

Religious and Sexual Identity Conflict among Same-sex Attracted Muslim Men: A Conceptual Differences of Life Experience between Western and Muslim Majority Countries

Mohammed Yusof Bin Dawood Gany
¹Nasrudin Subhi

*Centre for Human and Societal Well-Being
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia*

¹Corresponding e-mail: [nas2572@ukm.edu.my]

Previous studies exploring the conflict between religious and sexual identity among same-sex attracted Muslim men (henceforth, SSAMM) have been largely carried out on ethnic minority Muslims living in the Western countries. Many of such studies seem to indirectly imply that religious adherence to Islam have largely contributed to the identity conflict among SSAMM. Without scrutinizing the difference between Western and Muslim majority setting in which a same-sex attracted men (henceforth, SSAM) lives, other potential factors that may lead an SSAMM to experience conflict between religious and sexual identity are left unexplained. Thus, misperceptions against Islam as the only contributor to the said conflict are left uncorrected. In order to correct the misperceptions, the current paper proposes some conceptual differences between the Western and Muslim majority setting within which an SSAM lives. Malaysia is one of the valid Muslim majority settings suitable to demonstrate the conceptual differences as well as becoming a good breeding ground for studies pertaining to issues of homosexuality among religious SSAMM to flourish. It is hoped that such proposals of differences would be helpful to conceptually counter balance the unfavorable implications previous studies had on religion, particularly that of Islam.

Keywords: same-sex attracted Muslim men (SSAMM), same-sex attracted men (SSAM), conflict, religious identity, sexual identity.

The realm of academia has witnessed numbers of works exploring the complexities in the interaction between religion and sexuality. Such complexities were, one of them, demonstrated through studies exploring the conflict between religious and sexual identity among same-sex attracted Muslim men (henceforth, SSAMM). In this paper, the authors purposely focus on the issue of conflict between religious and sexual identity as this construct has invited a great number of critics primarily because of the clashing effect Islamic faith could have on an SSAMM's advancement of his sexual identity.

Previous studies exploring conflict between religious and sexual identity were conducted predominantly on Whites (Degges-White et al., 2000; Guittar, 2013) coming from a Judeo-Christian background (Anderton et al., 2011; Hamblin & Gross, 2014). Studies on the same construct were rarely conducted on Muslim populations. Should there be any, most of them were studies done on Muslim coming from an ethnic minority (Pakistani, Bangladeshi, India, Iraq and Iran) living in western countries (Akbarzadeh & Roose, 2011; Anonymous, 2015; Jaspal, 2012; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2014; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011;

Meladze & Brown, 2015; Minwalla et al., 2005; Yip, 2004).

Very few studies on the said topic could be found in samples coming from Muslim majority countries (Anderton et al., 2011; Rahman, 2015). To name some of the few studies in Muslim majority countries; Turkey (Bakacak & Oktem, 2014; Bereket & Adam, 2008); Indonesia (Boellstorffs, 2005); and Malaysia. (Mohd Izwan et al., 2014).

Malaysia is one of the Muslim majority countries in the world deemed fit to be a comparison to most Western countries in terms of religious and cultural values. Besides that, because of its strict Islamic values, any studies pertaining to the conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM is very much encouraged to be conducted in Malaysia. This will also serve as a fill up for the lack of academic works dealing with larger issues of homosexuality and Islam among SSAMM living in a Muslim majority country as well as providing a ground of appreciation for its religious and cultural values in informing the expression of sexual identity among SSAMM living in this country.

The following section will describe the main reasons religious adherence to Islamic faith among SSAMM have been criticized in the previous studies. The researcher has postulated three themes that surround this polemic; previous models of sexual identity development; the role of ethnicity in the experience of identity conflict; and the degree of political and social permissiveness. Inter-cultural comparison, where applicable, are highlighted to establish the conceptual comparison mentioned earlier.

Previous Sexual Identity Development Models

Previous models of sexual identity development or as Eliason (1996) puts it, “coming out” models like that of Vivienne Cass (Cass, 1979) and Richard Troiden (Troiden, 1989) were developed based on the essentialist paradigm which “view that sexual orientation as a real thing, an essence that is universal in that we can see it throughout history and across cultures” (Kohm & Yarhouse, 2002, p. 251). Various sexual identity models propose that a person’s sexual identity development progress through particular fixed stages in order to achieve a fulfilled sexual identity development or what is called as identity synthesis.

Although the outlines upon which each model operates are different, all of them agree on what constitute to be a complete sexual identity development; equalizing coming out to identity synthesis (Kohm & Yarhouse, 2002). This is true, for example, in models proposed by Vivienne Cass and Richard Troiden, in which they have made an explicit requirement that in order to attain a healthy sexual identity development, one must eventually be able to adopt homosexuality as a way of life, consider it as a valid identity, be content and happy with it, be able to disclose it to non-homosexual people (Troiden, 1989) have pride in it and be able to integrate it into one’s total self-identity (Cass, 1979).

With such rigid and fixed stages being presented, it can be postulated that these essentialist models of sexual identity development render sexual identity ahistorical and acultural (Eliason, 1996; Miville & Ferguson, 2004; Rahman, 2000). These western devised models suggest that the stages of sexual identity development are a universal reality that binds all people equally regardless of their subjective attributions to what it means to be same-sex attracted and how that sense of being so is expressed.

In other words, researchers and mental health professionals who subscribe to these models tend to 'force' them onto SSAM coming from non-Whites, non-western, and non-secular background while formulating the conclusion of an SSAM sexual identity formation experience like coming out. The consequences of such 'enforcement' may include negative portrayals against adherence to Islam in academic works and biased psychological assessment among SSAMM coming from different religious and cultural appreciation.

Examples of such can be seen, among others, in studies that pathologize those whose sexual identity was not characterized by the presence of coming out (Cole et al., 1996; Juster et al., 2013) or that which was informed by their religious beliefs (Dialmy, 2010; Meladze & Brown, 2015; Sowe et al., 2014; Wilkerson, 2012). There are numerous critiques leveled against the previous sexual identity development models (e.g., Degges-White et al., 2000; Eliason, 1996) that can be used to refute the studies cited, but that is not the main interest of this paper.

Studies on conflict between one's religious and sexual identity have always taken into account the experience of coming out. This is because part of life trajectory among SSAMM that constitutes such conflicts are, one of them, embedded in one's experience of having his sexual identity known to other people (McLean, 2007) especially among family members. Studies that consist of coming out narratives, among ethnic minority SSAMM often reflect the identity conflict as mentioned (Jaspal, 2012a; Jaspal, 2012b; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2014; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011; Yip, 2004).

Coming out may range from acknowledging one's own self same-sex attraction to coming out to others (Guittar,

2013; Rosario et al., 2001). Acknowledgment of one's own self as having an attraction towards members of the same-sex can be considered a universal experience of consciousness among same-sex attracted people across various cultures (Yarhouse, 2004). Acknowledgment as such however, does not mean that one subscribes to a particular label like gay or bisexual or in the case of same-sex attracted females, lesbian (Guittar, 2013).

Worthy of note, dis-identified with a particular label is another side of the lived experience of some same-sex attracted people worth researching. This is because it deviates from the traditionally understood form of coming out. An example to illuminate the above point is an alternative metaphysical construal by Yarhouse (2004) in which he started his construal by narrating "Jerry's" non-traditional coming out. In that narrative, Jerry did not associate himself with labels like "gay" despite his acknowledgment of his own same-sex attraction. The same experience can be found in another study by Yarhouse et al. (2009) on 26 African Americans some of whom refuse to be identified by their same-sex attraction. What drives Jerry and those African American to dis-identify themselves with their sexual orientation will be discussed later as we go through the sequence of my proposal in this paper.

As for disclosing one's sexual identity to other people, the decision to do this may require an immense cognitive and emotional investment and may be influenced by factors like one's own culture (Miville & Ferguson, 2004) that is unique to each country from which study samples are selected from. Coming out in public which is logically more taxing than acknowledging one's own same-sex attraction should thus be explored even subjectively. It should be examined as a subjective phenomenon unique to a particular same-sex attracted person

coming from various countries with diverse cultural and religious upbringing.

This subjectivity was further illustrated in a study conducted by Nicholas Guittar in his study on 30 lesbian, gay, bisexual and queer (LGBQ) individuals where he discovered that coming out has no single universal meaning (Guittar, 2013). This uniqueness is driven by the fact that social environment, life surroundings, and personal beliefs differ of LGBQ people from one another. Thus, a definite and fixed interpretation of coming out cannot be pronounced due to the broad variation seen across participants in his study.

Thus far, we have seen some critiques made on the previous models of sexual identity development on the basis of their lack of sensitivity to people's subjectivity. This subjectivity may come from many factors like dominance of religion, level of discreteness to the discussion of sexuality, compartmentalization between private and public realms, social attribution of gender roles and whether the culture is individualistic or collectivistic (Anonymous, 2015).

These and others are some aspects of life that drive many same-sex attracted people to want to pursue an alternative version of identity development as reflected in the narrative of Jerry (Yarhouse, 2004) and the 26 African Americans (Yarhouse et al., 2009). Jerry's refusal to take up any label like "gay" despite of his awareness of his same-sex attraction should never be looked at as a sign of psychological disturbance or as a precursor to pursue sexual re-orientation therapy.

In fact, Jerry did not want to pursue sexual re-orientation therapy. Rather, he just wanted to be attentive towards how his beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors

facilitate one identity over the other. For Jerry, his decision as to what his identity is going to be is defined by his religious beliefs and values about human sexuality and expression.

Jerry's formulation of his sexual identity expression truly indicates the calm interaction between two conflicting identities in which more priority is given to the religious identity in regulating his sexuality. Likewise, in the study of 26 African-Americans respondents who identified themselves to be both Christian and same-sex attracted, Yarhouse et al. (2009) found out that 11 of them prefer to identify themselves with being Christians rather than with their sexual identity. Jerry and the 26 African-American participants whose identity undertaking are motivated by religion/culture are a few of many similar examples we can find in other works (e.g., Petchauer et al., 2008; Yarhouse, 2010).

In Australia, Subhi and Geelan (2012) also found that through their sample of 20 gays and lesbians, 80% of their respondents ultimately rested on choosing to incorporate both sexuality and religiosity into their lives despite facing various potential conflicts. They found that these respondents came from families with either parent having a moderate to very religious background. Thus, suggested that their choice to incorporate both sexuality and religiosity might stem from the direct or indirect influence of their parents' religiosity.

The studies cited above and their likes that permeate within the academic works were predominantly conducted among Christian SSAM. Studies of the same direction that were conducted on SSAMM were very scarce and many of them, should there be any, have been focusing on SSAMM among ethnic minority Muslims.

The authors see that it is time to fill up the missing gap in the academic realm by producing more researches that explore the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM living in Muslim majority countries, particularly in Malaysia. The purpose is none other than to counter balance the abundant studies exploring the same construct, but were conducted mainly among SSAMM who lived in countries where the presence of other potential factors that contribute towards the identity conflict are often neglected leaving religion to suffer from the secular blaming alone.

The authors believe studies that have been carried out on ethnic minority SSAMM were not meant to demonize Islam and adherence to its teachings in regards to homosexuality but their tone and direction somehow indicated otherwise.

The following sections will present the rationale behind the needs to pursue studies in the area of conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM living in Muslim majority countries. This will be demonstrated via conceptual comparison of the socio-cultural and political scenario between SSAMM who live in the western countries and those living in Malaysia and possible differences both groups are likely to experience their conflict of identity due to their respective cultural difference.

The Role of Ethnicity in the Experience of Identity Conflict

Some studies that have been conducted seem to probably unintentionally demonstrate the experience of conflict between one's Islamic and sexual identity in an uncompromising contrast (e.g., Jaspal, 2012a; Jaspal, 2012b; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2013; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011;

Yip, 2004) and a glaringly negative tone (e.g., Anonymous, 2015). This may lead people to view religion, in particular, Islam negatively. As mentioned earlier, most samples of these studies were minority Muslims living in the western countries. There are many aspects of their lives, apart than the religion itself that promotes a sense of conflict within them.

Such interplay of other factors was demonstrated in a study by Yarhouse et al. (2009) on a group of African-American samples which was mentioned earlier. In that study, one Christian participant shared that he felt dirty because he was gay and Black. He felt that Black people should not have this problem and that same-sex attraction should be taboo in the Black church. This is one example of one's ethnicity and religious interplay in the conflict usually perceived to be the product of religious beliefs single-handedly.

Another one worth noting is a study by Jaspal and Siraj (2011) on perceptions of coming out among 10 British-born self-identified Muslim gay men of Pakistani heritage. In the said study, Jaspal and Siraj mentioned about 'Izzat', an ethno-religious construct that inhibits the participants from revealing their sexual identity. It is a "personal and cultural honour" which will result in excommunication by one's ethnic group as well as psychological and physical abuse upon one's disclosure of homosexuality (Jaspal, 2012a, p.3). Of an interesting point, Jaspal did mention about 'Izzat' as a distinctly Pakistani culture which is homophobic, which exemplified how one's ethnic or cultural aspect intermingles in the formation of sexual identity along with religion.

In exploring the life experience of conflict between one's religious faith and sexuality, it is critical to understand how the conflict between the two are very much ingrained in one's experiences as a cultural

being (Miville & Ferguson, 2004). Applying this principle to the experience of identity conflict among the SSAM from an ethnic minority population of Africa and Pakistani descent who professed Christian and Islamic faith respectively (as shown earlier) had really pointed out that the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity are greatly motivated by one's needs to preserve their cultural/racial values. None of them purely reflect the single work of religion.

Although Jaspal and Siraj (2011) made a claim by stating that it is the religion of Islam, which is deeply rooted in the Pakistani culture that has somehow contributed to the conflict of faith and sexuality, this may only be relevant to Pakistanis, especially among those who lived up the double minority status (being an ethnic and sexual minority) in many western countries. In contrast to what Rusi Jaspal and Asifa Siraj have claimed, Gallup Coexist Index had two years earlier revealed the non-hostile attitude towards homosexuality among more than one third of Muslims living in France (Green, 2009).

Thus, the influence of other factors that has linked itself to the function of religion in contributing to the conflict between religious and sexual identity is preliminary established. To substantiate the preliminary claim, studies exploring the experience of such conflict among SSAMM who only live up a single minority status (being sexual minority) in a majority Muslim community where all the privileges are very much equally enjoyed with their heterosexual counterparts are seriously needed.

In the interest of exploring the dynamics of interaction between one's religious and sexual identity among SSAMM living in Muslim majority country, the authors of this paper had themselves conducted a qualitative study

that explore the experience of coming out among SSAMM in Malaysia.

In the study on 20 SSAMM, Dawood Gany and Subhi (2017) spotted the interplay of one's ethnicity in the interaction between their religious and sexual identity. The Malay Muslim respondents, when narrating about reactions that their parent gave upon detecting some gay-like qualities in them, provided the narratives that are absent of any negative parental reaction against their sexual identity as compared to one Indian Muslim respondent who narrated to have a few experiences of repeated verbal rebukes by his father. In addition to that and oddly enough, one respondent who is a Chinese reverted to Islam narrated to have felt comfortable to ignore his previous homosexual lifestyle and friends while pursuing the comfort of being a Muslim despite his knowledge regarding the Islamic position towards homosexuality.

Previous studies exploring the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM were predominantly qualitative in nature where the narratives reported by the respondents seemed to portray adherence to religion in an unfavourable manner. Thus, the qualitative study by Yusof Dawood Gany and Nasrudin Subhi can be taken as a springboard to expose the various dynamics of interaction between one's sexual and religious identity in an environment where Muslim is the majority and where the observance of Islamic faith dominates in various levels of life.

Degree of Political and Social Permissiveness

Studies concerning conflict between religious and sexual identity have been conducted in many western countries with Judeo-Christian background (Hamblin & Gross, 2011). These studies, however, should be understood in the political light

of each and every country from which the same-sex attracted people are sampled. Most western countries operate on secular systems that allow freedom of speech and advocate various human rights including the right to practice homosexuality. Although historically western countries were very much influenced by Judeo-Christian cultures, most western countries like the United States of America, England, Britain, Holland, Canada and France, to name a few, gave in to rejecting homosexuality over the political sanction that generally permits and celebrate the practice of homosexuality which includes same-sex marriage.

Politically speaking, rejection against homosexuality in those countries is applicable within one's personal and community sphere, without further political power to enforce it. As per today, the whole United States of America, for example, are left with no choice but to be politically permissive to the practice of homosexuality like same-sex marriage (BBC, 2015). Religious sanctions against the practice of homosexuality have no authority whatsoever on state laws or public policy. Churches and educators are threatened to be ripped off from tax exemption and removed from their office should they refuse to solemnize same-sex wedding or propagating traditional Christian values on marriage (Denison, 2013).

The scenario described above is very much different in a country where Muslims make up the majority of the population. A very good example to demonstrate this difference would be Malaysia. Based on the statistics of population by states and ethnic groups 2015, Malays (as compared to Indian and Chinese) who are constitutionally Muslims, make up the majority of the Malaysian population of about 51% according to population statistics by states and ethnic 2015 (Penerangan, 2015). Islam

as argued by many scholars functions not only as a representation of Malayness but has become a fundamental feature of Malaysian Malay identity (Jerome, 2013; Stapa et al., 2012). Thus, giving the impression that a Malay-Muslim identity revolves around the combination of these two identities rather than around the other aspect like one's sexuality.

Unlike most western countries, the religious influence in Malaysia can obviously be observed, especially that of the Islamic faith. The influence of Islamic faith in Malaysia can be seen through the establishment of Islamic religious institutions like mosques, religious schools, shari'ah legal system, various national and state religious departments, and Islamic NGOs. The Federal Constitution even establishes the status of Islam in its Article 3(1) that states Islam as the religion of the federation (Fernando, 2006).

The influence of Islamic faith in Malaysia can also be seen via the inclusion of Islamic education subjects in public schools. In fact, the national philosophy of education in Malaysia has outlined the belief in God as the basis upon which all educational activities (Salleh, 2003) and development of Islamic identity (Mat Tuah et al., 2012) are supposed to be pointing at.

The implementation of shari'ah law has its root in Malaysia since the establishment of the first Islamic Sultanate in the Malay Peninsula (Shuaib, 2012). The finding of Terengganu inscription (*batu bersurat*) dated back to 1303 C.E. has proven such implementation of Islamic jurisprudence in the Malay Peninsula (Abd Rahim et al., 2010; Inscribed Stone of Terengganu, 2008). The implementation of Islamic legal system in Malaysia continues until these days with the establishment of shari'ah legal systems. Religious authorities have their share of power and

are not alone in combating various shari'ah misconducts.

Legal provision of shari'ah law is at disposal to have legal actions be taken against those who get involved in shari'ah misconducts (Ismail, Mohd Kasrin, & Mat Zain, 2012). Cooperation between the police force and religious departments in curbing immoral behaviors like cohabitation between unmarried Muslim partners and same-sex misconducts is another hallmark of the authority of Islam in Malaysia that shape its judicial landscape. These and others are some of the prime examples of how the Islamic tenets have been traditionally enforced in the Malaysian political and legal system and not just a matter of personal beliefs.

All the above facts should have given us some insights about the life experience of SSAMM in Malaysia as the people who have been raised in a country where Muslims are the majority and where the influence of Islam can be felt at the personal and political level. They have also been educated with the Islamic moral values at schools which include the prohibition of homosexuality in their Islamic faith and living in a culture where discussion about homosexuality is a taboo and practicing it is shameful and is to be shunned.

This is starkly different from many western societies whose philosophy of life is very much characterized by the philosophy of individualism and self-actualization and where the freedom of sexuality is celebrated openly via the establishment of various sources like gay rights movement, legal provision for the gay rights protection, gay premises, and support groups. There, pursuance of positive personal autonomy is highly valued and as we can see today, religious tenets play no legal and political part in criminalizing sexual behavior that is out of religious norms. By picturing this kind of

environment, it can be logically induced that the way Islamic faith is experienced by SSAMM in Malaysia is cross-culturally different from that of their Muslim counterparts living in the non-Islamic western host countries. This suggests that the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity of both populations to also be different.

This difference can be visualized by considering two different groups of SSAMM living in two different countries; one that is characterized by the permissive environment towards the expression of one's sexuality and the other one lives in a country that is characterized by certain authoritative religious or legal provision as to how one's sexuality should ideally be regulated and expressed. A fact that should not be ignored is that both groups have needs to express the sexual identity regardless of the level of permissiveness of the environment in which both groups dwell in.

SSAMM living in the western countries that offers a free expression of sexual identity, gay amenities at disposal, and legal provision of gay rights, but is restricted by their personal religious values will experience, hypothetically, but logically, an intense identity conflict in regulating the fight between the tendency to enjoy the available tempting benefits and adherence towards their Islamic faith. This, in comparison, is potentially different from the experience of their counterparts from Muslim majority countries who have been accustomed to the non-availability of such temptations while adhering to their Islamic faith.

In a majority Muslim country, for example Malaysia, where the Islamic influence permeates into various realms of life (personal, institutional, legal and political), freedom such as free expression of sexuality enjoyed by the LGBT community in many western countries may

not be of any equal experience here. Despite a few attempts to model after the practice of free expression of sexuality enjoyed in the western and some South East Asian countries (e.g., Singapore and Thailand) like *Seksualiti Merdeka* (Zurairi, 2013), open Malaysian gay Christian pastor (Yuan, 2011), and gay affirmative church (The Query, 2008), Malaysia has been maintaining and enforcing its traditional Islamic values that does not recognize non-traditional expression of sexuality.

Thus, such movements have relatively no weight to become the tempting opportunities among SSAMM in Malaysia. Absence of such opportunities in majority Muslim countries like Malaysia set a social environment with a different degree of permissiveness towards LGBT lifestyle than that of the environment in which ethnic minority SSAMM live in. Additionally, the presence or absence of opportunity to come out as a hypothetical source of conflict between religious and sexual identity could also be mediated by other assisting factors.

For Muslim immigrants who live in non-Muslim majority society, immigration itself is a religious experience. For immigrants, especially among those who come from a society where they were part of the religious majority, religious identity can suddenly be a very important aspect of their lives in a society where they are the religious minority even though religion was previously taken for granted in their homelands (Peek, 2005) especially, post 9/11 (Nagra, 2010). Plus, being a minority increases the need to be close to one's ethnic community, especially in the rise of racism (Minwalla et al., 2005) which requires a SSAMM to reconstruct their sexual identity to be at par with the norm of their ethnic group (Jaspal, 2012a; Jaspal & Siraj, 2011). Such intense affiliation, in turn, can cause potential psychological

incongruence between religious and sexual identity among ethnic minority SSAMM (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2014).

There is a relationship between perceived availability (perceived easier to obtain) with one's likelihood of getting involved in a particular behavior. In a study by Kuntsche et al. (2008), they found that community-level perceived availability and the density of on-premises were related to volume drinking. In a cross-cultural study comparing French and Dutch adolescent's perceived availability of alcoholic beverages and cannabis, and its influence on alcohol and cannabis consumptions, Knibbe et al. (2009) found that Dutch adolescents who perceived alcoholic beverages and cannabis to be easily obtained has a stronger influence on alcoholic consumption as compared to their French counterparts.

Although these studies are about drinking behavior, the psychological motivation in doing certain behavior stemming from the perceived availability of premises of one's interest is equally applicable to SSAMM coming out behaviour. Putting the influence of perceived availability of gay related platforms and the likelihood of an SSAMM to involve in gay related behaviour, it can be reasonably reckoned that SSAMM who have greater perception towards the availability of gay related platforms are more likely to get intensely involved or at least to be highly motivated to do gay related behaviors as compared to SSAMM whose perception towards such availability is lesser.

With this being explained, it should come to no surprise to see that SSAMM who live in an environment where gay related facilities and platforms were legally and freely available experience intense conflict with the awareness of their religious restrictions against enjoying such availabilities. This is in comparison, could

be a totally different experience from SSAMM who have been accustomed to live in an environment where gay related facilities and platforms are hardly or illegally obtainable which in turn makes religious restriction against enjoying such availabilities to have no significant conflict within themselves. The difference between SSAMM living in both environments is further illustrated in the Figure 1 and 2.

It is a well-grounded prediction to hypothetically say that the conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM living as ethnic minority in western societies are the product of not only the religion itself. Instead it is but the

interplay of religious faith and other factors such as challenges to resist the temptations to express themselves through personal freedom and human rights enjoyed by their progressive Whites counterparts living on the same land, the need to remain close to one's ethnic group, and the need to maintain and enhance their Islamic religious identity. It is sensible to suggest that religious tenets pertaining to homosexuality is not the sole contributor to such conflict, but rather was facilitated by other factors like ethnicity, presence or absence of temptation, and the need to maintain and enhance one's Islamic identity.

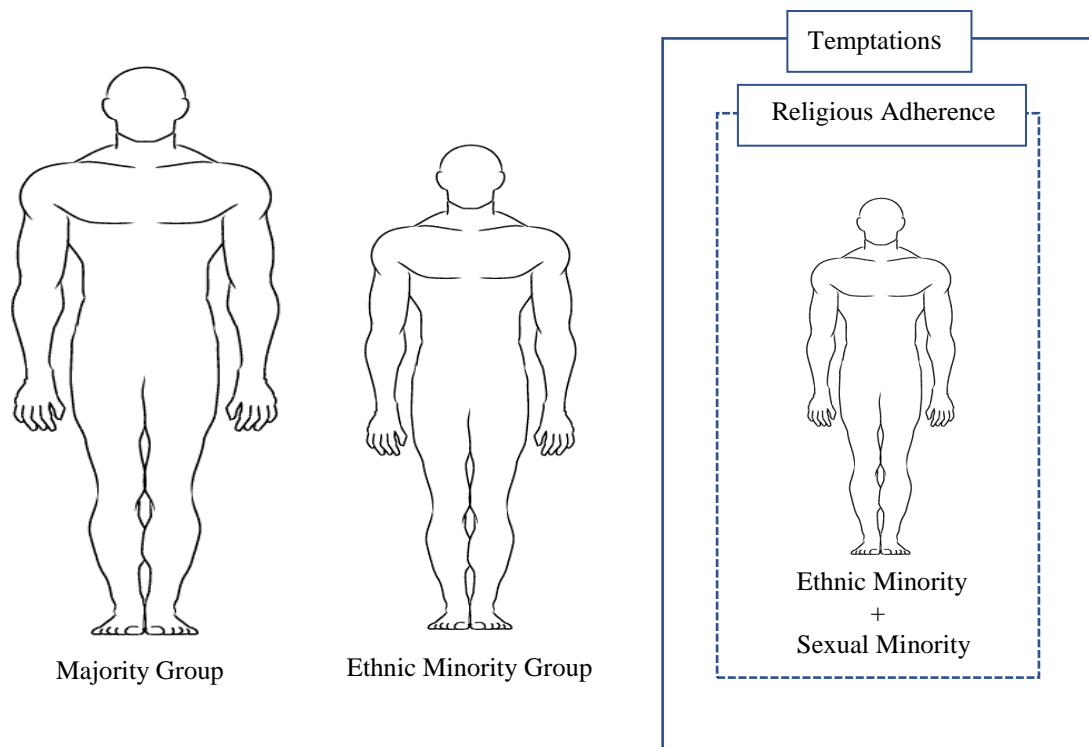


Figure 1. The environment in which SSAMM living in western countries experience the conflict between their religious and sexual identity. Other than the Islamic position towards homosexuality, their experience of identity conflict is potentially assisted by other factors like the needs to manage their double minority status as well as the presence of appealing sources to express their sexual identity. The dotted rectangular represents potential fragility of one religious adherence in the environment where presence of tempting resources to express one's sexual identity is inevitable.

The experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity of this magnitude may not be of any equal among SSAM living in Muslim majority country

like Malaysia for the reasons discussed earlier. Based on those reasons, it makes sense, at least hypothetically, to say that SSAMM living as ethnic minority

experiences higher levels of conflict between religious and sexual identity. It is sensible to suggest that religious tenets presence or absence of temptation, and the need to maintain and enhance one's Islamic identity.

Although this supposition is yet to be proven via empirical studies, the path

leading to it is reasonable. After all, one of the aims of this paper is to suggest the needs for more studies in the area of conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM living in Muslim majority countries. Any hypothesis stemming from the discussion above is actually what the topic originally intends to bring to attention.

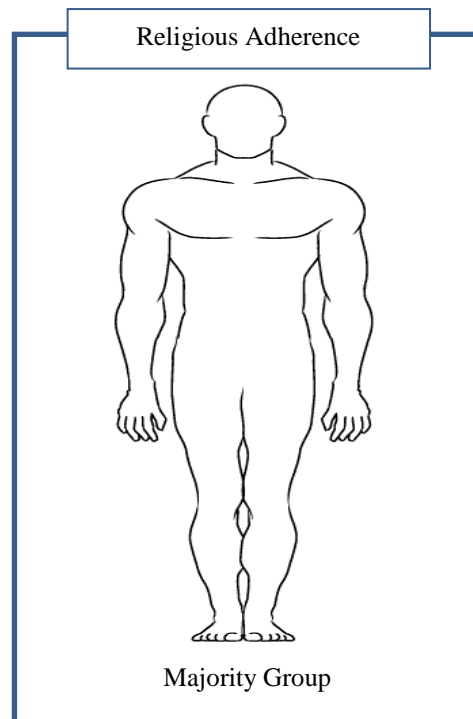


Figure 2 The environment in which SSAMM who live in a Muslim majority country experience the conflict between religious and sexual identity. Although the conflict is felt, but the intensity can be predictively said to be lower than their counterparts living within the western societies. Being able to equally enjoy the same benefits as their other fellow citizens characterize the absence of double minority status. The relative absence of tempting gay resources and the awareness of the Islamic position towards homosexuality potentially facilitate the identity conflict rather easily.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it proposes conceptual yet logical differences between Western and Muslim majority setting in which SSAMM lives that demonstrates the presence of other potential factors aside than the religion itself that have contributed to the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM. This

is helpful in correcting the misconceptions that Islam is the one and only contributing factor to the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity among SSAMM. Secondly, this paper proposes the need for more studies conducted among religious SSAMM living in a rather Muslim majority setting like Malaysia to counter balance the unfavorable implications many western

studies on homosexuality have had on Islam.

Based on the concern of this paper, the authors have come up with potential studies scholars and researchers could embark upon in the future. The future studies proposed are given in the following list;

- i. The different level of conflict between religious and sexual identity between SSAMM who live in permissive and non-permissive settings.
- ii. Cross-cultural reaction towards children's display of homosexual characteristic among Muslim parents.
- iii. Exploration of how religious SSAMM incorporates religiosity into the expression of their sexual identity.
- iv. The different impact of perceived availability of gay related outlets between SSAMM living in permissive and non-permissive settings.

This paper as stated in the title, is calling for the increase of studies on SSAMM. How about same-sex attracted Muslim women? SSAMM have always been the most covered topics on LGBT issues (Bennett, 1998) and are viewed more negatively compared to same-sex attracted women (Kerns & Fine, 1994). In Malaysia, the most targeted LGBT people in mass media are the male effeminates and male homosexuals (Amirul, 2015; Jaafar, 2003; Mohammed et al., 2016; Shirat, 2003).

Negative portrayal of SSAM in the mass media coupled with a homonegative attitude within the Muslim society itself acts as precursor towards internalizing self-guilt among SSAMM. This, in turn, is very potential to lead them to experience the conflict between their religious and sexual identity in a greater intensity than

that experienced by same-sex attracted Muslim women. This is further supported in a study conducted by Henrickson (2007) on 2,246 lesbian, gay, and bisexual people in which he revealed that male homosexuals are more susceptible to perceiving religion as a difficulty compared to lesbians.

Thus, in any case where the experience of conflict between religious and sexual identity is significant, it can reasonably be said to be among the SSAM. Well, this conclusion is hypothetical too and is open for empirical scrutiny. For the moment, let us consider it to be a reasonable proposition worthy of studying.

References

- Abd Rahim, R. A., Ismail, P., Abd Majid, M. K., & Md Dahlal, N. H. (2010). Batu bersurat Terengganu. Satu tafsiran terhadap pelaksanaan syariah Islam (Inscribed stone of Terengganu. An expounding of the practice of the Islamic Shari'ah. *Jurnal Fiqh*, 7, 107-148.
- Akbarzadeh, S., & Roose, J. M. (2011). Muslims, multiculturalism, and the question of silent majority. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31(3), 309-325. doi:10.1080/13602004.2011.599540
- Amirul. (2015, March 7). Nafsu songsang kecelaruan naluri. [Deviated lust confused instinct]. *Utusan Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.utusan.com.my/berita/nasional/nafsu-songsang-kecelaruan-naluri-1.66816>
- Anderton, C. L., Pender, D. A., & Asner-Self, K. K. (2011). A review of the religious identity/sexual orientation identity conflict literature. Revisiting Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5(3-4), 259-281. doi: 10.1080/15538605.2011.632745

- Anonymous. (2015). Muslim and gay: Seeking identity coherence in New Zealand. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 18(3), 280-193. doi: 10.1080/13691058.2015.1079927
- Bakacak, A. G., & Oktem, P. (2014). Homosexuality in Turkey: Strategies for managing heterosexism. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 61(6), 817-846. doi: 10.1080/00918369.2014.870453
- BBC. (2015). US supreme court rules gay marriage is legal. Retrieved from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33290341>
- Bennett, L. (1998). *The Perpetuation of Prejudice in Reporting on Gays and Lesbians Time and Newsweek: The First Fifty Years* (Research Paper no. R -21). Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University. http://www.hks.harvard.edu/presspol/publications/papers/research_papers/r21_bennett.pdf
- Bereket, T., & Adam, B. D. (2008). Navigating Islam and same-sex liaisons among men in Turkey. *Journal of Homosexuality* 55(2), 204-222. doi: 10.1080/00918360802129428
- Boellstropp, T. (2005). Between religion and desire. Being Muslim and gay in Indonesia. *American Anthropologist*, 107(4), 575-585. doi: 10.1525/aa.2005.107.4.575
- Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 219-235.
- Cole, S. W., Kemeny, M. E., Taylor, S. E., Visccher, B. R., & John, L. (1996). Accelerated course of human immunodeficiency virus infection in gay men who conceal their homosexual identity. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 58(3), 219-231.
- Degges-White, S., Rice, B., & Myers, J. E. (2000). Revisiting Cass' theory of sexual identity formation: A study of lesbian development. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 22(4), 318-333.
- Denison, J. C. (2013). How does same-sex marriage affect you. Biblical answers to frequently asked questions about homosexuality and same-sex marriage. *Denison Forum of Truth and Culture*. Retrieved from <http://assets.denisonforum.org/pdf/books/how-does-same-sex-marriage-affect-you.pdf>
- Dialmy, A. (2010). Sexuality and Islam. *European Journal of Contraceptive Reproduction Health Care*, 15(3), 160-168. doi:10.3109/13625181003793339
- Eliason, M. J. (1996). Identity formation for lesbian, bisexual, and gay persons: Beyond a "minoritizing" view. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 30, 31-58. doi:10.1300/J082v30n03_03
- Fernando, J. (2006). The Position of Islam in the Constitution of Malaysia. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 37(2), 249-266.
- Guittar, N. A. (2013). The meaning of coming out: From self-affirmation to full disclosure. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 9(3), 168-187. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-sociologyreview.org/ENG/Volume26/QSR_9_3_Guittar.pdf
- Green, C. (2009, May 8). Patriotic, respectful and homophobic. A portrait of British Muslim's state of mind. *Independent*. Retrieved from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/patriotic-respectful-and-homophobic-a-portrait-of-british-Muslims-state-of-mind-1681062.html>
- Hamblin & Gross. (2014). Religious faith, homosexuality, and psychological well-being: A theoretical and empirical review. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 18(1), 67-

82.
doi:10.1080/19359705.2013.804898
- Henrickson, M. (2007). A queer kind of faith: Religion and spirituality in lesbian, gay, bisexual New Zealanders. *Aotearoa Ethnic Network Journal*, 2(2), 57-70. <http://www.aen.org.nz/journal/2/2/AENJ.2.2..pdf>
- Ismail, A. B., Mohd Kasrin, Z., & Mat Zain, M. N. (2012). Kesalahan khalwat dan perbuatan tidak sopan dan hukumannya menurut Islam. (Offences of close proximity and indecent acts and their punishment in Islam). *Jurnal Hadhari*, 4(2), 65-68.
- Jaafar, N. A. (2003, July 12). IPT diminta beri perhatian peningkatan pelajar lelaki lembut. [Institutions of higher learning are urged to pay attention on the increase of effeminate students]. Retrieved from http://www1.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2003&dt=0712&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Muka_Hadapan&pg=mh_03.htm
- Jaspal, R. (2012a). Coping with religious and cultural homophobia: Emotion and narratives of identity threat from British Muslim gay men. In P. Nynäs & A.K.T. Yip (Eds.), *Religion, gender and sexuality in everyday life* (pp. 71-90). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Jaspal, R. (2012b). 'I never faced up to being gay': Sexual, religious and ethnic identities among British Indian and British Pakistani gay men. *Culture, Health, & Sexuality*, 14(7), 767-780. doi:10.1080/13691058.2012.693626
- Jaspal, R., & Cinnirella, M. (2010). Coping with potentially incompatible identities: Accounts of religious, ethnic and sexual identities from British Pakistani men who identify as Muslim and gay. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 49(4), 849-870. doi:10.1348/14466609X485025
- Jaspal, R., & Cinnirella, M. (2014). Hyper-affiliation to the religious in-group among British Pakistani Muslim gay men. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 24, 265-277. doi:10.1002/casp.2163
- Jaspal, R., & Siraj, A. (2011). Perceptions of 'coming out' among British Muslim gay men. *Psychology & Sexuality*, 2(3), 183-197. doi:10.1080/19419899.2010.526627
- Jerome, C. (2013). Queer Malay identity formation. *Indonesia and the Malay World*, 41(119), 97-115. doi:10.1080/13639811.2012.757875
- Juster, R. P., Smith, N. G., Ouellet, E., Sindi, S., & Lupien, S. J. (2013). Sexual orientation and disclosure in relationship to psychiatric symptoms, diurnal cortisol, and allostatic load. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 75(2), 103-116. doi:10.1097/PSY.0b013e3182826881
- Kerns, J. G., & Fine, M. A. (1994). The relation between gender and negative attitude towards gay men and lesbians: Do gender role attitudes mediate this relation. *Sex Roles*, 31(5), 297-397. Retrieved from <http://www.yorku.ca/alison3/kahs6020/April%2023%20reading%20.pdf>
- Knibbe, R. A., Joosten, J., Derickx, M., Choquet, M., Morin, D., Monshouwer, K., & Vollebergh, W. (2009). Perceived availability of substances, substance use and substance-related problems: A cross national study among French and Dutch adolescents. *Journal of Substance Use*, 10, 151-163. doi:10.1080/146598051235134410
- Kohm, L. M., & Yarhouse, M. A. (2002). Fairness, accuracy, and honesty in discussing homosexuality and marriage. *Regent University Law Review*, 14(2), 249-266.
- Kuntsche, E., Kuendig, E., & Gmel, G. (2008). Alcohol outlet density,

- perceived availability and adolescent alcohol use: A multilevel structural equation model. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 62(9), 811-16. doi:10.1136/jech.2007.065367.
- Mat Tuah, A. H., Stapa, Z., & Munawar, A. (2012). Memperkasakan jati diri Melayu-Muslim menerusi pendidikan Islam dalam pengajaran akhlak [Strengthening Malay-Muslim Identity through Islamic education and Akhlaq teaching]. *Jurnal Hadahri: An International Journal, Special Edition*, 23-35.
- McLean, K. (2007). Hiding in the closet. Bisexuals coming out and the disclosure imperative. *Journal of Sociology*, 43(2), 151-166. doi:10.1177/1440783307076893
- Meladze, P., & Brown, J. (2015). Religion, sexuality, and internalized homonegativity: Confronting cognitive dissonance in the Abrahamic religions. *Journal of Religious Health*, 54(5), 1950-1962. doi:10.1007/s10943-015-0018-5
- Inscribed Stone of Terengganu (2008). *Memory of The World Register. Ref. no. 2008-37*. Retrieved from http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/Malaysia+Terengganu.pdf
- Miville, M. L., & Ferguson, A. D. (2004). Impossible "choices". Identity and values at a crossroads. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 32(5), 760-770. doi:10.1177/0011000004267568
- Mohammed, I. S., Malik, M. A., Japre, F. F., & Kamaruzaman, H. (2016, April 16). Wayang suami homo. [Pretentious homosexual husband]. *Harian Metro*, pp. 14-15.
- Mohd Izwan, M. Y., Abdul Kadir, M. N., Ibrahim, M., & Tengku Puji, T. I. Z. (2014). Malaysian Muslim gay and lesbian community's perspective on the concept of domestic partnership and marriage in the Quran. Paper presented at the Conference of Gender and Love at the Mansfield College, Oxford, United Kingdom.
- Minwalla, O., Simon Rosser, B. R., Feldman, J., & Varga, C. (2005). Identity experience among progressive gay Muslims in North America: A qualitative study within Al-Fatiha. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7(2), 113-128. doi:10.1080/13691050412331321294
- Nagra, B. (2011). 'Our Faith Was Also Hijacked by Those People': Reclaiming Muslim Identity in Canada in a Post-9/11 Era. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 37(3), 425-441.
- Peek, L. (2005). Becoming Muslim: The development of a religious identity. *Sociology of Religion*, 66(3), 215-242. doi:10.2307/4153097
- Penerangan (2015). Unjuran populasi penduduk 2015. [Population by states and ethnic groups 2015]. Retrieved from <http://pmr.penerangan.gov.my/index.php/info-terkini/19463-unjuran-populasi-penduduk-2015.html>
- Petchauer, E. M., Yarhouse, M. A., & Gallien, L. B. (2008). Initiating a culturally responsive discourse of same sex attraction among African American males. *Spaces for Difference. An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1(3), 4-20.
- Rahman, M. (2000). *Sexuality and democracy. Identities and strategies in lesbian and gay politics*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Rahman, M. (2015). The politics of LGBT Muslim identities. *E-International Relation*. Retrieved from <http://www.e-ir.info/2015/04/02/the-politics-of-lgbt-muslim-identities/>
- Rosario, M., Hunter, J., Maguen, S., Gwadz, M., & Smith, R. (2001). The coming-out process and its adaptational and health-related

- associations among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths: Stipulation and exploration of a model. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 29(1), 133-160. doi:10.1023/a:1005205630978
- Salleh, A. M. (2003). *Pendidikan Islam: Falsafah, sejarah dan kaedah pengajaran dan pembelajaran* [Islamic education: history and method of instruction and learning]. Shah Alam: Fajar Bakti.
- Savin-Williams, R. C., & Cohen, K. M. (2007). Development of same-sex attracted youth. In Meyer, I.H. & Northridge, M.E. (Eds.), *The health of sexual minorities: Public health perspectives on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population*. (pp. 27-47). Springer.
- Shirat, R. H. (2003, July 12). Pensyarah lelaki lembut punca ramai pelajar lembut di IPT. [Effeminate lecturers cause abundance of effeminate students in institutions of higher education]. Retrieved from http://ww1.utusan.com.my/utusan/info.asp?y=2003&dt=0713&pub=Utusan_Malaysia&sec=Muka_Hadapan&pg=mh_09.htm
- Shuaib, F. S. (2012). The Islamic legal system in Malaysia. *Pacific Rim Law & Policy Journal*, 21(1), 85-113.
- Sowe, B. J., Brown, J., & Taylor, A. J. (2014). Sex and the sinner: Comparing religious and nonreligious same-sex attracted adults on internalized homonegativity and distress. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 84(5), 530-544. doi:10.1037/ort0000021
- Stapa, Z., Yusuf, N., & Shahrudin, A. F. (2012). Islam asas pembentukan jati diri bangsa Melayu-Muslim [Islam as a foundation of Malay-Muslim identity formation]. *Jurnal Hadhari, Special Edition*, 129-141.
- Subhi, N. & Geelan. (2012). When Christianity and homosexuality collide: Understanding the potential intrapersonal conflict. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 59(10), 1382-1402.
- The Query. (2008). MCC consecrates first MCC in Asia. Retrieved from <http://www.mccny.org/Newsletters/08%20Pride.pdf>
- Troiden. (1989). The formation of homosexual identity. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 17(1-2), 43-74. doi:10.1300/j082v17n01_02
- Wilkerson, J. M., Smolenski, D. J., Brady, S. S., & Rosser, B. R. S. (2012). Religiosity, internalized homonegativity, and outness in Christian men who have sex with men. *Sexual and Relationship Therapy*, 27(2), 122-132. doi:10.1080/14681994.2012.698259
- Yarhouse, M. A. (2004). Homosexuality, ethics, and identity synthesis. *Christian Bioethics*, 10, 239-257.
- Yarhouse, M. A. (2010). *At the intersection of religious and sexual identities*. A Christian perspective on homosexuality. [Monograph] *Gospel Coalition's Christ on Campus Initiative*. Retrieved from http://thegospelcoalition.org/publications/cci/at_the_intersection_of_religious_and_sexual_identities_a_christian_per
- Yarhouse, M. A., Nowacki-Butzen, S., & Brooks, D. F. (2009). Multiple identity considerations among African American Christian men experiencing same-sex attraction. *Counseling and Values*, 54, 17-31.
- Yip, A. K. T. (2004). Negotiating space with family and kin in identity construction. the narratives of British non-heterosexual Muslims. *Sociological Review*, 52(3), 336-350. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954x.2004.00483.x
- Yuan, E. (2011, August 31). Malaysia's first openly gay pastor to marry. Retrieved from <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/US/08/31/malaysian.pastor.gay.wedding/>

- Yusof, D. G., & Subhi, N. (2017). *Experience of coming out among same-sex attracted Muslim men (SSAMM) in Malaysia*. Paper presented at International Conference of Humanities and Social Science (ICOSH 2017). Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, Bangi.
- Zurairi, A. R. (2013, August 23). Seksualiti Merdeka organisers hope to outlast 'prejudicial' law. Retrieved from <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/seksualiti-merdeka-organisers-hope-to-outlast-prejudicial-law>