

Research Article

Tracing the Integration Journey: A Qualitative Study of Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity Among LGBTQ Individuals in Indonesia

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Abstract.

The mainstream religious perspective that opposes homosexuality and cross-gender expression creates a dilemma for LGBTQ individuals, especially those who grew up with a specific religious affiliation. This can result in internal conflict between gender and religiosity. The present study aims to explore how individuals perceive and cope with the conflict between their religious status and gender and sexual identity over time. We used qualitative methods, specifically the grounded theory approach, which allowed for a focus on the process of theory formation and development. Six participants were selected using purposive and snowball sampling criteria: 1) they identified as part of the LGBTQ community; 2) they had practiced or were currently practicing a particular religion, and; 3) they were at least 18 years old. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. We developed an “Integration Model of Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity” derived from Cass’s Gender Identity Formation Model [6]. This model consists of the following stages: nonconform, questioning, conflict, exploration, self-identify, compromise, self-integration, and spiritual integration. Additionally, we observed how cognitive appraisal and attachment to religion as a community can play a role in preventing gender-religiosity conflict. This study provides insight into the experiences of LGBTQ individuals who also have a religious affiliation and may be struggling with conflicting identities. The model developed in this study can be used as a framework for understanding and supporting individuals going through this process.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, gender, Indonesia

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Published: 8 November 2024

Publishing services provided by
Knowledge E

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Selection and Peer-review under the responsibility of the ICoPsy 2024 Conference Committee.

1. Introduction

Genders and sexualities minorities in Indonesia, specifically the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) population, confront significant challenges concerning their social and political acceptance within the Indonesian context [25]. The rejection of the LGBTQ community often finds its basis in arguments grounded in religious texts and doctrines intertwined with the heteronormative paradigm. Within this framework, religious values assume a central role within the Indonesian civil society landscape [49].



Indonesia, namely Islam, Catholicism, and Christianity, tend to classify homosexuality as a behavior deviating from the norm [33].

In a cultural and religious milieu reflecting the dominance of these faiths, unfavorable attitudes toward LGBTQ identities and sexual orientations become starkly evident. From this perspective, social and religious norms frequently interact and mutually reinforce to sustain the stigmatization of this minority group. As a consequence of this phenomenon, the rights and recognition of LGBTQ individuals often face neglect, impeding their comprehensive engagement in social and political spheres.

This circumstance underscores the intricate interplay among religion, culture, and human rights within the Indonesian context. Despite the efforts within civil society to advocate for equality and inclusion for the LGBTQ group, the challenges persist in a significant manner and necessitate a multidimensional approach encompassing elements such as interfaith dialogue, shifts in social norms, and profound endeavors to comprehend sexual and gender diversity. Various waves of rejection sporadically emerge as forms of protest against the presence of the LGBTQ community. For instance, the organization of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) congress in 2010 in Surabaya was disbanded under the pressure of militant Islamic groups. Public condemnations of LGBTQ individuals also emanate from the mouths of officials. For instance, Mayor Bobby Nasution of Medan recently declared Medan as an “anti-LGBT city” [7].

The isolation and negative experiences associated with religious traditions ultimately accumulate and can significantly impact their psychological well-being and spiritual journey [20][8]. The prevalence of religious trauma among non-binary populations, leading some to reject their religious identity and choose to be non-theistic [17]. Conversely, actually demonstrates a substantial number of gender minorities who opt to uphold their identities, affiliations, and religious practices [34]. Despite existing amidst rejection, gender minorities continue to cling to their religious identities. This illustrates that religiosity and minority gender identities do not always stand in antithesis. Researchers suggest that this pattern is intriguing and warrants further exploration.

Previous research conducted in Indonesia has shed light on the religious experiences of waria [39] and gay Muslims [43]. However, there remains an absence of studies focusing on the gender representation of Queer individuals. Furthermore, qualitative research examining LGBTQ participants from religions other than Islam has not been identified, necessitating perspectives from LGBTQ individuals of diverse faiths.

Consequently, this study aims to qualitatively explore the depiction of the conflict between gender and religiosity, hereafter referred to as “gender-religiosity conflict,” experienced by LGBTQ individuals in Indonesia. In this research, the characteristics of Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity & Expression, Sexual Characteristic (SOGIESC) of respondents are classified into four categories for classification purposes, while acknowledging the intertwining of religious, gender, and sexual dimensions: 1) Lesbian; 2) Gay; 3) Bisexual; 4) Transgender, and; 5) Queer. The central question posed is: how do individuals experience and interpret the conflict between their religiosity and their gender and sexual identities?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Gender and Sexual Minorities in Religious Perspectives

The LGBTQ community has long been considered a source of conflict for some individuals within religious communities who view same-sex behavior and gender non-conforming identities as expressions of immorality and deviations from religious values. In Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country, there is a general belief that homosexuality is a deviation [51]. Islamic law prohibits Muslims from expressing their sexual desires with those of the same biological sex. Additionally, rejection of same-sex relationships in Islam contradicts the urgency of marriage in Islam, which, besides recreation, serves the purpose of procreation or continuing the lineage [52]. Similarly, in Christianity, LGBTQ individuals are often perceived as sinful for deviating from God’s purpose of creating men and women for monogamous marriage and engagement in procreation activities [53].

In this context, for most people, homosexuality is considered unacceptable, particularly in Abrahamic religions, as it contradicts the harmonious nature of human genders, where humans are created in pairs by God with the sacred purpose of marriage for procreation in Islam [50]. Moreover, the imagined consequences for ‘defiance’ in this regard are severe, such as the shadow of curses or torture after death [54], accompanied by the labeling of sinners and the continuous reproduction of the legend of the Prophet Luth.

Nevertheless, different interpretations regarding homosexuality and gender expression in religion are continually being studied. Creation stories are progressively reinterpreted, and the languages of interpretation in sacred texts are dissected, challenging

the assumption that God only created men and women. Progressive interpretations suggest returning to the essence of a religion full of love and empathy. As mentioned in the Quran (42:50), Allah has affirmed that infertile or non-procreating creatures are also part of His power as the Supreme Creator. These beings are referred to as 'aqim, and there is no command to isolate or discriminate against them.

Meanwhile, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism, also recognized in Indonesia, are less rigid regarding homosexuality and LGBTQ issues [33]. In the Kama Sutra, Hinduism acknowledges the existence of individuals with non-conforming sexualities. Men who are attracted to other men are referred to as having a “third gender” and are not morally condemned [55].

2.2. Dynamics Related to Gender-Religiosity Conflict in LGBTQ Individuals

Throughout their lives, LGBTQ individuals can be shaken by internal changes and external events that challenge their identity and fundamental values, including questioning the compatibility between their religious and gender identities. Individuals facing difficult life situations, such as mental and psychosocial health issues, are highly vulnerable to experiencing gender-religiosity conflicts within themselves [56]. Previous research has highlighted the perceived conflicts experienced by gender minority individuals related to their sexuality and religiosity [10][11]. Gender-religiosity conflicts can be seen as a form of cognitive dissonance, where this can lead to psychological distress and internal conflict within the individual. Cognitive dissonance as conflict when thoughts are inconsistent with attitudes, cognitions, or behaviors.

Research conducted in the United States indicates that 33% of religious LGBT adults experience conflict between their beliefs and sexual orientation [57]). For some of them, religious communities and conventional places of worship have instilled feelings of insecurity, distress, and even trauma [42]. This conflict can trigger fears of social isolation and feelings of threat [58]. Additionally, individuals may internalize societal homophobia and heterosexism in this conflict, incorporating them into their self-evaluations [59].

Studies conducted in Australia show intense trauma responses in nonbinary individuals who experience mistreatment by religious institutions [21]. Consistent with this research, common religious trauma in the nonbinary population, leading them to reject their religious identity and become nontheistic [17].

Some studies find similar patterns in the responses of nonbinary individuals to conflicts with religious identity: rejecting gender identity, rejecting religious identity, compartmentalizing gay and religious identities, or integrating identities [1]. Individuals experiencing an “identity integration” response after internal or external conflicts over their religious and gender-sexual identities choose to maintain their identities, affiliations, and belief practices even in conventional religious spaces [34]. Resilience plays a crucial role in identity integration, with resilience in LGBTQ individuals as the quality to withstand and thrive in the face of minority stress, encompassing everything that leads to a more positive adaptation to minority stress and thus reducing its negative impact [36].

2.3. Individuals Facing Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity

Conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity typically arises when individuals become aware of their differences from those around them [48]. This is accompanied by discomfort towards the practiced religion [32]. Hunsberger et.al. elaborate on religious doubt as uncertainty and a questioning attitude towards the values or teachings of religion [60]. This doubt can result from interpersonal or intrapersonal experiences [47]. Interpersonal doubt is rooted in memories of negative experiences or conflicts with others from a religious environment. Intrapersonal doubt, on the other hand, focuses on personal thoughts and actions. Intrapersonal doubt into moral dilemmas, dilemmas of meaning in life, and skepticism towards religion [47]. Moral dilemmas occur when someone questions their ability to follow the moral standards of a religion, leading to guilt and fear of religious condemnation [28][29][30]. Dilemmas of meaning in life arise when individuals sense problems due to a lack of meaning in life and existential issues. Skepticism towards religion emerges when someone questions specific aspects of their faith, such as the existence of God, leading to doubt.

Numerous studies have shown that the conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity is associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety across diverse demographics (Willis, Nelson & Moreno, 2019; Galek, Krause & Ellison, 2007). If the experienced conflict fails to resolve contradictory elements in religious life, it can have detrimental effects on mental health and subjective well-being.

Individuals experiencing internal conflicts related to religiosity may follow at least two patterns [29]. The first is doubting and seeking spiritual growth. Consistent with this

research, religious doubt provides space for individuals to deepen their spiritual status and find meaning in life [16]]. Understanding and deep spiritual reflection are more likely to be achieved through the prolonged exploration of individuals questioning their religious identity.

However, another pattern may emerge when individuals experience internal conflicts related to religiosity. Those experiencing religious doubt may suppress their doubts due to feelings of guilt and shame. As a result of the guilt following internal conflict, some individuals may be reluctant to admit to themselves or others that they are in a state of spiritual doubt [46].

When faced with stressful life events, including conflicts between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity, individuals' initial response to the pressure they face is to engage in cognitive appraisals (Lazarus, 1993). Cognitive appraisals involve simple judgments of what happens to us, both internally and externally. This evaluation can lead to two outcomes: harming oneself or benefiting oneself. An essential aspect of cognitive appraisal is the primary appraisal and secondary appraisal after exposure to stressful events.

In the primary appraisal, individuals evaluate what is happening in a given situation. Subsequently, in the secondary appraisal, individuals assess the resources they have and alternatives to control the situation. When someone perceives that they have little control over the situation, negative emotions are felt. Therefore, emotions depend on cognitive appraisal [14].

2.4. Personal and Contextual Factors in the Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality and Religiosity

Personal and contextual factors play a crucial role in the conflict between gender/sexuality and religiosity. Negative experiences related to religion can be a contextual factor leading to such conflicts. Data reveal that individuals facing more negative interactions within their religious community tend to have more religious doubt, while spiritual support and greater involvement in prayer groups are associated with less doubt (Krause & Ellison, 2009). Additionally, the conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity is influenced by the religious background of the individual. When individuals raised in religious backgrounds realize they are not heterosexual, guilt often develops due to feelings of disappointment toward their families, fear of rejection, and a sense of being unloved and unsupported by their families and communities [17]. Growing

up in a religious environment is associated with higher internalized homophobia scores in LGBTQ samples in Austria, making it more likely for individuals to experience gender-religiosity conflicts [27].

In facing the conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity, individual personal factors also play a role. When religious conflict occurs, it is common for individuals to engage in rumination, negative thinking that can adversely affect mental health [45]. Resilience becomes one individual feature that can prevent individuals from rumination when facing negative experiences in their lives. Resilience generally describes the ability to 'bounce back' or reintegrate after experiencing difficult life experiences [3].

In addition to resilience, the level of self-esteem also predicts the tendency to ruminate when individuals are in stressful situations. As demonstrated by Orth & Robins [61], low self-esteem is associated with a tendency to ruminate in stressful situations that can lead to depression. Furthermore, having a positive self-concept also acts as a protective factor for LGBTQ individuals when experiencing the conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity. Individuals with a positive self-concept are more likely to explore and accept their sexual orientation, even if it does not align with societal expectations [44]. Beyond personal factors, social support also plays a crucial role in helping individuals cope with difficult experiences in their lives, including the conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity. Social support has been associated with better mental health and even linked to increased life expectancy [41]. For example, in a sample of lesbian and bisexual individuals, [15] found a significant negative correlation between social support and measures of anxiety and depression. Moreover, in a sample of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adolescents, [13] showed that increased social support, particularly related to gender issues, is associated with a reduction in mental health problems.

3. Method

This study falls under the domain of qualitative research employing a grounded theory approach. The choice of the grounded theory approach allows the researcher to concentrate on theory formation or development (Creswell, 2007; Glaser, 2007). The sampling technique utilized comprises purposive and snowball sampling. Participants were selected based on predefined criteria: 1) aged above 18; 2) self-identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer; 3) currently or previously affiliated with

a particular religious identity; and 4) residing in Indonesia. Data collection commenced with the dissemination of questionnaires via social media, containing basic demographic information and concise qualitative inquiries to identify potential interviewees. Additionally, we capitalized on informal LGBTQ community networks to identify participants. Subsequently, potential participants who had registered via the questionnaire were screened based on the following criteria: 1) indication of experiencing conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity; 2) representation of specific gender-sexual identities (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer), chosen in an equitable manner; 3) religious affiliation; 4) diverse age and occupation backgrounds.

TABLE 1: Partisipants.

	Yara	Paul	Taufik	Andi	Minah	Ria
Gender & Sexuality Identification(s)	Queer, bisexual	Gay	Gay	Gay	Transgender	Lesbian
Sex (by birth)	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Domicile	Depok	Depok	Jakarta	Tangerang	Jakarta	Surabaya
Age	21	28	32	30	53	33
Occupation	Student	Lecturer	Editor	Employee in a private sector	An activist NGO	Freelancer
Religion/Spirituality	As Stated on ID Card: Catholic Belief: (agnostic)	As Stated on ID Card: Buddha Belief: Catholic	Islam	As Stated on ID Card: Islam Belief: (atheis)	Islam	As Stated on ID Card: Islam Belief: (agnostic)
Religious Practices Undertaken	---	Regularly attending church	Regularly performing prayers and reciting Quranic verses	--	Praying	---
*) Participant names listed in this study are pseudonyms.						

We recruited a total of six participants, each serving as a representative of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer categories. Subsequently, a combination of online and offline semi-structured interviews was employed. The data collected underwent thematic analysis, a method characterized by the identification of patterns and theme extraction from the amassed data [2].

4. Result and Discussion

4.1. Discovery of Self-Identity as a Part of LGBTQ

In general, the participants have shown a different gender expression from their assigned sex since childhood. The diverse gender expressions displayed by the majority of participants made them aware from an early age that they did not conform to the socially constructed gender norms.

“I mean, since I was a kid, people frequently said: don’t be like a boy. Because I’m kind of a tomboy, I like climbing, sitting with my legs apart, stuff like that. If you talk about stereotypes, that’s it. So, it seems like from a young age, I just didn’t really fit into the ‘framework’ of being a girl.” —Yara, queer and pansexual, 21 years old.

The feelings of being ‘different’ intensified when they entered puberty. They began to feel an attraction to the same sex. Questions and denial started to grow within them. Acceptance was achieved through a winding path of sexual exploration. Some participants tried to like the opposite sex, but it turned out to be fruitless. Minah decided to change her appearance to be more like a woman to catch the attention of the man she liked. Yara went through an exploratory phase by conducting research and seeking to understand her condition.

The stage of sexual exploration eventually led all of them to the conclusion that they were not heterosexual. Ria didn’t take long to fully embrace her own sexual orientation as a lesbian; in fact, she embraced it. Just like Ria, Yara never denied her condition from the beginning. After the exploration, she understood that there was nothing wrong with her. She even felt disappointment with the gender expectations imposed by others. The same pattern was shown by Minah, who had been aware of her homosexuality and feminine gender expression since childhood—she accepted it as a part of herself and had the courage to stand up against her closest people who condemned her condition. Minah’s decision to change her appearance to be more like a woman received criticism and even threats from her father that he would kill her.

Meanwhile, even though Taufik didn’t go through a denial period, he did struggle to fully accept his sexual orientation. Implicitly, Taufik mentioned that he had internalized LGBTQ-phobia that was unconsciously ingrained in him. For a while, Taufik attempted to bury his sexual orientation. The moment he fully accepted his condition was when he encountered various aspects of the LGBTQ community in an inclusivity event, which changed his perspective.

Although they have chosen not to come out to their families for the time being, the accounts of all the participants indicate that they have received sufficient social support from their circle of friends. They all feel comfortable with their respective gender and sexuality conditions.

4.2. Religious Experiences Over Time

Turmoil came to almost all participants who were raised in religions known to oppose LGBTQ, such as the Abrahamic religions like Islam, Christianity, and Catholicism. Among the six participants, only two of them still exhibit religious behavior. The only participant who still believes in a religion and regularly practices it is Taufik.

Before experiencing conflicts, some participants initially showed enthusiasm for religious activities, such as joining organizations. During their high school years, Taufik and Andi were members of the Islamic Religious Club (Rohis). Minah was actively involved in religious activities in her community, taking the initiative to become the muezzin and regularly attending religious classes. However, at some point, almost all participants began to feel uncomfortable with religion. These feelings were triggered by discrimination and unfair treatment from religious practitioners or due to not finding solace in religious rituals. Apart from negative experiences with religion, Andi also stopped believing in God after gaining intellectual insights about the existence of God during college. One participant eventually decided to become agnostic, while another chose to be an atheist. Specifically, participants who lost interest in religion did so because of conflicts related to their gender.

4.3. Efforts to Address the Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity and Current Spiritual Beliefs

For participants who had previously embraced a religious belief, discovering that their gender-sexuality condition was incongruent with the values of their faith proved to be a disconcerting experience that gave rise to internal conflicts. All participants had encountered religious-based discrimination, either directly or indirectly, at some point in their lives. This emerged as a key factor leading to a loss of sympathy for their respective religions. This pattern is exemplified by Paul and Andi, both of whom lost

their sympathy for Islam after experiencing internal conflicts, periods of denial, and self-blame. Paul eventually identified as agnostic, while Andi continues to identify as an atheist.

Although it was a brief episode, Yara also experienced a period of conflict when she became aware of her religion's perspective on LGBTQ individuals. Subsequently, she conducted research regarding her situation and established her stance: she believed that religious-based discrimination against LGBTQ individuals was merely an interpretation exploited for particular interests. Like Yara, Taufik and Minah also believed that religion should be interpreted in the context of their circumstances. This perspective steered them away from denial and ongoing conflicts regarding their gender-sexuality conditions.

After identifying as agnostic for a period of time, Paul, who had embarked on a study of Catholicism, gradually began to cultivate the idea that his condition was not inherently contrary to his religion's principles.

"I limit myself from fully accepting that these teachings are something fixed, something that cannot be changed. I mean, even though they are teachings by the prophets, who were indeed inspired by God, receiving God's commands, and so on, but for me, these teachings or commands have always changed from one prophet to another, adapting to the times. Why not with moral teachings like this? Maybe. I don't know if it's my pure thought or if it's just my justification." - Paul, a 30-year-old gay.

Like Paul, initially, Taufik also crafted affirmations and justifications for his sexual orientation.

"So there was a neighbor of mine who was an Islamic boarding school (Pesantren) student, then one time I accompanied him because his father and mother had just passed away so he was alone in the house, and he came home from boarding school. I accompanied him, and I even had my first sexual experience with that man there. And, 'Oh, it turns out that Islamic boarding school students are also like this', like that. I started to find affirmations, like, 'He's just like that, so why can't I?' I always affirm and justify myself like that, even though it might be wrong." —Taufik, 33 year old gay.

The majority of the participants currently report feeling spiritually at peace. Based on the observations, those who identify as agnostic exhibit a remarkably high level of spiritual contentment. They express great satisfaction with life and a sense of closeness to a higher power, even though they do not engage in religious rituals. Meanwhile,

Minah, although comfortable with Islam, has, at certain points, experienced dilemmas due to her gender-sexuality condition.

“I myself still identify my religion as Islam. But as I mentioned earlier, since I became a trans woman, I didn’t pray as frequently as before. I only do the basic things like saying *Bismillah* (in the name of Allah) in prayers, and I often remember God as well. I often pray, ‘Oh Allah, why am I born this way?’ However, I still remember God a lot.” - Minah, a 53-year-old transwoman.

Minah has stopped attending religious services since she moved to Jakarta. She stated that her reason for ceasing worship is laziness, but on other occasions, she also indicated her discomfort with religious practice due to her changed gender expression, which now differs from her assigned sex, and the potential risk of rejection from people. Minah also feels uncomfortable with religious leaders who occasionally deliver discriminatory speeches about LGBTQ issues, which she has heard in mosques. Similar to Taufik, Minah reconciles this conflict by being prepared to accept the consequences of her choices.

5. INTERPRETATION

5.1. Perceiving Religion: “Does My Religion Really Oppose My Condition?”

We observed a connection between individuals’ perceptions of their religion and the self-acceptance process. Participants who hold a positive view of their religion tend to be more accepting of their gender-sexuality conditions, thereby avoiding conflicts between their gender/sexuality identity and religiosity. This is evident in some participants who view the discriminatory aspects of religion as a reflection of the attitudes of its followers, rather than an inherent characteristic of the religion itself or even of God.

In contrast, participants who fail to perceive religion positively go through a stage of denial, which often leads to deteriorating mental health. The perception that “religion opposes LGBTQ” has caused conflicts because it contradicts their own identity. The disparity between their beliefs and their self-identity indicates cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance, as described by Festinger [62], is a conflict when thoughts do not align with attitudes, cognitions, or behaviors. If this dissonance is not resolved, individuals may experience feelings of stress, anger, disgust, fear, depression, and even suicidal thoughts [18].

Cognitive dissonance is intertwined with a perceived moral dilemma. A moral dilemma occurs when someone questions their ability to adhere to the moral standards of a religion—in this case, the individual would feel guilty when violating the moral principles of their religion, which can lead to a decreased sense of self-worth and a fear of being condemned by the religion [28][29]. Those grappling with this situation, like Paul and Andi, find it difficult to view themselves in a positive light. As Paul mentioned, he went through the conflict to the point of “cursing himself.” Paul and Andi demonstrate low self-esteem when experiencing this dissonance. Internalized homophobia is associated with low self-esteem in homosexual individuals [5]. Research conducted on the LGB student population shows that individuals who fail to reconcile these two identities tend to live with greater internal conflicts and may suppress their sexual orientation [32], as was evident in Paul’s case.

5.2. Compromising to Resolve the Conflict between Gender-Sexuality Identity and Religiosity

The participants in this study experienced a variety of patterns in the process of self-discovery and internal conflict. However, all participants went through a common initial stage, starting with the awareness of the differences between themselves and their environment.

This aligns with the Non-Heterosexual Identity Formation Stage [6]. The first stage in Cass’s model involves an initial awareness of different feelings in terms of non-exclusively heterosexual sexual and/or romantic feelings or attractions. Subsequently, individuals oscillate between feeling that they are likely LGBTQ and denying this potential reality (identity confusion & identity comparison). Then, individuals accept the possibility of being LGBTQ but only later fully embrace their LGBTQ identity (identity acceptance). Next, individuals become open to others, engage with the LGBTQ community and its culture, become highly aware of heterosexism and its effects, and may feel anger towards heterosexist people and institutions (identity pride). In the final stage, individuals realize that being LGBTQ is just one part of themselves and integrate their LGBTQ identity into their holistic self-awareness (identity synthesize).

However, Cass’s model has been criticized for its linearity and failure to acknowledge the potential complexity of the processes experienced by individuals with intersectional identities [24]. Therefore, researchers have developed several stages in the participant’s journey process in compromising with the conflict between gender/sexuality identity

Participants' Integration Map of Conflict between Gender/Sexuality and Religiosity

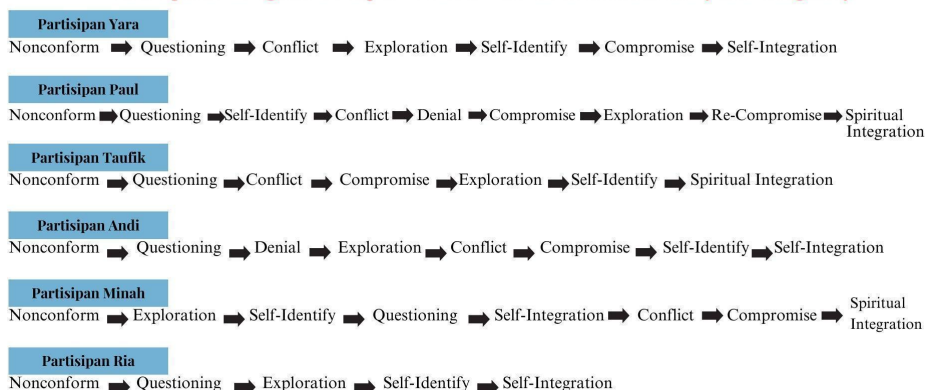


Figure 1: Integration Journey Map of Conflicts between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity Experienced by Participants.

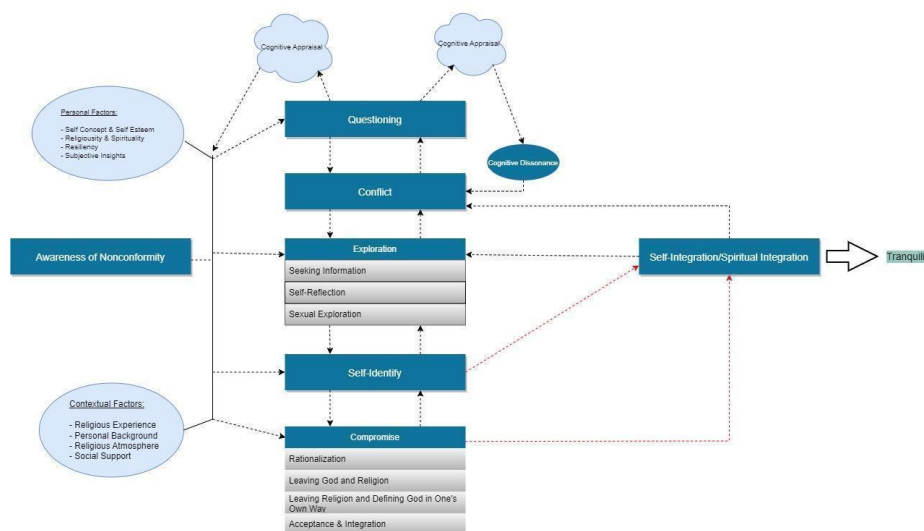


Figure 2: Diagram of Individual Integration with Conflict between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity.

and religiosity. The formulated stages are not linear; participants experience conflict and integration stages in varying orders and, at some point, may go through a stage more than once. The individual's journey toward the Integration Stage is influenced by both internal and external factors, as outlined in Figure 2.

The initial stage, Nonconform, is the moment when individuals become aware of their different feelings regarding sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression compared to those around them. Generally, this stage is followed by the Questioning stage, a moment when individuals begin to question and/or doubt their gender and sexuality. The Questioning stage experienced by individuals is closely related to the

cognitive and appraisal processes that will determine the possibilities in the subsequent stages.

For some individuals, the outcome of thinking in the Questioning stage may lead them to Denial, while others may feel that they have discovered their gender and sexual identity, thus beginning to identify with a specific gender or sexual orientation - this stage is called Self-Identify. In addition, individuals may actively engage in the process of seeking answers and doubts in the previous stages by exploring their gender and sexuality, which is included in the Exploration stage.

When individuals realize the incongruity between normative religious teachings and their sexual orientation, expression, or gender identity, they may experience internal conflict rooted in cognitive dissonance. Research conducted on lesbian, gay, and bisexual college students indicates that individuals who fail to reconcile these two identities tend to live with greater internal conflict and the potential to suppress their sexual orientation [32].

There are several possible responses by individuals to compromise with this conflict: rejecting gender identity, rejecting religious identity, compartmentalizing gay and religious identities, or integrating identities [1]. Consistent with this research, Buchanan et al. [63] identified several compromise strategies used by individuals, including choosing between gender or religion identities, integrating both, or separating them as different aspects (compartmentalization). The “Compromise” stage in this research includes individual responses to the conflict between gender/sexuality and religiosity observed, such as: rationalization; leaving God and religion; leaving religion and defining God in one’s own way, and; accepting and integrating the differences between gender and religiosity.

After compromising with the experienced conflict, individuals may go through the “Integration” stage, where they feel safe, comfortable, and at peace with their LGBTQ identity. There are two types of Integration that individuals may experience, namely: Self-Integration, which involves feeling safe, comfortable, and at peace, and accepting their orientation, expression, and identity as LGBTQ—although choosing to disregard or reject their religious identity after experiencing conflict between gender/sexuality and religiosity; and Spiritual Integration, which is characterized by the ability to accept their gender and sexuality identity, feeling safe, comfortable, and at peace with their religious affiliation, and having passed the period of conflict between gender/sexuality and religiosity and compromising without relinquishing both identities. Individuals at the

Spiritual Integration stage have managed to unite their gender, sexual, and religious identities into their self-awareness in a holistic manner.

5.3. Cognitive Appraisal in the Questioning Stage

The findings of this study reveal that participants begin to display diverse response patterns upon entering the Questioning stage. Consequently, drawing from Cognitive Theory that emphasizes the role of cognition in the relationship between emotions and behavior [64], we suggest that cognitive appraisal developed during the Questioning stage can determine how individuals progress toward integration. Cognitive appraisal in high-pressure situations is characterized by two mechanisms. In primary appraisal, individuals evaluate what is happening in a given situation. Subsequently, in secondary appraisal, individuals assess the resources they have and alternatives to control the situation. When someone perceives that they have little control over the situation, they experience negative emotions. Hence, emotions depend on cognitive appraisal [14].

In the Questioning stage, individuals evaluate themselves, their gender identity, and their values. For example, participants with negative cognitive appraisals of themselves at this stage are more likely to proceed to the Conflict stage. Meanwhile, participants with neutral or positive appraisals tend to move on to Exploration or even Self-Identify. A comparison reveals differences in the patterns experienced by participants Taufik and Ria. Taufik, raised in a religious environment, carried internal stigma and homophobia. In the Questioning stage, Taufik's pre-existing schema influenced his self-evaluation, making him feel guilty about being gay. This contrasts with Ria, who perceived her sexual orientation as neutral, entering the exploration stage without cognitive dissonance or significant conflict.

5.3.1. Facing Conflict between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity: Creating Affirmation and Rationalization

In confronting the conflict between gender/sexuality identity and religiosity, some participants displayed behaviors of creating affirmation and rationalization for their contradictory conditions with the normative values of their religion. This behavior was exemplified by Paul, who believed that normative religious teachings against homosexuality could not be interpreted literally. He believed that human conditions with minority sexual

orientations occurred for biological reasons and were intended by God. Paul, a 30-year-old gay man, expressed, “I limit myself to fully accepting that those teachings are fixed, that they can’t be changed. I mean, even though they are teachings by the prophets, who were inspired by God, who heard God’s command, etc., for me, teachings or commands always change from one prophet to another, following the times. Why not with moral teachings like this? Maybe. I don’t know if it’s my pure thought or just my justification.”

Creating rationalizations is a common behavior in individuals when faced with difficult decisions [65]. Rationalization can reduce the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance.

“Thus, I have a neighbor who grew up in a pesantren (Islamic boarding school), and one time I accompanied him because his parents had just passed away, so he was alone at home, and he returned from the pesantren. I accompanied him, and I actually had my first sexual experience with a guy in that situation. And, ‘Oh, it turns out, even kids from pesantren are like this,’ and I began to find affirmation, like, ‘He’s like that, why can’t I be?’ I always affirm and justify myself like that, even though it might be wrong.”
— Taufik, 33 years old, gay.

5.3.2. Facing Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity: Leaving Religion and God

Conflict, in any form, creates discomfort for individuals experiencing it. One participant in this study, Andi, decided to distance himself from the source of conflict by completely leaving religion and God. In addition to being influenced by his discomfort with the religious climate, this decision was also influenced by his subjective interpretation of the ambiguous existence of God. Furthermore, the participant grew up in a family that was not very religious; one of his parents had converted to Islam, and he did not feel a strong attachment to his religion.

“...maybe there are people whose basic foundation for being religious is love for God, and doing all religious activities is based on feeling the desire to serve God. Whereas I don’t. I don’t believe much in that kind of thing, according to me, it’s a burden. And also, there’s peer pressure, you have to be like this, you have to be like that, so it becomes even more burdensome.”

Andi feels very comfortable with his current atheistic condition. Findings from a qualitative study (Anderson & McGuire, 2021) state that participants who describe

themselves as never feeling connected or involved in their family's religious beliefs or faith communities tend to find it easier to exhibit deconversion behaviors (leaving religion) and describe it as a neutral or positive life event.

5.3.3. Facing Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity: Leaving Religion and Defining God/Higher Being on One's Own Way

Another pattern observed in this study is that two participants decided to distance themselves from the source of conflict by leaving religion, but not by leaving a higher being. Both participants, Yara and Ria, sought solace in a higher being, albeit not through conventional means. Ria developed a close connection with a higher being through Tarot and self-affirmation. She defined the higher being as "angels," specifically archangels Michael and Gabriel, as wise beings who constantly watch over and protect her.

"...when we were in elementary school, we had teachers, right? There was a principal, right? If we passed or failed depended on our grades, didn't it? In general, this entity serves as a teacher and principal. Not something that has to be this way or that way, but if you need help or something beyond the capacity of your mind and logic, you can ask. You can ask them." — Ria, agnostic, lesbian, 33 years old.

Interestingly, we found that, overall, agnostic participants experienced a high level of spiritual peace. This was demonstrated by Yara and Ria, who described their closeness to a "higher being" even without affiliation with a specific religion. The belief in a higher being that watches over and protects human beings undoubtedly creates a sense of peace. A study found that LGBT individuals who focus on their interpretations of scripture, spiritual beliefs, and ignore the social implications of religious teachings have better mental health [72].

Furthermore, according to our observations, the spiritual peace experienced by Yara and Ria was significantly higher when compared to other participants. Yara and Ria did not feel constrained by religious norms and could be themselves, had a high level of self-acceptance, and, at the same time, felt a connection to something greater.

5.3.4. Facing Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity: Separating Gender and Religious Selves

With this type of compromise, individuals feel there is no need to make explanations that bridge the two perceived contradictory aspects. Rodriguez [66] referred to this compromise strategy as compartmentalization. According to Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice [67], compartmentalization is a compromise between conflicting identities. By separating two conflicting identities, a resolution of identity conflict can be achieved.

Taufik understands well that his sexual orientation contradicts normative religious teachings, but he creates a “partition” between them and is willing to accept any consequences.

“I haven’t found how Islam defends the Queer community from a religious perspective; it must prioritize the humanitarian aspect. So, up to this point, I don’t consider it necessary for them to align. I regard it more as a choice. It’s like, ‘You choose that, and you have to face the consequences,’ and at this point, I’m prepared. Whatever the consequences, I’m ready.” — Taufik, Islam, gay.

Similar to Taufik, Minah also indicates a similar pattern of compromise. She faces the conflict by viewing her gender expression and religiosity as two aspects that don’t always have to align. According to her, whatever decision is made, it’s in God’s hands, and she accepts the consequences.

“Whatever we do, whether it leads to heaven or hell, whether it’s sinful or virtuous, we don’t know any of that. It’s like that. So, when people say, ‘You have to repent, you have to do this,’ I say, ‘Well, it’s ultimately up to God, heaven and hell are God’s business.’”

5.3.5. Facing the Conflict Between Gender/Sexuality Identity and Religiosity: Accepting and Integrating the Differences Between Gender and Religiosity

Full self-integration is achieved when participants are able to accept their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and religiosity as interconnected aspects within themselves in a holistic manner. Individuals employing the fourth strategy have a positive gender and sexual identity, a positive religious identity, and do not feel conflicted or compelled to create artificial divisions between them [68]. The only participant who ultimately reached this stage is Paul. Paul, who previously compromised through rationalization, eventually managed to accept and integrate the differences between his

gender and religiosity, identifying himself as a “gay Catholic.” Paul interprets his sexual orientation as a divine gift.

“When I reflect on myself, I fully accept myself as gay now. I fully accept myself as Catholic now. I fully accept myself as a gay Catholic, even though it is still around 80%.”
— Paul, Catholic, gay

5.4. More Than Just Belief, Religion as a Community

In a sociological perspective, Durkheim [69] argued that religion serves as a community. Religion unites society (social cohesion), promotes consistent behavior (social control), and provides individuals with strength and meaning during transitional periods in their lives. When one adopts a religion, they also become a part of the broader social, cultural, and group context that surrounds that religion. Therefore, attachment to a specific religion is also influenced by attachment to its socio-cultural context. Minah, during her childhood and adolescence, was deeply involved in religious activities in her village. However, she stopped practicing religion after moving to Jakarta and transitioning into a transgender woman. She expressed concerns that her appearance as a transgender woman would not be accepted by the people in her place of worship.

Minah’s experience is a phenomenon commonly observed among gender and sexual minority individuals within religious institutions [43]. Minority groups are particularly vulnerable to stressors [35]. As a result, Minah felt uncomfortable participating in religious activities and eventually ceased practicing her faith.

Minah no longer experienced communal religious activities, which she previously enjoyed when she was in her village before transitioning into a transgender woman. Individuals who participate in group worship and other small social networks within a congregation often form emotional bonds with fellow members (Lewis, MacGregor & Putnam, 2013). Emotional bonds and social interactions within religious groups contribute to a sense of religiosity and emotional fulfillment [70]. Minah’s bond with religion as a community waned after her transition.

6. Conclusion

Participants in this study were directly exposed to the concept that their gender and sexual identities violated religious norms and social expectations, which were instilled through their families and internalized dogmas. Upon realizing that their gender and

sexual identities did not align with normative religious teachings, two participants, Andi and Paul, went through a phase of denial, while others questioned themselves and chose to explore their identities.

The feeling of conflict was more intense in individuals who were raised with strong religious values. However, the ambivalence displayed by LGBTQ individuals towards their religiosity does not necessarily indicate a failure to achieve identity resolution, reconciliation, or integration. Instead, they demonstrated unique experiences and diverse forms of compromise. We observed several patterns of compromise that individuals employed when dealing with the conflict between their gender and sexual identities and their religious values. Some individuals chose to (1) create affirmations and justifications to cope with the cognitive dissonance they experienced, (2) abandon their religion, (3) separate their gender and religious selves, and (4) accept and integrate the differences between their gender and religion, along with being willing to accept the consequences of their choices.

Over time, the participants processed the conflict between their gender and sexual identities and their religiosity, gaining a different understanding of their religion and their concept of God. The majority of the participants believed that, fundamentally, religion was created for a good purpose and needed to be interpreted within its context. However, three participants chose to disaffiliate from their religion. Regardless of whether they decided to leave their religion or not, all participants have now reached a comfortable stage where they can make peace with themselves.

Based on the research findings, we then developed a “Model of Integration with Conflict between Gender/Sexuality and Religiosity,” derived from Cass’s Model of Identity Formation [6]. This model comprises stages such as Nonconform, Questioning, Conflict, Exploration, Self-Identity, Compromise, Self-Integration, and Spiritual Integration. These stages are not linear and may be experienced in varying orders by different individuals, and they may be experienced more than once in one’s life.

We also found that the cognitive assessment made by individuals during the Questioning phase significantly influenced how they experienced the conflict between their gender/sexual identities and religiosity. Participants who held a positive view of religion, believing that religion was fundamentally good and that religious judgments were merely interpretations for certain interests, were generally able to accept their gender and sexual identities, thus avoiding conflicts between their gender/sexual identities and religiosity. Furthermore, we discovered that participants’ comfort with their religion

was not solely dependent on personal beliefs and private interpretations but was also influenced by their sense of attachment to religion as a community.

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