

LGBT, Muslim, and Heterosexism: The Experiences of Muslim Gay in Indonesia

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Received: 2020-03-27; Accepted: 2020-05-13; Published: 2020-06-29

Abstract: Muslim gay and bisexual men have been facing various challenges when living in a homophobic and heterosexist society in Indonesia. However, the study of strategies they utilised to manage those homophobic attitudes, such as discrimination, prejudice, and stigma, of their sexual minority status is limited. Therefore, drawing on minority stress theory, this study explores the life experiences of Muslim gay or bisexual men in Indonesia, by focusing on the problems they faced and the strategies they used to address those issues. All participants aged between 20 and 27 years old, have self-identified as gay or bisexual men, Muslims or ex-Muslims, and have been living in Indonesia. The primary data collection was a semi-structured qualitative interview. The data were recorded and transcribed verbatim according to the research questions from a snowball sample of seven participants. The data were then analysed using thematic analysis. The study revealed that all the participants experienced sexual and religious related problems because of living in a homophobic society. These obstacles came in many forms, such as rejection, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and concerns. However, they employed strategies to solve problems, such as self-acceptance, self-control, positive reinterpretation, seeking social support, concealing, conversion, and migration. This study recommends those who support sexual minorities to help and support them in various ways, such as providing psychological services and counsellings.

Keywords: Bisexual; Gay; Heterosexism; Homophobia; Indonesia; Islam.

Abstrak: Banyak pria Muslim gay dan biseksual menghadapi berbagai tantangan saat hidup di lingkungan masyarakat yang homofobik dan heteroseksis di Indonesia. Akan tetapi, penelitian terkait strategi-strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengelola sikap-sikap homofobik tersebut, seperti diskriminasi, prasangka, dan stigma karena status seksual mereka masih sedikit. Oleh karena itu, berangkat dari teori stres minoritas, penelitian ini dilakukan untuk menelusuri pengalaman hidup pria-pria Muslim gay dan biseksual di Indonesia, meliputi masalah-masalah yang mereka hadapi dan strategi-strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasi masalah-masalah tersebut. Semua partisipan berusia antara 20 dan 27 tahun, telah mengidentifikasi dirinya sebagai seorang pria gay atau biseksual, masih/telah beragama Islam, dan tinggal di Indonesia. Pengumpulan data primernya adalah wawancara kualitatif semi terstruktur. Data direkam dan ditranskrip secara verbatim berdasarkan pada pertanyaan penelitian. Semua partisipan berjumlah tujuh orang dengan teknik pengambilan sampel secara *snowball*. Data kemudian dianalisis menggunakan *thematic analysis*. Penelitian menemukan bahwa semua partisipan mengalami masalah-masalah yang berkaitan dengan status seksual dan agama mereka karena tinggal di lingkungan homofobik. Masalah tersebut meliputi penolakan, perasaan terisolasi dan kesepian, dan kekhawatiran-kekhawatiran, sedangkan strategi-strateginya meliputi penerimaan diri, pengendalian diri, penafsiran ulang secara positif, mencari dukungan sosial, penyembunyian, konversi agama, dan migrasi. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan kepada orang-orang yang mendukung minoritas seksual untuk membantu dan mendukung mereka dalam berbagai cara, seperti memberikan pelayanan psikologis dan konseling.

Kata kunci: Biseksual; Gay; Heteroseksisme; Homofobia; Indonesia; Islam.

1. Introduction

Religious principles have played a crucial role in influencing personal identity and meaning. Consequently, religion may contradict one's intimate needs and desires (Siraj, 2012, p. 457). This study discusses Muslim gay and bisexual men living in a heteronormative society in Indonesia. In this country, the authorities will punish same-sex perpetrators based on religious texts or criminal law. For example, the Shari'a court in Aceh, Indonesia, sentenced two gay men with dozens of lashes in front of bloodthirsty people after committing same-sex acts (McKirby, 2018).

In the past, same-sex activities are indeed common in Indonesia. However, religions have changed the way people in the country view homosexuality. In the Dutch colonial period, for example, Christianity viewed homosexuality as unnatural, abnormal, and prohibited (Bloembergen, 2011, p. 414). It has subsequently influenced the Dutch government's attitudes on same-sex people in which the latter often collided with the issues of morality and the fear of God's punishment (Boomgaard, 2012, pp. 150–151). Literature shows that the authorities have sentenced those who are allegedly committing same-sex acts in various types of sanction, such as being hung, strangled, or drowned to death, based on the moral cleansing operation (*zedenschoonmaak*).

Similarly, besides Christianity, Islam is another religion whose teachings are homophobic as Siraj (Siraj, 2012) said that "Islam is inherently a homophobic religion" due to strong prohibition on same-sex desires and acts. Anyone who is committing same-sex acts, like in Christianity, should be punished in various ways from canning to death. In today's Indonesia, Ichwan (2014, pp. 199–200) has proved that significant religious institution dominated in Indonesia has influenced "people's understanding of issues of gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation" and Islam, in particular, tend to increase "the level of heterosexism within Indonesian society." Thus, it is not a surprise if most anti-LGBT demonstrations in the country, are organised by Islamic believers.

Indonesia is home to more Muslims than any other nation across the globe. Ethno-locality plays a major influence in the lives of Indonesians as it attributes to their shared frame of reference (T. Boellstorff, 2005, p. 576). The incommensurability between male homosexuality and Islam in the country is influenced, besides religion, by the national and local spatial scales (T. Boellstorff, 2005). Therefore, Muslim gay men are subject to a wide range of challenges based on their sexual preferences and retreat to spatial scales that enable them to inhabit the incommensurable spaces of being a homosexual and Muslim man. Consequently, both Indonesian gay and bisexual Muslim men find it difficult to express their gender and sexuality in the public domains.

Nevertheless, there is minimal data on the strategies they employ to deal with the negative thoughts and attitudes of their sexual standing and religious affiliations. Those homophobic performances may cause an immeasurable amount of anxiety and strain on LGBT members based on their desires, feelings, and emotions that are considered to be aberrant (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016; Siraj, 2012). Therefore, this present study attempts to explore the lived experiences of Muslim gay and bisexual men living in a homophobic environment of Indonesia, including the problems they face and the solutions they employ to address those problems.

The central question of this study is, how do Muslim gay and bisexual men live in a homophobic environment Indonesia with three sub-questions, namely, how does Islam view homosexuality? What challenges/issues do Muslim gay and bisexual men in Indonesia face? Also, what strategies do they use to address those challenges/issues?

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Muslim gay and bisexual men in Indonesia, including the problem they encounter and how do they address those problems. Whereas, this study aims to understand their experiences of being gay and bisexual Muslim men in this Muslim majority country by focusing on their obstacles and strategies or solutions.

2. Researching Sensitive Issue in Indonesia: A Methodological Determination

This study used a qualitative method in nature and a phenomenological approach to capture and understand the study participants' life experiences for being a Muslim gay and bisexual man in

Indonesia. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to understand how people experience a particular phenomenon in their life and how they construct their interpretations of those phenomena (Willig, 2007, p. 210). Thus, such an approach was useful in this study as “it involves the use of thick description and close analysis of lived experiences to understand how meaning is created through embodied perception” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1373).

The results obtained from the research have to be supported by sufficient data. The research results and the discovery must be the answers, or the research hypothesis stated previously in the introduction part.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Participant code	Age	Religion/ Personal Beliefs		Sexual Orientation	Last/Current Education
		Then	Now		
1	20	Catholics	Islam	Bisexual	College
2	26	Islam	Islam	Gay	College
3	21	Islam	Buddhism	Gay	College
4	26	Islam	Islam	Gay	Middle School
5	22	Islam	Islam	Gay	High School
6	27	Islam	Islam	Gay	High School
7	26	Islam	Islam	Gay	College

The relevant study participants have been recruited through personal networks. For confidentiality, I substitute them using alphabetical symbols. I found them through an online search for gay communities in Yogyakarta. For example, four people, A, B, C, and D, were contacted via email. Such groups provided some services, such as medical assistance, counseling, social support, etc. Nonetheless, three of four organizations emailed me back. They showed interest in this research, but only two organizations provided relevant research subjects from their internal networks. While recruiting, I faced various challenges. One of the most remarkable was the privacy issues of personal information, stories, and feelings of shame and worry. I told them that their stories would have been kept secret. After feeling confident, some eventually showed interest and bravery in sharing their life stories of being gay and bisexual men in Indonesia concerning their religious identity as you can see the demographic information of this study in Table 1.

The research collected data through interviews to explore the life experiences of the study participants. Before conducting interviews, a protocol was established as a guide to ensure that their descriptions answer the research questions, as mentioned earlier. Because it is a semi-structured interview, the formal conversations would not only focus on the guide but also allow the researcher to provide other related questions in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. The interviews were taped using an Android application, as have been consented by the participants to avoid inaccuracies during the analysis process.

This study used a thematic analysis to find the patterns within the data. According to Braun and Clarke, a thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 6). It is a fundamental method to analyse data in qualitative research and was useful for this current research to identify the interrelated patterns in the study participants’ interviews. There are six steps when one uses this technique. First, researchers should familiarize themselves with the data by transcribing the interviews, re-reading the transcripts, and noting down the initial ideas. Second, researchers should generate initial codes from the transcriptions. Third, researchers should identify the themes from their notes. Fourth, researchers should review the produced themes to check the emerged themes of whether or not the topics represent the data and answer the research questions. Fifth, researchers should define and name the emerged issues. Sixth, the researcher should produce a report containing the defined and named themes.

3. Homosexuality in Islam

Qur'an is central to the Islamic religion. All Muslims unquestionably believe that *Qur'an*, besides *Sunnah*, is one of their life manual and guideline that must be obeyed in totality. Theologically, ones will get lost from their ultimate goals, such as meeting God in the hereafter or endlessly becoming heaven's inhabitants, when they have lost this protocol form their lives. In the Islamic perspective, both *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* are the lights that will guide people to their real-life goals. Both regulate various aspects of one's life, and sexuality, in particular, is one of many aspects they control. This religion necessarily does not prohibit one from having sexual desires. Still, it regulates how their sexual needs are appropriately directed and "performed within the bounds of the *Shari'a*" (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012, p. 8). Islamic laws prohibit Muslims from channeling their sexual desires to those who have the same biological sex, and those who violate this rule will be convicted with certain punishment like caning. Thus, it is true when Boellstorff (T. Boellstorff, 2005) states that being gay and Muslim simultaneously is "ungrammatical" as having both conflicting identities violate the harmony of humans' sexes.

Additionally, the rejection of same-gender relationships in Islam is against the urgency of marriage in Islam (Eniola, 2013, pp. 20–21). The purpose of marriage in Islamic doctrines, besides recreation, is procreation or to continue the offspring (Eniola, 2013; Hanah, 2017; Mulia, 2009, p. 4; Suwardin, 2018, pp. 100–101). The unification of male-male or female-female intimacy either through marriage or not cannot sexually produce children. Thus, in this context, homosexuality is strongly unacceptable in Islam as it contradicts the harmony of humans' sexes by which human beings are created by God in pairs and the sacred purpose of marriage, which is procreation, in Islam (Harahap, 2016, p. 229).

Furthermore, the prohibition of same-sex relationships in Islam is following Islamic doctrines that subsequently become the legal standing for four schools of thought in Islam to forbid this kind of relationship. *Qur'an* says:

O humankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women. And fear Allah, through whom you ask one another, and the wombs. Indeed Allah is ever, over you, an Observer. (QS. 4:1)

And of His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquillity in them; He placed between your affection and mercy. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought. (QS 30:21)

4. Homosexuality in Indonesia

It is probably true if Siraj (Siraj, 2012) said that "Islam is inherently a homophobic religion" due to unnegotiable doctrines regarding non-heterosexuality. Though this statement seems correct in many cases, not All Muslims are homophobic individuals, especially those who are progressive in religion. However, most Muslims agree with conservative Islamic ideologies about same-sex relationships that are considered a sin against God and a significant offense against *Shari'a*. These ideologies, in particular, influence the Muslim majority countries in the world. Thus, they are religiously and legally more aggressive to non-heterosexual people. Punishment against those who have engaged in same-sex activities in such countries are prevalent and supported by most or probably all believers.

LGBT people, in general, have been experiencing stigma, discrimination, prejudice in Muslim dominated countries because of their sexual preferences. Rehman and Polymenopoulou (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012) report that homosexual people get cruel treatment from countries that implement strict Islamic law. Some Islamic theocracy states, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, sentenced to death for those who commit same-sex acts in their administrative areas; the Northern region of Nigeria and the southern region of Somalia impose death penalties for Sodomites. Other punishment, such as caning and stoning in public, are applied in Muslim dominated countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Whereas some states like the Maldives imprison the perpetrators for the rest of their lives. Thus, it is true that countries, where Islam is dominating, have "the highest level of homophobia and intolerance towards sexual diversity" (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012).

Rejections towards homosexual people in the countries mentioned above are common, and those who denied sexual minorities' existence use "religion as an ideological argument for its negation" (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012). Religion, culture, and tradition within such countries are often used by its Muslim heterosexists to "sanctify brutal punishment, discrimination, and exclusion of LGBT persons from the society" (Rehman & Polymenopoulou, 2012). The government representatives and public officials are also able to contribute to the spreading of homophobic ideologies within the countries. Media that depicts non-heterosexuality and broadcasts homosexuality-nuanced contents will be censored. Therefore, various elements in a Muslim majority country will massively restrain and reject the notions of sexual and gender diversity.

Homosexuality in Indonesia had existed before its freedom from colonialism. During the colonial period, same-sex behaviours are stigmatized by the Dutch government and associated with deviant sexual behaviours like sodomy or adultery. Those who committed non-heterosexual activities are against the *Wetboek van Strafrecht* of the Dutch Criminal Code (Bloembergen, 2011) and normally sentenced to death in various means of punishment where the most common ways are being hung, strangled or drowned to death. The first punishment to homosexual perpetrators occurred in 1636 on Banda Island, Central Moluccas, where a slave was burned alive along with a dog next to him. Then in 1643, the colonial government executed two people, Ingel Harmensz and Bento de Sal, for committing same-sex acts in Batavia or what is now Jakarta. The *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* (VOC) gave different penalties for both. Harmensz was punished by drowning, while de Sal was punished by being burned alive (Boomgaard, 2012).

Moreover, in 1644, the authorities executed a Dutchman Joost Schouten for the same reason as Harmensz and de Sal. He sentenced to death by being "strangled and burned to ashes" (Boomgaard, 2012; Headsman, 2013). In 1735, two Dutch people, which are Class Blanc and Rijkaert Jacobsz, were punished by the death penalty. Jacobsz worked as a sailor for the Dutch East Indies in which previously he was accused of sodomy in 1713 in Batavia. Because of insufficient pieces of evidence, he was exiled to Robben Islam for twenty-five years. After a series of the allegation to him, the authorities sentenced Jacobsz and Blanc to death on August 19, 1735 (Newton-King, 2005, pp. 6–8; SAHO, 2018).

Other homophobic attitudes of the Dutch government in Indonesia performed in the form of massive arrest those who are allegedly homosexuals in major cities in Indonesia, such as Batavia, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Malang, Palembang, Makassar, etc. They arrested around 171 of 223 people, and a small number escaped from the operation, one of which is Sutjipto (Bloembergen, 2011; T. Boellstorff, 2005). He was a *Priyayi* descent man from East Java and wrote an autobiographical book about his lived experiences of a homosexual man in the Dutch colonial period in Indonesia. All of these homophobic attitudes are related to the role of religion in the Dutch institutions. Christianity has changed the way the Dutch government sees homosexuality. It was perceived as unnatural, abnormal, and prohibited (Bloembergen, 2011), and issues of homosexuality were associated with issues of morality. The government then established a police force called "polisi kesusilaan" (*zedepolitie*) to deal with those who were considered sexually immoral as it was seen "not only as a disgrace that polluted the noble character of society, but is also regarded as a crime." They also called several medical experts to write about sexual behaviour deviations in the "heteronormativity" framework (Bloembergen, 2011).

In the Soeharto regime, homosexuality was more tolerant than the previous period. In 1969, an LGBT-based organization called *Himpunan Wanita Adam Djakarta* was established in Jakarta and facilitated by the Jakartan Governor Ali Sadikin. Though the term "Wadam" has been introduced a year ago, it was rejected by *Majelis Ulama Indonesia* because of mentioning a religious term "Adam" which was a prophet for Muslims. Consequently, in 1980, the LGBT organization changed those words into "Waria" which had a similar meaning to accommodate the third gender in Indonesia. In 1982, a homosexual organization called *Lambda Indonesia* was established. However, this organization could not live longer and lasted only one year. However, two years after, *Lambda Indonesia* ends their existence. Indonesian sexual minorities formed several homosexual organisations, such as *Persaudaraan Gay Yogyakarta*, and *Kelompok Kerja Wanita Lesbian dan Gaya Nusantara* (Muthmainnah, 2016, p. 16; Roby Yansyah, 2018, p. 135).

The emergence of LGBT communities and organisations in Indonesia initiated LGBT people to conduct some national meetings, which I will highlight some. The first national meeting called *Kongres Lesbian and Gay Indonesia* was conducted in Kaliurang, Yogyakarta, which eventually produced six essential points regarding their existence in the future. *GAYa Nusantara* was trusted to implement such issues and to coordinate *Jaringan Lesbian and Gay Indonesia*. Then, the second national meeting was held in 1995 in Lembang, Bandung, and for the first time, a political party explicitly included in their manifesto the rights of homosexuals and transsexuals. In 1997, the third congress was held in Denpasar, Bali, and again for the time media and journalists were welcomed to cover the events (Tom Boellstorff, 2006, p. 466; Muthmainnah, 2016). After successfully conducting three LGBT-nuanced national meetings, gay organizations with the French Cultural Centre plan to hold a gay pride event in Surabaya in June 1999. This event got a rejection from an Islamic organization called the Surakarta Islamic Defenders Front and threatened to attack the event's participants. To avoid such a brutal threat, the committee decided to cancel the event for security reasons.

The negative attitudes towards homosexual people began to start after the fall of Soeharto in 1998. Issues of homosexuality have been intersected with politics and religion. Boellstorff (Tom Boellstorff, 2006) indicated that anti-LGBT violence after Soeharto's resignation marked the beginning of political homophobia in Indonesia. Although he regarded politics as the major contributor to this phenomenon, he did not deny the role of religion in this matter (Tom Boellstorff, 2006). He assumed that any religion dominated a country will always have fundamentalist groups and potentially take any violent action in the name of their belief (Ichwan, 2014).

Furthermore, political and religious homophobia has been growing for years like a snowball and leads to difficultness of sexual minorities living in the country. They could not discuss any LGBT related topics or express their sexuality in public domains due to the strong homophobic atmosphere over the country. Rejections towards homosexual people are not only carried out by 'grassroots,' but also various sectors, such as universities and public officials. For example, a university in the North Sumatra established a regulation that discriminates lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (Tehusijarana, 2018). Moreover, LGBT people have been experiencing regional discrimination, besides national discrimination, because of their sexual status where Islam dominates in the area. West Sumatra is the best example of this regional discrimination in which the authorities made a regulation to make it difficult for homosexuals to live on the land (Ramadhani, 2018). In addition to sexual discrimination, Indonesian LGBT people are stigmatized by heterosexuals. They are labeled as a sexual deviation, proxy war, immoral, and a threat to the nation, a source of HIV/AIDS, etc. According to community legal aid agencies, the stigmatization of the minority group was caused by the fallacy or lack of understanding of LGBT. Though modern science has denied all the myths of those labels, "the public prefers to believe in what they want to believe" (Zakiah, 2018, p. 10).

In summary of this section, sexual minorities in Indonesia have been finding it difficult to discuss LGBT-themed scholarship or express their sexual preferences in public to avoid various negative consequences from society. Politics is not only the source of homophobia in the country but also religions, especially Islam.

Minority Stress

The term "minority stress" refers to "psychological stress derived from minority status" of a group of people in a society (Meyer, 1995, p. 38). This theory is virtually related to issues involving minorities and dominant standards, as well as any conflict experienced by the former as a consequence of disputes with the majority in society (Meyer, 1995). If one's life as a minority in a society that stigmatizes and discriminates him or her because of different standards or physical appearances or other preferences with the majority of people in a society, a conflict may occur. Such a conflict may lead to stress, and it eventually causes adverse mental health outcomes among minorities.

Furthermore, negative views of people against sexual minorities may influence their thoughts about themselves. Meyer (Meyer, 1995) wrote that "negative regard from others, therefore, leads to negative self-regard." Most scholars call this phenomenon as internalized homophobia or negativity,

which means a poor understanding of heterosexuals regarding homosexuality. Still, then homosexuals use it to against themselves and reject the fact that they are attracted to same-sex persons. Meyer (Meyer, 1995) indicates that internalized homophobia and other stressors, such as stigma, discrimination, and violence, significantly affect the mental health of gay men. Ge stated further that “men who had high levels of minority stress were twice to three times as likely to suffer also from a high level of distress.”

5. Being Homosexual and Muslim: A Dilemma

Participants described their experiences of being Muslim gay and bisexual men in Indonesia, including what problems do they encounter and what strategies do they employ to manage those problems. Themes were grouped into two superordinate topics, which contain three and seven sub-themes, respectively, as listed in Table 2. These themes and illustrations are produced from the verbatim interviews, following the thematic analysis standard. Table 3 contains a list of problems with the used strategies by the participants.

Table 2. Emerged themes

#	Problems	#	Strategies
1	Rejection	1	Self-acceptance
2	Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness	2	Self-control
3	Concerns	3	Positive Reinterpretation
		4	Seeking Social Support
		5	Concealing
		6	Conversion
		7	Migration

Table 3. Problems experienced and strategies used by the participants

Solutions	Problems		
	Rejection	Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness	Concerns
Self-acceptance	X		
Self-control	X		
Positive Reinterpretation	X		
Seeking Social Support	X	X	
Concealing			X
Conversion	X		
Migration			X

6. Theme 1: Problems

Rejection

The first theme that emerged of this study is rejection, which manifested in many various ways, such as sexual harassment, humiliation, stigma, prejudice, etc. All study participants described a feeling of rejection from society and their religion. Religion, as discussed previously, depicts themselves as homophobic. Their position towards same-sex relationships is evident, unnegotiable, and final that theologically homosexuality is prohibited. Besides, society also shows negative attitudes towards them because of their sexuality. Both religious and social rejection leads to deadly internalized homonegativity among the participants, and it showed in many forms, such as self-rejection, self-loathing, stress, etc.

Religious rejection

Participants realized that their religious doctrines are not in support of non-heterosexuality. Still, at the same time, they could not reject the fact that they are attracted to men rather than women. Nevertheless, they all maintain both conflicting identities, even though they emotionally feel stress, depression, frustration, self-loathing, etc. It should be noted that this research does not address the psychological terms spoke by the participants, instead write narratively what the participants feel in their own words.

Allah created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Adam

Religious rejection has a strong influence on rejecting one's sexual orientation, and it occurs in all participants with their own words. At this moment, a participant described religious rejection with the story of the creation of Adam and Eve.

Religion always says that homosexuality is prohibited because Allah created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Adam. (P1)

We are part of the story of the Prophet Lot

The prohibition of homosexuality in Islam indeed originated from the story of the Prophet Lot. Such a story influences some study participants regarding religious rejection. However, they acknowledged that being a gay Muslim man is wrong if it is related to this sacred story. These are some related quotes from the participants to demonstrate the homophobic understanding of their sexuality.

So, in Islam, we are part of the story of the Prophet Lot, if Islam said that homosexuality is wrong, so it is wrong. (P2)

Many Islamic teachers, when I was in middle and high school, spoke about homosexuality, and it is forbidden in Islam, contrary to human nature. They used the story of the Prophet Lot to justify this prohibition. So, I can't deny that homosexuality is forbidden in Islam. (P7)

Islam said that they embrace and nurture humans, but in reality, they do not

Many people believe that religion teaches goodness, and Islam, in particular, indoctrinates its believers that this religion teaches love to all God's creatures in the universe. However, a participant felt disappointed and said that Islam, in reality, was not what it said about themselves.

From elementary to high school, my religious life was normal. But, since I went to college, my religiosity declined drastically. I was a Muslim. I felt that Islam seems judgmental towards LGBT people. Islam said that Islam embraces and nurtures humans, but in reality, it doesn't. (P3)

Social rejection

Homosexuality and family

Family is like a micro-community in a society. Being a gay boy or girl in a homophobic family could lead to expulsion from his or her home. Similarly, a participant described how his mother expelled him from his home once other family members knew that he was attracted to a man and engaged in same-sex behaviour with a man. Chronologically, it occurred when his ex-girlfriend came to his house and met his mother. While crying, she innocently told his mother that he was attracted to a man and carried out 'something' with the man. After he came home from a beach, he found his ex was crying in front of his mother. Immediately, his mother drove him away from the house.

Finally, my ex-girlfriend told my mother what I have done with my ex-boyfriend and my family could not accept it, and there was one statement spoken by my mother, 'do not stay with me anymore!' (P1)

Homosexuality and natural disasters

Homophobic people believe that the existence of homosexual people in a particular region can cause a natural disaster, such as earthquakes, Tsunami, flooding, etc. These labels show heterosexuals' rejection of homosexuals. A participant described that he heard many stigmas about homosexual people circulated in society.

People always call us a crumb. Moreover, some people said that homosexuality causes an earthquake in Yogyakarta and the Tsunami in Aceh. All of these happened because there were many LGBT people, homosexuals. I felt scared. (P2)

Homosexuality and spiritual beings

In a strong religious influence family, a homosexual family member may be either directly or indirectly stigmatized and prejudiced in religious manners because of his or her attraction. Homosexuality sometimes is perceived as an act of demons, jinn, spirits, or lack of religion, and to solve these problems, his or her family will suggest being cured in a religious way, such as *Ruqyah*, which is an Islamic exorcism.

What could make me *belok* might be not a genie or because my religion was lacking. It is a matter of prayer; I used to pray. Immediately, I was suggested by other family members to perform a *Ruqyah*. Well, I just followed his suggestion, whatever. (P1)

Self-rejection

Religious and social rejection are foundations of self-rejection. Those sources affect the acceptance of gay or bisexual people's sexual orientation, and in some extreme cases, these lead to self-loathing and self-rejection. All participants have experienced this kind of rejection because the place where they live in, and religion they believe in do not allow this kind of sexuality in negative manners, such as condemnation, sexual harassment, stigma, etc. In this part, I will describe how participants faced this problem.

Those who are self-identified gay or bisexual men describe themselves in negative ways. For example, they believe that being a gay or bisexual man is wrong, dirty, or sinful. This labeling is closely related to the environment in which they live. In a heteronormative society, heterosexuality is a human default sexual orientation. As a consequence, they regard homosexuality as a wrong sexual orientation. This poor understanding of homosexuality may lead to internalized homophobia among homosexual people.

I accepted my sexual orientation in the first semester of 2016. Before this, I still had no courage to accept it. I said that this is wrong or not, this is wrong or not, but at the time I thought it was wrong (P2)

It's like there's something weird with me. Why I was like this, why I was like this. Then my best friend at the time of elementary school graduation advised me to consult my problems to psychologists, 'try to go to a psychologist!' (P3)

In addition to that, homosexual people may feel dirty because they have 'wrong' sexual orientation. Homosexuality is associated with dirty, while heterosexuality is cleanness. For Muslim homosexuals, it could be a serious problem, as shown in a participant in the study. When he realized that he was attracted to male instead of female, he tried to 'purify' himself with water until he subsequently realized that it was useless.

I felt closer to God when I was in elementary and middle school because my friends motivated me to pray. Now I feel different from the old one, who still worship God more often. Now, I sometimes feel so dirty; I feel that what we have done is dirty. I also understand religion, but I am still doing this (same-sex sexual intercourse). Thus, I'm now confused. (P4)

In 2012, I felt dirty; I felt so disgusted with myself that I got showered many times because I felt dirty. Seriously, I felt really dirty; I felt disgusted with myself. (P4)

I felt strange, a little disgusted with myself and unclean. I deny myself that I'm attracted to the same sex. (P6)

Feelings of Isolation and Loneliness

In an online dictionary of Cambridge, the word "isolation" has several definitions: "the condition of being alone, especially when this makes you feel unhappy" or "the fact that something is separate and not connected to other things." This word as well can be defined as "the condition of being separated from other people, towns, countries, etc." (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020b). From these definitions, this section fits the last one. Meanwhile, the word "loneliness" can be defined as "the state of being lonely" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020c).

Even though social isolation is often linked to loneliness, they are substantially different. The former fundamentally means a person who is lacking interactions with others in which this kind of communication is essential to all human beings. There are a lot of means of communication, such as talking with other people virtually or personally, directly or indirectly. The latter can be understood as one's feeling of being disconnected from others, even though a myriad of people surround him or her. It can be triggered by various reasons, such as a feeling of loss like a loss of faith, family, or friends, and in extreme cases, it leads to depression among these individuals. In this part, I will describe how the participants experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness because of their sexual status.

There's no friend

A gay or bisexual man sometimes has a more feminine look rather than masculine. A feminine homosexual man is prone to be stereotyped by society because of his appearance. Heteronormative society could easily label feminine men as gay or homosexual. Thus, stigmatized men would feel alienated. A participant described his experience being isolated by his classmates when he and his schoolfriends were conducting a study tour.

At the time of high school, my school held a study tour to Bali. I didn't have male friends to be roommates. One room contained four same-sex people, a man with a man and a woman with a woman. Finally, because I had a female best friend, her boyfriend contacted and asked her to help me to be allowed to stay in her room. (P3)

Nobody understands

A participant has a feeling of isolation and loneliness as they are afraid of the negative consequences of people if they know his sexual attraction. Thus, they kept his story until he felt that he needs to do it to relieve his stress because of his ex-boyfriend.

I have no friend to share my problems and everything because if I tell my father, he may not understand all problems in my life. (P1)

Previously, I had a problem with my ex-boyfriend, I was angry and stressed, but I didn't know whom I should tell. Usually, I discussed girls-related issues with my friends, while what I wanted to discuss about a man. Finally, I chose to keep the problems to myself. (P1)

Concerns

In an online dictionary of Cambridge, the word "concerns" means "to cause worry to someone"; "to be important to someone or to involve someone directly" and "if a story, film, or article concerns a particular subject, person, etc., it is about that person or subject" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020a). Though there are no real threats to the participants, they have many concerns because of their sexual preferences and negative consequences, such as stigma and prejudice, of homophobic people in a society which would lead to the adverse mental health of them. The participants may generalize the

notions that non-heterosexual people are homophobic; thus, they fear of heterosexual people with no apparent reason.

This study found that some participants have related sexual concerns in many domains, such as school, university, workplace, and others. To begin with, a family is an essential setting for many people. It provides attention, care, support, love, protection, and many others. Children are highly likely to rely on their parents to get the aforementioned positive things. Similarly, some participants portray their families as the most important people in their lives though they are not in favour of same-sex relationships for various reasons, such as religious traditions, social or cultural norms. A participant showed a withdrawal action from his peers when they almost know his 'true' sexual orientation. Below are quotes from the related participants who experienced this problem.

I don't want to share this story with my 'normal' friends because I'm worried if they cannot accept this and then avoid me and eventually uncover my secret to others. It's a danger! (P3)

I don't want to say that I'm gay to others because I'm worried they will be called me 'homo,' and it will become a problem for me. Actually, I don't think of myself about this problem, but I think of my parents' feelings too. Their feelings will break if they know I'm gay. If people know I'm gay, they will humiliate not only me but also my family. I did it because I love my family more than me. (P4)

From the last statement, the participant described the importance of his family in his life. He loves his family more than himself, and he, therefore, prevent to tell others about his sexual orientation. It is clear that the participant's reasons for the concealment of sexual orientation are to maintain and protect his parents' feelings from homophobic people's attitudes. The adverse parental reactions of sexual orientation disclosure occurred on participant one when his family knew his sexual attractions and what he has been doing with a man. He was expelled from his house for this. However, though participant one's experience may be a foundation for other Indonesian homosexuals to worry about disclosing their sexual orientation to their families, it cannot be generalized to every heterosexual over the country. Another participant described his experience of revealing his attraction to same-sex persons to his sister and got positive feedback on it. He was worry if his sister would show a negative response. Below are quotes from the participants who have these stories.

When I was in Malang (East Java), I told my sister, 'I was so upset because of my boyfriend.' My sister shocked and asked, 'When did you like a guy for the first time?' I then told my story with my ex-boyfriend. After that, I realized that my sister also actually liked that man. She said, 'Are you seriously going out with him?' I said, 'Yes.' She asked me again, 'Then, what have you done with him?' I replied, 'Something.' She was shocked, and I was scolded. She then said, 'You may be gay, but I wish you should not be infected with the virus (HIV), you also don't mess up!' It means it's like doing silly things that harm myself and harm my family; she said, 'You already know how our family is, right?' My sister is a hard person, but she acted normally regarding homosexuality, she said, 'I remain to embrace you, you are still my little brother!' At that time, I cried. "I still love you no matter how you are, I still accept you, you are my little brother." After that, we were crying together. ... Finally, she said, 'If you have any problems, please let me know.' (P3)

My family is not homophobic at all because my father often interacts with various kinds of people and activities. For example, a man plays at a girl's house. Daddy acts normally. (P2)

Some Indonesian people prohibit the activities of a single man and woman in a room with a locked door. If it happens, people will suspect them as they are not following religious teachings and social as well as cultural norms. In some extreme cases, local residents or authorities raided and forced them to leave their rooms due to committing immoral conduct (The Jakarta Post, 2016).

Furthermore, another participant described his concerns when it comes to marriage. He realized that Indonesia would not accept any kind of marriage except heterosexual marriage. Besides, he has no

attractions at all to women, even feeling disgusted. He has a plan to marry his beloved man abroad in a country that recognizes such marriage or move to other regions that perceived less Muslims.

Same-sex relationships cannot last long-term. What's the name? We cannot get married, and the most painful is the feeling of wanting to have someone we love, but we cannot. We cannot be with the people we love; we will not be able to get married because we live in Indonesia. So, we will never get married unless in the Philippines or European countries (P4)

7. Theme 2: Strategies

To survive, Muslim and bisexual men in a strong heteronormative society must face problems due to their sexuality. They will employ various strategies to do so. In this part, I will describe the experiences of participants regarding how they deal with those problems in their life. Before doing that, it should be noticed that this study does not measure or discuss how effective the employed strategies instead of describing what strategies do they engage for a particular problem.

Self-acceptance

Self-acceptance occurs when participants have nothing to do with their sexual orientation. They realized that their attractions are religiously not allowed, but they still maintained both identities. The following are some quotes from the interviews on how the participants used this strategy.

I like not accepting this; even I reject myself who was attracted to males at first. But, that's how it is, what can I do, I have been comfortable with men (P1)

My heart had struggled between desire and religion. 'What should I do?' But, now I think I have to live as it is. (P4)

So, I thought this feeling could be lost. The feeling of same-sex desire is getting bigger. Finally, I just have to accept this. There is no outside influence. This is only my inner conflict. (P4)

At that moment, I was stressed because of the conflict between my desire and religion. On the other hand, I do understand; this desire is not allowed in my religion, Islam. So, I'm confused. Finally, there is an inner war (*perang batin*). But I enjoy being gay. (P4)

Self-control

For some gay males, being gay or bisexual means being a good patient for the homophobic attitudes of people. They must control their emotions, especially their anger, when heterosexuals show their negative attitudes toward them. Otherwise, a conflict between homosexual and heterosexuals will occur, which in some extreme cases, it will widen to the national level, and eventually, homosexual people will be harmed socially. Therefore, the best solution for them to deal with these homophobic behaviours is to control their emotions. Below are some quotes which represent this strategy.

Just kept patient! I just ignored them! I always ignored them. He did not know the inside of mine, so just let him talk, and ignore him. However, I would still be kind to you, what you want to do to me, just ignore him what he said. (P1)

My friends at school always insult me because I look a little feminine and often hang out with the girls. It makes my heart hurt. I cannot fight them. I can only be silent and patient, ignoring them. (P7)

Positive Reinterpretation

Society in a particular country portrays homosexual people as bad, negative, dirty, abnormal, and other negative words. These stereotypes are common in strong heteronormative environments like Indonesia, which leads to various problems, such as poor psychological health, among LGBT people.

This strategy is employed by some participants to deal with the issue of rejection. When religion and society stigmatise and prejudice them in many ways, some Muslim gay men in this study reinterpret about themselves or their religious doctrines positively.

I can be useful for others; I can share rice and alms to people in need, socialize about the dangers of free sex and drugs. I feel helpful, and they will feel my contributions without having to know my (sexual) identity. (P2)

Even though I look like an effeminate man, but I have achievements. I think what I should do I have to show my talent, but what is that? Finally, there is an extracurricular club in the field of film at school, and I join the community. When I do that, I participate in four competitions related to the film, and I win two of them. See! I can make my school pride in me with my achievements even though I am underestimated by my male friends. Although I look like an effeminate man, I want to have many achievements at school. (P3)

I am Muslim, but I will not accept the explanation of the clerics who corner homosexuality. Thus, I reinterpret every verse related to homosexuality. In essence, I seek justification from *Qur'an* for my sexual orientation. (P5)

Seeking Social Support

People's support and acceptance to gay people can contribute to their confidence in a society regardless of their preferences, including sexual orientation. It is highly likely to happen if they live in an environment that supports and accepts them as they are. Living amid anti-LGBT people can cause various internal problems among homosexuals. Friends and family members are two crucial elements in their life to seek support and acceptance for their sexual status in a strong heteronormative society. The following quotes represent how this strategy employed by the participants.

When I broke up with my boyfriend, it became a problem with me. I felt stressed at that moment. Finally, it was like I want to tell this problem to be relieved, then I told one person, she was my sister-in-law. (P1)

When I broke up with my boyfriend, I felt sad and cried all night for several weeks because of this until I told my mother that I had a boyfriend. She cried when she knew it, then she said, 'it is okay.' After that, I always confide my problems with men with my mom, and she was accommodating. She had no problem with this. (P7)

Concealing

All participants have concerns about rejection from heterosexual people, including their families. Some of them have come out to their families. They told me how they felt lonely and socially isolated because of their sexual status. Meanwhile, one participant told me how he went through bad days because of familial rejection. Participant four is worried about his family's reaction if they realise his sexual orientation. He believes that his family is homophobic. It came when they were watching the news on television together. A news anchor reported a sodomy case in a region of Indonesia, and his parents negatively reacted to it. As a result, he chose to conceal his 'true' sexual orientation from his family.

I don't think of myself about this problem, but I think of my parents' feelings too. Their feelings will break if they know I'm gay. If people know I'm gay, they will humiliate not only me but also my family. I did it because I love my family more than me. (P4)

I act like a normal guy so that no one suspects me that I'm gay. (P6)

Although I've talked about this to my family, I'm still worried if my extended family realised it. I'm afraid they will be angry with me, advising me all the time. So, I should not tell them about this. (P7)

Conversion

Participant three employed this strategy as he thought that Islam is absolutely against non-heterosexuality, and such prohibition is impossible to negotiate anymore. As a result, he accepts two conflicting identities. He believes that converting is the best solution to the problem of social and religious rejection.

Islam believes that LGBT is a bearer of evil, I then thought, 'Why is Islam like this, huh? Why is Islam so like this?' Many people said that Islam is a religion of peace, but why it treats LGBT people like this. From then on, I consider Islam as a strange religion. I mean Islam, is not following its teachings written in its book. (P3)

Migration

Participant four believes that it is difficult to continue same-sex relationships to a higher or more serious level of relationship, which is marriage due to the prohibition of same-sex marriage in Indonesia. The Marriage Laws in the country unquestionably only recognise the union of heterosexual people, not homosexuals. As a consequence, the participant plans to get married abroad with his partner or to live together with his beloved one in other regions in Indonesia that is more accepting of sexual minorities.

The only solution we have is that we have to accept our destiny. There is no real solution. I will feel disgusted if I marry a woman. I want to marry a guy, but I can't do it. Do we have to migrate abroad? I also think of my family. So, I feel confused. I can't possibly migrate abroad. One day, a Singaporean gay man offered me to go there (Singapore). He wanted to bring me there, invited me to live there together. I'm confused about whether I have to join him or not, but I love my family. When I had been in a relationship with my ex-boyfriend in 2015, I also felt confused. We had a plan to marry. We discussed where we would stay after that. We planned to live in Bali because it was the best place for us to live as gay. Islam is not the majority religion, but a minority in Bali. As far as I know, there are many Hindus there. (P4)

I can't deny the fact that I want to live with my boyfriend and don't have to worry about the stigma or public perception of us. I plan to live in Bali or other areas where there are not many Muslims there. I also want to marry my boyfriend later in a country that has legalized same-sex marriage like Australia. (P7)

The findings above showed that Muslim gay and bisexual men face many challenges because of their religious and sexual status in Indonesia. Islamic doctrines and its homophobic followers have contributed to the high level of heterosexism in the country. As a result, sexual minorities have experienced barriers in life with those statuses in society. The social rejection of homosexual people is an example of a myriad of problems they have faced. Such rejection refers to a person's tendency not to accept others in their groups or relationships (DeWall & Bushman, 2011, p. 256). In addition to religious rejection, the participants have experienced social rejection, which eventually leads to self-rejection, self-loathing, and others. These three types of rejection cause them challenging to live as gay and bisexual and Muslim in Indonesia. During the interviews, some participants described their experiences of rejection. It showed in several themes, such as "don't stay with me anymore," "homosexuality caused an earthquake in Yogyakarta and the Tsunami in Aceh," and "what makes me not-straight might be a genie or because my religion was lacking." These three themes of rejections are closely related to sexual orientation stereotypes and could be categorised as social rejection that is related to religious traditions, natural disasters, and religiosity of the participants.

LGBT people who live in a community with homophobic religious doctrines tend to prejudice them, and they may regard their religion as oppressive (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016). In this study, all participants believe that religious misconceptions about their sexuality have

prejudiced them, and they all agree that their religion is oppressive in various ways (see the category of religious rejection). To deal with this problem, the participants employed different strategies, such as a positive reinterpretation and conversion. Some participants, though they realised that their beliefs do not accept their sexual orientation, still keep their religious identity, while others decide to convert his religious affiliation to other beliefs that are considered friendlier towards their attraction. From a series of interviews, it can be shown that these strategies aimed to deal with the strain between religious identity and sexual orientation of the participants that affect their psychological health, such as distress. In this regard, Beagan and Hattie (2015, p. 94) state that “conflict between sexual or gender identity and religious teachings can significantly damage the psychological and emotional well-being of LGBTQ individuals” (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016). Homophobic religious believers use religious teachings to “oppress, coerce, and manipulate LGBTQ people through shaming, stigmatizing, rejecting, ousting, exorcizing, and ex-communicating.”

Furthermore, most Indonesians associate LGBT with natural disasters, such as earthquakes and Tsunami (Zakiah, 2018). Similarly, Islam believes that people’s evil deeds can provoke God and trigger disasters. Many Muslims categorize same-sex acts as evil deeds so that God will punish that person in various ways, including natural disasters. Consequently, most Muslims are not in support of homosexuality from their territory to avoid God’s punishment. It is consistent with the participant two’s statement about how the perception of heterosexual Indonesians towards LGBT people, one of which is the notion that homosexuality is the cause of natural disasters in the country. Besides, same-sex relationships are also associated with supernatural things in which the cause of same-sex desire in humans is the interference of jinn (genie) or demons. Many religious people believe that *Ruqyah* or Islamic exorcism can heal or eliminate same-sex desires (Wibawa & Renaldi, 2018). In this case, participant one has performed such a religious healing technique, but there was no result at all since the participant still has such desires.

The above statements showed that religion plays an essential role in the rejection of homosexuality, and Islam, in particular, provides no places for it (Janssen & Scheepers, 2018, p. 15; Siraj, 2012). In the context of Indonesia, significant religions in the country contribute to heterosexism. Ichwan (Ichwan, 2014) stated that Islam dramatically contributes to the high level of homophobic attitudes among Indonesians so that LGBT people should face barriers because of their religious affiliations and sexual status. Therefore, They must know where they can express their sexuality to avoid people’s negative consequences, such as discrimination (T. Boellstorff, 2005).

Regarding the feelings of isolation and loneliness, LGBT people may suffer these feelings. They are possibly worried about out of the closet for various reasons, such as worrying if people will not accept the fact that they are gay. As a result, they choose to hide their “true identity” in society. Soeker et al (2015, p. 16) found that gay men have a fear of disclosing their sexual orientation or exposing their true selves to the public because it may provoke discrimination from others. All participants have experienced such a problem; they felt socially isolated and lonely. The participants face the problem by applying one strategy available, that is, seeking social support. It includes others’ acceptance of their sexual orientation, such as friends and family members. They will also find other gay-affirmative supports that can hear their ‘secret’ stories.

The purpose of the strategy of seeking social support is to relieve stress as a result of the feelings of loneliness and isolation. During the interviews, some participants talked about their “stress” because they did not know whom they should share their stories. In this regard, McDavitt et al (McDavitt et al., 2010, p. 14) stated that young gay males avoid their heterosexist family members by “seeking support out gay-affirming individuals or organizations.” Additionally, some participants shared their ‘secret’ stories to those who are gay or bisexual or are not homophobic. In contrast, a participant went through bad days when he shared his sexual orientation problems with his heterosexist family member. Consequently, his family watched him closely.

The last category of problems found in the present study is concerns concerning the ones’ sexual orientation. LGBT people “fear of rejection from family, clergy, and the religious community” (Pietkiewicz & Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek, 2016). Previous studies indicated that LGBT people living in a

hostile environment have other concerns, such as a fear of verbal or physical abuse from heterosexists (Goh, Kort, Thurston, Benson, & Kaiser, 2019, p. 4). Such acts can lead to adverse mental health that is prone to depression and suicidal (Lee, Oliffe, Kelly, & Ferlatte, 2017; Paul et al., 2002). Therefore, some participants employed self-protective strategies to protect themselves against potential bias.

In this present study, some participants employ various strategies to deal with the problem where concealing and migration are considered the best strategies they have. With regards to migration, a participant believes that move from one area to another with his partner is beneficial to reduce religious heterosexism in the area in which Muslim dominated areas tend to be homophobic rather than other religions. For some gay people, "migration is not always a choice but also a necessity" to avoid discrimination in the area (Adihartono, 2015, p. 11). According to the participant's story, it is clear that migration not only aims to avoid discrimination but also to avoid the domination of certain religions that are considered homophobic. Meanwhile, concealment of ones' sexual orientation from friends or family members is another valuable strategy that offers "a sense of security in a world that devalues and discriminates against those with a known stigmatized identity" (Goh et al., 2019). Therefore, sexual minorities should prevent exposure to bias. Some participants employed this self-protective strategy is not only to avoid exposure to bias but also to prevent potential verbal abuse and other homophobic attitudes from society against their family, and they fear of disappointing their family. Participant one went through bad days when his family members acknowledged that he was attracted to men and have done something with them, he was driven out of the house by his mother and lived alone in a boarding house. Therefore, concealment of sexual orientation is necessary to keep the feelings of their loved ones, such as family, or to avoid the negative consequences of people when they realise his or her true sexual orientation.

8. Conclusions

This study had general purposes of demonstrating and analysing the lived experiences of Muslim gay and bisexual men in Indonesia. Specifically, this study aimed at exploring the religious and sexual dynamics of gay and bisexual men in Indonesia. Thus, the purpose is to explore what problems or barriers or challenges they faced for being a gay or bisexual man and Muslim in the country that is flourished by homophobia and heterosexism and to reveal what solutions they employed to deal with those problems or barriers. This study did not measure how effective the strategies are, instead of describing participants' problems and solutions that have experienced. Seven gay and bisexual Muslim men who live in the homophobic and heterosexist society in Indonesia have been investigated through semi-structured interviews to provide valuable insights into this study.

Moreover, sexual minorities will face serious challenges when they live in environments with strong religious and homophobic traditions. Problems, such as rejection and sexual harassment, will arise among them because of their sexual and religious status. To survive in society, they must employ a series of strategies to get through their bad days, breathing in a homophobic atmosphere. The problems that arise and the strategies they use are the focus of this study by examining their lived experiences for being a Muslim gay or bisexual man in Indonesia. This study found that gay Muslims faced several problems in expressing their identities include rejection, feelings of loneliness and isolation, and concerns. This study also shows that the participants found several strategies to deal with the problems they faced, namely exercising self-acceptance, self-control, positive reinterpretation, seeking social support, concealing, conversion, and migration.

The main problem among the participants is the rejection of both themselves and others. Self-rejection is related to internalized homophobia, which is caused by religious doctrines and social perceptions towards them. When religion and community stigmatize, humiliate, prejudice them, they are highly likely to do the same things directed to themselves. Consequently, they have difficulties accepting their sexual orientation, and in some extreme cases, they entirely reject their desires. To overcome these issues, the participants employ various strategies, such as self-acceptance, self-control, positive reinterpretation, seeking social support, and conversion. These strategies aim to accept that

they are attracted to same-sex persons, more comfortable hanging out with girls instead of boys, or of the opinion that their religion rejects their sexual orientation.

Furthermore, two other interrelated problems are feeling of isolation and loneliness. Some participants feel socially isolated and feel lonely. The tendency to play with the opposite sex, which is a girl, and to look more feminine than masculine, result in them being socially isolated, especially for boys. It causes their male schoolmates to stay away from them, and they have eventually felt isolated. Besides, negative thoughts or images of gay or bisexual men can affect their relationship with male friends. They were in the opinion that men were rude people so that they stay away from their male friends. In addition to the problem of social isolation, the feeling of loneliness is another problem. Some participants feel lonely as if no friend wants to listen to his problems. This problem arises when they worry about people's negative understanding of sexual orientation topics. As a result, they feel lonely. To deal with this problem, they employ a strategy so-called seeking social support. In this strategy, the participants share their problems with others, both gay and heterosexual. Based on the participant's experience, this way is vulnerable enough to get a rejection from their friends. It is because they do not know whether or not their friends are homophobic. If yes, he would accept the consequences. Although some of their friends show homophobic behaviours, some participants keep sharing their problems with others who are considered able to understand them. As stated previously, this study does not focus on how effective the solutions are but rather to explore the problems they face and the solutions they employ to deal with those problems.

Finally, the study participants have experienced concerns, such as rejection, health, confidentiality, and prejudice. Although such problems are not real threats from their environment, they must have their solutions. Some participants employ concealing and migration strategies. Both strategies aim to prevent undesirable negative consequences of others.

In summary, the study findings reveal that Muslim gay or bisexual men in Indonesia experienced many problems and employed various strategies to deal with them. This study provides pieces of evidence that homophobic and heterosexist attitudes still exist in the context of a Muslim majority country like Indonesia, in which heterosexual people regard such sexuality as a sin against God, abnormal, or scumbag. These negative attitudes and perceptions affect the participants' mental health outcomes. These findings highlight the great need for LGBT people to help them overcome their problems by providing solutions that are tolerant of sexual minorities.

Recommendation

LGBT people are indeed prone to adverse mental health problems, such as depression. This study recommends those who support Indonesian LGBT, such as educators, counseling practitioners, religious preachers, and other people, to keep supporting and helping them in various ways, such as listening to their sexual-related problems or providing LGBT friendly solutions. It can make them feel better so that they can live well and properly with better mental health outcomes in a society.

Future Researches

Because this study focused on the experiences of Muslim gay and bisexual men, it is useful to study in the future the experiences of Muslim lesbians in Indonesia, including what problems they encounter and what strategies they use to address such problems. Do they have the same issues, or do they employ the same strategies as Muslim gay and bisexual men? The most important thing for future research is to further study about Muslim gay or bisexual men in Indonesia from various perspectives, such as psychology or sociology, due to limited research data on this topic in Indonesia.

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