlie Spring. Through this research, we can be more aware of the people around us. Although the *Heartstopper* Series Season 1 is fiction, it portrays the reality of life and shows us that homosexuality really exists, or maybe it happens in our circle.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Homosexuality

Homosexuality is widely used for a person who practices homosexuality and is called a homosexual. It can be said that a person, a man or a woman, is sexually attracted to people of the same sex (Rudy, 2016). A man who is attracted to other men and identifies as homosexual is typically referred to as gay. For women who are attracted to other women, the most commonly used term is lesbian. Homosexuality is a core part of the LGBTQ+ community, representing the

identities and experiences of gay and lesbian individuals. The LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and others) serves to encompass and unite a wide range of sexual and gender identities, promoting inclusivity, advocacy, and support for all members of this diverse community.

Character and Characterization

There are two kinds of characters in general, which are the main character and the additional character. Haven stated (in Qonita, 2023) the main character is the one who determines the storyline from beginning to end, which frequently deals with various situations depending on the context of the story. On the other hand, has a more limited function and also complements the story, in which she or he interacts and clashes with the main character to reveal important elements of the main character's nature and circumstance.

Characterization is the sum of all observable qualities of a human being, everything knowable through careful scrutiny: age and IQ; sex and sexuality; style of speech and gesture; choices of home, car, and dress; education and occupation; personality and nervosity; values and attitudes---all aspects of humanity we could know by taking notes on someone day in and day out (McKee, 1997).

According to (Murphy, 1972), there are nine methods of describing characters in literary work to make the characters understandable and believable for the audience, as mentioned below.

1. Personal Description

A personal description of a character is a written portrayal of their outward appearance, detailing elements such as height, build, facial features, hair, complexion, clothing, and any distinctive physical traits.

2. The Character's Speech

Analyzing a character's speech is crucial in understanding their personality, background, and motivations. The way a character speaks, including their word choice, tone, and speech patterns, can reveal crucial insights. For instance, formal or informal language may indicate social status or education level.

3. Characters Seen by Another

This refers to the way a character is perceived, described, or presented from the perspective of another character within the narrative. This technique is often used to provide different viewpoints, reveal contrasting impressions, or highlight the subjective nature of character interpretation.

4. Past Life

The personality of a character may influenced by their life experience in the past. A kid may act rudely because she saw her parent always argue and even do some physical abuse, so as she grows up she does the same thing that her parent did in the past.

5. Reaction

The characters' reactions to various situations and stimuli can reveal core aspects of their personalities and psyches. A hot-tempered outburst may signify an aggressive, volatile nature, while a measured, thoughtful response could convey level-headedness. Ultimately, how characters react illuminates their defining strengths, flaws, fears, desires, and moral compasses, providing invaluable insights into their fundamental identities.

6. Thoughts

The inner thoughts and inner monologue are crucial for gaining a clear and nuanced depiction of characters within a narrative. A character's outward actions may be ambiguous, but their inner thoughts lay bare their real motivations, priorities, fears, and desires driving their behavior.

7. Mannerism

The mannerisms refer to habitual or characteristic ways in which a person behaves, moves, or expresses themselves through gestures and other physical behaviors. Manners can be demonstrated in a variety of actions, for example, tapping feet or drumming fingers frequently can represent nervous energy.

8. Conversation of Other

The biases, impressions, and dynamics between characters are often revealed through dialogue, highlighting divergent perspectives on an individual's personality, morals, and relationships. Descriptions or gossip from an outside viewpoint may expose telling details about their reputation, impact on others, or shaded history.

9. Direct Comment

In characterization, the director's direct comment refers to instances where the director directly states or describes a character's personality traits, qualities, or attributes through straightforward narrative exposition.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism is the movement in the mid-20th century that believed that science is not objective but subjective and the interpretation of humans themselves, So that truth is relative (Setiawan & Sudrajat, 2018). The themes that are widely explored in postmodernist literary works are criticism of authority, identity, reality, history, and language (Syofyan, 2022). The postmodernism movement produced new theories related to gender and sexuality. Queer theory is a form of postmodernism (Franklin-Jeune, 2013). Queer theory as literary criticism interprets and critiques the representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and themes in literature, often challenging heteronormative perspectives and binary categorizations of gender and sexuality. According to Foucault, sexuality is not a natural feature or fact of human life but a constructed category of experience that has historical, social, and cultural, rather than biological, origins (Spargo, 1999).

Theory of Identity Formation by Ruth Fassinger

1. Awareness

This stage involves becoming aware of one's same-sex attractions and feelings. It often begins with awareness of differences, a general feeling of being different from the heterosexual norm and therefore from the predicted self. In society, this stage is set into motion by a new awareness that heterosexuality is not a universal norm and that people exist who have different sexual orientations.

2. Exploration

In this phase, individuals explore their feelings of sexual attraction to other individuals of the same gender. They begin to consider the existence of erotic feelings to themselves. A gay man in this phase may think that he wants to be closer to men or with certain men. Individuals begin to explore their feelings and desires, often through social interactions and self-reflection.

3. Deepening/Commitment

At this stage, individuals begin to solidify their sense of identity and develop a deeper understanding of themselves. It involves a commitment to create a personal relationship with the reference group, with awareness of the possible consequences entailed. They may form connections with others who share similar experiences and engage in activities that reinforce their identity. For example, a man may join a gay support group, participate in gay events, and surround himself with other gays to strengthen his sense of belonging.

4. Internalization/Synthesis

The final stage involves integrating one's gay/lesbian identity into daily life, often by openly expressing it and embracing it as a fundamental aspect of self. This stage is marked by a sense of acceptance, self-acceptance, and self-compassion. For instance, a man/woman may come out to

his/her family and friends, participate in LGBTQ+ activism, and openly express his/her gay/lesbian identity in various aspects of his/her life.

METHOD
Research Design
This research uses the descriptive qualitative method that relies on words to analyze the data which focuses on discussing the main characters' identity formation in the Netflix series *Heartstopper* series season 1. Descriptive qualitative research is a study that explains to understand the phenomenon of the subject of the research, behavior, perception, motivation, action, and the way of describing the result is in the form of words and sentences (Moleong, 2010). The researchers focus on describing the characterization by applying M.J Murphy's theory and the identity formation journey of characters by applying (Fassinger, 1998) theory regarding the stages of identity formation experienced by Nick and Charlie in the Netflix series *Heartstopper* season 1.

Data Collecting Technique
The observation and documentation methods are used to collect data. As a result, the researcher used the following tools to collect data: The first step was for the researchers to watch the series several times to gain a better understanding of its story and problems. Second, understand and mark up every relevant information of characterization and identity formation of the main characters. Finally, select and pick the data that is relevant to the problems.

Data Analysis Technique
The researchers used descriptive analysis to examine the data which includes compiling data, assembling data, interpreting data, and concluding data. As a result, the procedures are as follows: first, the researchers watch the series to collect the data. Second, the researchers mark up and classify the selected data into each part of characterization based on the theory of characterization by M.J Murphy and stage of identity formation based on Fassinger's theory of Identity Formation. Third, the researchers interpret and analyze the data in a narrative form. Lastly, the researchers draw a conclusion based on the interpretation of the entire study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
Characterization

1. Personal Description

These characters' appearances are not described directly but are shown visually in the scene. The first episode shows that Nick Nelson is a year 11 student who is also a school rugby player. He has an athletic build, taller than Charlie, white skin, and short-straight blonde hair. Meanwhile, Charlie Spring is shown as a student with pale white skin, skinny, bushy eyebrows, and curly black hair that is usually a bit messy and falls over his forehead.

Figure 1 Nick's appearance. Episode 2 (Min. 02:22)

Figure 2 Charlie's appearances. Episode 1 (Min. 00:16-00:20)

2. Nick and Charlie's Speech

Nick: Are you feeling okay?

Charlie: Yeah, I'm fine, don't worry v̄

Nick: You sure? You can talk to me about it if you want. Sounds like a pretty serious situation. But you don't have to if you don't want to. But I am your friend and I do care.
Episode 2 (Min. 01:37-05:43)

The conversation above is Nick and Charlie's chats in the Instagram message. Based on the texts he typed, it was clear that Nick was worried about Charlie. Nick is willing to hear Charlie's story if Charlie needs a friend to share it with. From Charlie's response, he seems to still be embarrassed about Nick. The chats above show that Nick did not force Charlie to tell his problem, but the real context that we can observe is that Nick really hopes that Charlie can be open and honest about his problems. He emphasized that they were friends and Nick cared about him so it was okay to share problems so he could help and find solutions. From this depiction, We can conclude that Nick is a good listener and can make Charlie feel comfortable sharing his problem.

Coach: It's all about confidence.
Charlie: Well it's hard to be confident when they all see me as a stereotypical gay boy who can't do sports.
Coach: a lot of gay people are good at sports, Charlie.
Episode 4 (Min. 11.10-11:36)

The dialogue above occurs between Charlie and his rugby coach. The coach asked Charlie to be more confident in tackling. However, the way Charlie answered, showed his insecurities and lack of confidence because of people's stereotypes about gays being weak. To raise Charlie's self-confidence, his teacher said that many gay people are good at sports. She is a supportive teacher to builds Charlie's confidence.

3. Character Seen by Another

Tori: I don't think he's straight.
Episode 2 (Min 25:49)

Charlie invites Nick to come to round his house. They do many things such as playing drums and watching. They really enjoy their time shown by their always laughing happily. When Nick wants to go home, he hugs Charlie. Tori, Charlie's older sister, apparently saw it from behind. Charlie didn't expect Nick to do it. Hugging guy friends is not something Nick usually does. Even before hugging Charlie, he looked hesitant, especially when he said goodbye to go home it was clear that he was nervous. Nick's restless and nervous attitude made Tori think that Nick is not straight and maybe there was a possibility that he was attracted to Charlie.

Nick's Mom: Charlie seems like a lovely boy. When did you meet him?

Nick: Uh.. a couple of months ago. Uh, he's in my form.

Nick's Mom: He's very different to your other friends. You seem much more yourself around him.

Nick: Do I?

Nick's Mom: You do!

Episode 2 (Min. 15.10-15:28)

The conversation above occurs between Nick and his mother after Charlie back from their house. His mom thinks that Charlie is a lovely boy, different from Nick's other friends. His mom uses the word lovely to describe Charlie's personality. Lovely means a person who is pleasant to be with. Nick seemed to be himself when he was with Charlie. This shows that Charlie is a kind and friendly person who makes Nick comfortable being around him.

4. Past Life

Charlie is known as gay at Truham Boys School, and it makes him bullied by other students in the last semester. Therefore, this new semester still leaves him with trauma.

Boy 1 : did you hear some year 9 is gay? Boy 2: It's not really bullying.

Boy 1: Like, he sort of asked for it.

Boy 3: This is an all boys school. What did he expect? Boy 4: He's so gross

Boy 1: I bet he was looking at us in the changing room. Boy 2: I'd rather be dead than be gay

Boy 3: He's looking at us. Boy 4: What a weirdo Boy 3: He's such a loser

Episode 2 (Min. 00:43-00:58)

The dialogue above is a flashback of how people talk about Charlie. Boy 1 started a conversation talking about Charlie who was discovered to be gay last semester and it became a topic that was widely told about. Boy 2 stated that what Charlie received was not a form of bullying. This statement was supported by other boys. They thought that Charlie deserved this treatment. The words they said were not a form of bullying but the fact that gays deserve to die. The boys added that gay is so gross, weird, and a loser.

Charlie got this treatment when he was in grade 9. It made him down, so he often hid in Mr. Ajayi's room and isolated himself. Charlie is an introvert. He didn't have many friends. Charlie often eats lunch in Mr. Ajayi's room instead of with his friend. This room is a comfortable place for Charlie. So, in this new semester, he spent lunch time here and even his secret meeting with Nick took place in this room.

5. Reaction

Ben: I know you like me

Charlie: Stop it!

Ben: Charlie, I like you but I figuring stuff out. Literally, what do you want from me?

Nick: He told you to stop! Gone, piss off! You okay?

Episode 1 (Min. 20:38-20:52)

This dialogue above tells that Ben, Charlie's ex-boyfriend asked Charlie to meet. However, he treated Charlie in a bad and rude way. He kissed Charlie as he pleased without Charlie's consent. Nick, who had seen Charlie anxious, followed Charlie to a room where he met Ben. He overheard most of their conversation and stopped Ben from attacking Charlie. Nick pulls Ben away, telling him to leave. Nick even used a swear word to warn Ben. The word piss off that he

used reflects Nick's anger and his dislike of what Ben did to Charlie. Nick's reaction shows that he is a protective friend. He doesn't like it when his friends are hurt by other people.

Ben: Look, I'm sorry about what happened. Have you finished sulking about it?
Charlie: Leave me alone.
Ben: Oh, come on.
Charlie: Don't touch me!
Episode 3 (Min. 13:33-13:41)

In episode 3, it is shown how Charlie can protect and stand for himself when Ben meets him at Harry's birthday party. He even pushed Ben's body, which made Ben stunned because Charlie, who usually remained silent, dared to fight him. Charlie expresses his anger at Ben. He even told Ben to leave him alone and not touch him. This shows that Charlie considers his relationship with Ben to be over and he doesn't want to have anything to do with Ben anymore.

6. Thoughts

Figure 3 Episode 2 (Min. 24:1 4-25:03)

The picture above is the scene where Charlie invited Nick to his house. When they are watching, they sit together and Charlie falls asleep. At that time, Nick looked at Charlie's hand and his thought reflected his desire to hold it but he hesitated.

Figure 4 Episode 2 (Min. 21:44-22:02)

"Sorry, I'm definitely straight, like, I only like girls. We should probably stop being friends if you feel like that."
Nick: Charlie
Charlie: What?
Nick: You just spaced out.

The picture above is not real, it is just Charlie being delusional. Charlie can be said to be an overthinker. Tao has just told a heartbreaking rumor that Nick likes a girl from Higgs school, Tara Jones. It made his mind restless and overthink. He wasn't sure whether Nick had a crush on him or not. He struggles with his bad thoughts and becomes delusional.

7. Mannerism
Tori: Where are you going? Charlie: Round a friend's.

Tori: Tao's?
Charlie: No, his... His name's Nick. Is my hair too short?
Tori: It looks the same.
Charlie: But is it okay?
Tori: It looks the same.
Charlie: Great, Thanks.
Episode 2 (Min. 11:08-11:33)

Charlie is a simple person and pays attention to his appearance. He was often seen touching and doing his hair several times, especially when he was about to meet Nick. Although his sister, Tori said that it just looked the same as usual, he kept wondering about his look, whether it was okay or not. He even asked twice about his hair. It shows that he wants to look perfect in front of the person he loves.

8. Conversation of Others
Boy 1: Charlie Spring though?
Boy 2: Isn't he in Year 8?
Boy 3: No. Year 10.
Boy 2: He's, like, well skinny though.
Boy 1: Can he even play? I'm sure he's a nice guy but we actually want to be dece.
Boy 4: Does he even like sports? Everyone knows he's gay.
Episode 2 (Min. 15:28-15:42)

Charlie heard boys chattering about him. The boys believe Charlie is the same as the gay stereotypes. Boy 2 comments about Charlie's body. This comment was supported by Boy 1's statement which said that they actually want to be decent, where the meaning of that sentence was that he didn't think that Charlie would be suited to rugby sport because this sport needs strength meanwhile Charlie is a skinny and weak person. They don't even believe that Charlie likes sports just because he is gay and this sport are so manly. They see Charlie as weak. Those words made Charlie even more anxious and are not confident to play. Luckily, Nick was a big help. He teaches Charlie how to play rugby and rebuilds Charlie's confidence.

Elle: Nick Nelson? You might as well give up right now. He's the straightest person
I have ever seen.
Tao: Thank you.
Episode 2 (Min. 19:50-19:56)

Charlie's friends talk about Nick. They heard rumors that Nick was close to Tara Jones. Elle, who knew that Charlie had a crush on Nick, told him to stop because everyone knew that Nick was the straightest person she knew and everyone knew that and there is no chance of Charlie dating Nick.

9. Direct Comment
This series mostly shows conversations between the characters. The author of the story or the director of the series has no part in the narration of the story. So, this method does not show the characteristics of the characters in the *Heartstopper* season 1 series.

Self-Discovery
1. Awareness
Charlie is already known and comes out as gay from the beginning of episodes. So, this series does not show the awareness stage experienced by Charlie. Charlie is even shown to have had a secret relationship with Ben in episode 1. Meanwhile, Nick seems to be going through this

process. After he saw Charlie and his ex's interactions, he realized that heterosexuals are not the only ones in this world, there are other possibilities.
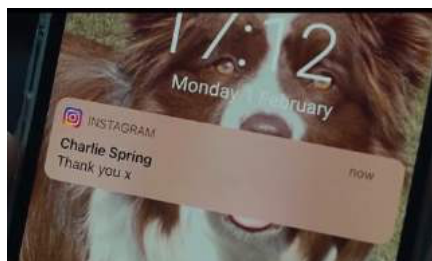

Figure 5 Episode 1 (Min. 23:26-23:36)

The image above is a message that Charlie sent to Nick via Instagram chat. Charlie is grateful for Nick's help when he is bothered by Ben. Charlie ended his message by typing an "x" in it. "X" at the end of a message means kisses. It was used between lovers. However, these days it is more often used as a way of implying you are being friendly, not formal (Britain Explained, n.d.).

Whatever Charlie means by sending a text with an "x" in the end, it makes Nick feel a strange feeling that even he didn't know about. Then he checks Charlie's Instagram profile and sees some of Charlie's posts. The more he looked at Charlie's face, the more he could feel that strange feeling. This feeling is the starting point for the formation of Nick's self- identity.
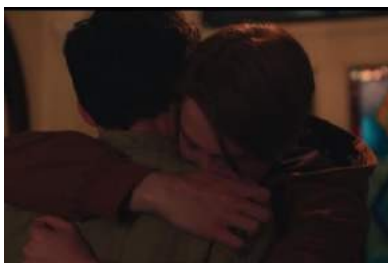
2. Exploration

Figure 6 Episode 2 (Min. 25:10-25:42)

Charlie: I wish you didn't have to go.
Nick: I wish I didn't either. You look so cuddly like that.
Charlie: Do I? Nick: Yeah

Nick says that Charlie looks so cuddly. He uses the words cuddly or cuddle rather than hugable. Cuddling is hugging a person more intimately to show their love and affection which can get in the way of erotic passion. After he said that, Nick hugged Charlie for the first time, he felt nervous and a bit awkward afterward. In this case, Nick begins to consider the existence of erotic feelings for Charlie and wants to be closer to Charlie.
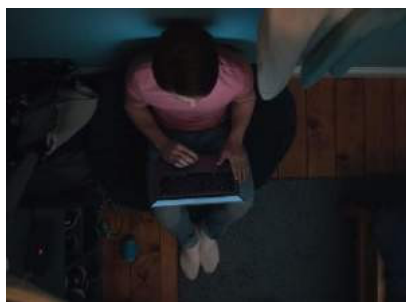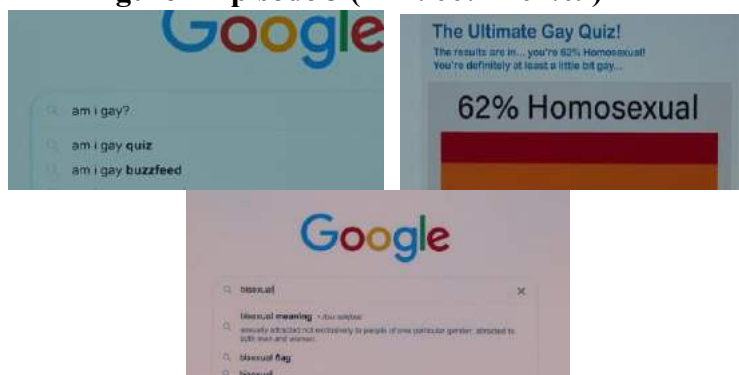
Figure 7 Episode 3 (Min. 00:14-01:09)

Figure 8 Nick's Internet Searching

Nick's awareness encourages him to explore himself. He was doubtful and confused about what he felt. He searched for information about LGBT and took a gay quiz on google to find out his identity. The result showed that he is 62% homosexual.

Tara: There's my girlfriend over there. We mostly been keeping it quite.
Nick: Yeah. So why are you telling me?
Tara: Me and Darcy have been talking, and honestly, we feel like we don't need to keep it that quiet anymore.
Nick: You mean like, come out?
Tara: Not necessarily. We don't want to make a big announcement, but maybe just not hide so much.
Nick: That's cool.
Episode 3 (Min. 09:45-10:45)

His curiosity continues when he meets Tara, a friend who admits to being a lesbian. As his exploration, he kept asking why Tara told Nick that she was a lesbian. Tara and her partner thought that they didn't need to keep it a secret but also didn't need to announce it. Nick seemed to agree with Tara's decision. There was a time, he saw Tara and Darcy kissing while dancing. Nick smiled, indicating that he was comfortable being in an environment where he found people who were different like himself.

Charlie: What's she like then?
Nick: You're just going to assume they're a "she"?
Charlie: Are they, are they not a girl? Nick: Um...
Charlie: Would you go out with someone who wasn't a girl? Nick: I don't know. Maybe
Charlie: Would you kiss someone who wasn't a girl?
Nick: I don't know
Charlie: Would you kiss me? Nick: Yeah
Episode 3 (Min. 19:38-21:45)

As time went on, Nick felt he became more comfortable around Charlie. When Charlie asked Nick about who is someone that he likes, he uses the pronoun "she" because he thinks Nick is straight. Nick's responses made Charlie more curious. Charlie repeatedly asks the question of whether Nick will go out and kiss someone who isn't a girl. From the questions he asked, it was clear that Charlie really hoped that Nick was not straight. But Nick kept telling him that he doesn't know, which shows he was confused and unsure about his sentiment. When Charlie offers himself to be kissed, Nick apparently agrees and tries to kiss Charlie for the first time to convince his sentiment. This is included in the exploration stage where Nick feels curious and tries new things to find what he wants and makes him comfortable.

3. Deepening/Commitment
Nick: At school... is it okay if we, like...
Charlie: Keep this a secret?
Nick: Yeah.. I just don't really know if I can, uh.. you know, come out as anything.
Charlie: Yeah, it's fine.
Episode 4 (Min. 04:17-04:43)

Nick is pretty sure that he also loves boys, it was just that he still needed time to understand this situation better. He then wants to have a relationship with Charlie. However, he had problems coming out. He is not sure about coming out as gay or anything, due to his fear of rejection from other people. Therefore, he asked Charlie to keep their relationship a secret until he was ready to come out. Luckily, Charlie was understanding and agreed. He helps Nick in the process of finding his identity.
Nick: And Tara and Darcy want us to go and get milkshakes with them before it starts. Like a double date.
Charlie: I've never been on a date.
Nick: Me neither. Want to go on me?
Charlie: Yeah
Episode 6 (Min. 13:29-13:53)

The dialogue above occurs when Nick asks Charlie to go on a double date with Tara and Darcy, a lesbian couple who are also their friends. Charlie, who had never experienced dating outside freely, agreed to their idea. At this point, they are in the deepening stages. Nick and Charlie form connections with others who share similar experiences which are homosexual relationships and want to engage in activities that reinforce their identity.

4. Internalization/Synthesis
From the story shown in the *Heartstopper* series season 1, Charlie is already achieving this stage. He even came out as gay to himself as an individual sexual identity and also to the group/society as the group membership identity. The whole school knew that Charlie was gay. Even though he gets rejected and bullied, he accepts himself as he is and expresses himself as he wishes.

Nick: I was thinking... what if I came out?
Charlie: Do you really want to?
Nick: I really want to. I know I've been pretty unsure of everything for a while, but, like, I'm definitely bisexual. I don't want to have to sneak around pretending we're platonic BFF's. I'm not saying I want to have a public announcement or anything, but... I want to tell the people who matter. And I want you to be able to tell people too. Oh, my God, I like you so much. And I love liking you.
"I like Charlie Spring in a romantic way, not just a friend way!"

Charlie: I never thought this would happen to me.
Nick: Me neither.
Episode 8 (Min. 23:39-24:53)

In the final episode of season 1, Nick and Charlie spend their holiday time going to the beach together. Nick was thinking to come out. It shows that he experiences fuller self- acceptance of his desire/love toward Charlie and his identity as an individual bisexual. As a group membership identity, he won't make a public announcement but he wants to come out to the people closest to him to know about his identity.

Nick: He's my boyfriend. Charlie's my boyfriend. I...I still like girls, but, um, I like boys too. And me and Charlie, we're.. We're going out. And I just wanted you to know.
Nick's mom: Oh baby. Oh. Aw, thank you for telling me. I'm sorry if I ever made you feel like you couldn't tell me that. You don't have to say you like girls if you don't.
Nick: no, I, um.. It's definitely not just guys. I, um It's called bisexuality. If you've heard of that?
Nick's mom: I have heard of that. I wasn't born in the 18th century.
Episode 8 (Min. 26:34-27:55)

Nick opens up to his mother. He explains who Charlie is and tells her that he still likes women as he calls him bisexual. His mother accepted Nick and his identity, this was indicated by his mother thanking Nick for his honesty and apologizing if he had ever created a situation where Nick could not express himself. His mother is supportive. After hearing Nick's confession, she hugged Nick to give support, love, and reinforcement.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of *Heartstopper* Season 1 revealed that the main characters' personality and identity formation is portrayed through various narrative and visual techniques, emphasizing themes of self-discovery, acceptance, and resilience. The portrayal of LGBTQ+ identity formation in *Heartstopper* aligns with existing theories of adolescent identity development. Inappropriate treatment such as discrimination and bullying can affect the development of LGBTQ+ youth. However, a safe and supportive environment helps them to explore and express their potential well.

Nick Nelson is a student who is active in sports. He is a rugby player, this sport is known for its masculinity which really needs extra strength. Nick is a person who empathizes and protects Charlie when other people try to hurt and insult him. He became a good listener when Charlie had problems with his ex-girlfriend. Nick provides a comfortable environment for Charlie who is gay. Charlie, who is gay, often feels inferior due to the treatment of his school friends who always look at him as weird and gross. Actually, he is a talented student in music, but that doesn't mean anything because the boys at his school always doubt him and make fun of him for not being good at sports because he is gay.

Nick felt that his friends' treatment was outrageous and that Charlie shouldn't be treated so badly when he didn't do anything. This feeling was also indirectly an expression of himself when he finally realized that he was bisexual. As Nick and Charlie develop feelings and develop a romantic relationship, they strengthen each other until they reach a point where they accept and are confident enough about their sexual identity. The various things they have gone through cannot be separated from the help and support of their family and close friends who have enabled them to continue to develop positively and ultimately reach a happy ending.

The findings in this research resonate with previous research by Ricardo Reitsma which analyzes how queer people in the *Heartstopper* series challenge the heteronormative society in a variety of ways, even though it uses a different theory (Reitsma, 2023). It shows that LGBTQ+ people in this series experience criticism and suffering caused by heteronormativity like Harry

and his other boys. But behind that. the show features characters who themselves offer resistance to the system, by subverting numerous stereotypes.

CONCLUSIONS

There are 9 methods for describing characters, and 8 methods were found that succeeded in revealing the personalities of the main characters in this series. Those are personal description, speech, character seen by another, past life, reactions, thoughts, mannerisms, and conversation of others, while there is no character's personality revealed through direct speech from the author/director because this series only shows conversations between characters in the series.

Series *Heartstopper* Season 1 also shows Nick and Charlie's journey to find their identity, especially their sexual orientation. Charlie's search for sexual identity is not shown in this series, he is shown having reached the internalization/synthesis stage, while Nick goes through 4 stages of sexual identity formation; awareness, exploration, deepening or commitment, and internalization or synthesis.

Based on the series above, the sexual identity of a person is influenced by the environment. Support from the family also helps the person in forming their sexual identity. So, the researchers hope that we will become more aware of the differences that exist around us and learn how to respect people regardless of race, gender, and sexual orientation. It comes back to ourselves, whether we accept or reject LGBT ideology. The researchers also hope that the topic of LGBTQ+ theme and characterization can be studied more deeply in the field of literature.

These findings have important implications for students, media producers, educators, and mental health professionals. For students, this analysis can improve the ability and understanding in writing a project regarding elements of literary work. For media producer, understanding the impact of representation can guide the creation of more inclusive and authentic narratives. For educators and mental health professionals, the insights into identity formation can aid in developing supportive environments for LGBTQ+ youth. One limitation of this study is the focus on a single season of *Heartstopper*. Future research could extend the analysis to subsequent seasons or compare it with other series to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

REFERENCES

Bench, S. W., Schlegel, R. J., Davis, W. E., & Vess, M. (2015). Thinking About Change in The Self and Others: The Role of Self-Discovery Metaphors and The True Self. *Social Cognition*, *33*(3), 169–185. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2015.33.3.2

Britain Explained. (n.d.). *What that X means on messages*. Britain Explained. Retrieved from https://britainexplained.com/what-that-x-means-on-messages/

Fassinger, R. E. (1998). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identity and student development theory. *Working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender College Students: A Handbook for Faculty and Administrators*, 13–22.

Franklin-Jeune, S. (2013). Queer theory as a form of Post-Modernism. *Graduate Seminar in Anthropological Theory II*.

McKee, R. (1997). *Story*. New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, Inc.

Moleong, L. J. (2010). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya.

Murphy, M. J. (1972). *Understanding unseens: An introduction to English poetry and the English novel for overseas students*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Qonita, A. (2023). *Hierarchy Of Needs Of The Main Character In Nzingha Stewart's Tall Girl Movie*. Diponegoro University.

Reitsma, R. (2023). *Heartstopper and the Query of Queerness: an exploration of how Heartstopper navigates, resists, and diversifies a heteronormative society*.

Rotten Tomatoes. (2022). *Season 1 - Heartstopper*. Rotten Tomatoes. Retrieved from https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/heartstopper/s01

Rudy. (2016). The Depiction of Homosexuality in American Movies. *Jurnal Humaniora*, *28*(1),

59–68. https://doi.org/10.22146/jh.v28i1.11502

Sahrani, A., Kuncara, S. D., & Sudirman, E. P. (2022). Queer Representations: Coming Out and Homophobia in Selected Young Adult Novels. *Ilmu Budaya Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni, Dan Budaya*, *6*, 286–307.

Setiawan, J., & Sudrajat, A. (2018). Pemikiran Postmodernisme Dan Pandangannya Terhadap Ilmu Pengetahuan. *Jurnal Filsafat*, *28*(1), 25–46. https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.33296

Spargo, T. (1999). *Foucault and Queer Theory*. Cambridge: Icon Books Ltd.

Syahputra, F. P., & Mendrofa, P. I. K. (2022). Figurative Language In John Mayer's Selected Songs: A Stylistic Analysis. *Lingtersa*, *3*(2). https://talenta.usu.ac.id/lingtersa

Syofyan, D. (2022). *Sastra dan Postmodernisme*. Retrieved from https://geotimes.id/kolom/sastra-dan-postmodernisme/

Wanggay, D. A., & Sugihartono, R. A. (2023). Characterization of Juno in the Film Kucumbu Tubuh Indahku. *ProTVF*, *7*(2), 148–164. https://doi.org/10.24198/ptvf.v7i2.46538