BEING A MUSLIM GAY MAN: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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Abstract. This article presents a systematic discussion on how Muslim gay men protect their image and identity in an Islamic ambience, which can be threatened as a result of self-identifying and coming out as gay. The overarching question of this systematic review is, 'What has research told us about Muslim gay men?" For the literature synthesis, out of 57 articles that touch on the issues associated with Muslim gay men, 30 of them met the inclusion criteria and were coded. After scrutinizing the articles, the following themes emerged: (i) factors affecting the identity development of Muslim gay men; (ii) societal expectations on Muslim gay men; and (iii) implications of developing the identity of a Muslim gay man. Based on the data obtained, it can be concluded that undermined Muslim character can prompt hyper-connection within fellow religious comrades. The possible directions for future research are discussed towards the end of this paper.

Keywords: Muslim gay man, LGBT, identity, social experience, homosexuality, Islam

1. Introduction

Homosexuality is generally defined as being attracted to individuals of the same sex. It also refers to an individual's sense of personal and social identity based on those attractions, behaviors expressing them, and enrollment in a group of other people who share the same platform. Homosexuality is being perceived as being against the law of nature in many religions including Islam. Individual who are gay or homosexual are described as sinners who do not deserve a chance to carry out their daily routine as 'gay' in public (Zulkffli and Rashid, 2016). Over the years accepting individuals for who they are is more vital and indispensable. Despite the hatred and disapproval of the society, many families choose to accept their kids rather than causing much confusion and unpleasantness. The act of an individual to uphold his identity as a gay or homosexual is driven by many factors, such as self-acceptance, culture, social expectations and rule of law.

In Islam, being gay is viewed as deviant, corrupt, and rebelling against God, which takes off no plausibility for recognizing gay as Muslim (Jamal 2001; Siraj 2009). There have been many attempts in interpreting the Qur'an (which could be comprehensive of homosexuality) by more contemporary researchers (Jamal 2001, Kugle 2003); despite that, the majority of Islamic community does not support this understanding. We can thus claim that Islam is hostile to gay mentalities. Investigations on gay dispositions in Islamic context are minimal in the literature. The few that exist believe that anti-gay attitudes are predominantly negative (Duyan and Duyan 2005, Güney et al. 2004). Explicit anti-gay attitudes have been anticipated by gender, relational contact, and religious convictions (Duyan and Duyan 2005, Gelbal and Duyan 2006, Sakalli 2002, 2003).

This systematic review on Muslim gay men synthesizes research on gay Muslim men and their lifestyle. The prevalent question that is being identified alongside with the three sub-questions is "What has research told us about Muslim gay men?" The sub-questions are:
1. What are the factors affecting the identity development of Muslim gay men?
2. What societal expectations do Muslim gay men need to face?
3. What are the implications of developing the identity of a Muslim gay man?

2. Conceptualizing Muslim gay men

The concept of 'Muslim gay men' is derived from the Identity Process Theory, which assimilates the identity conflict which is presumed to be a part of gay Muslim men's coming out experiences (Breakwell 1986). With regard to that, Jaspal (2014) opines that avoiding cognitive dissonance and achieving psychological coherence is an impelling cause in identity development. Psychological coherence is concerned with establishing compatibility between identities that individuals have an attachment to, especially highlighting the principles of self-esteem and social and cultural worth. When identity is threatened through the obstruction of these principles, the individual will strategize to minimize that particular threat (Breakwell 1986). Breakwell (1986) was among the first to identify the concept of Identity Process Theory so as to constitute the development of identity among Muslim gay men.

This theory basically conceptualizes identity as dynamic, and a product of interaction or communication between individuals and social context (Breakwell 1993). The structure of identity is divided into two planes, namely the content dimension which highlights the individual's characteristics, and the value of dimension, which is the positive or negative value emerged and attached to each element of the content (Breakwell 1986). This Identity Process Theory initially proposed four guiding principles in accordance with identity construction and management. Those principles are continuity, distinctiveness from others, feeling

control and in control, and feelings of personal or social worth (Breakwell 1986), two principles by theorists were added to the last part; belonging and meaning (Vignoles et al. 2006). In relation to this, Breakwell (1986) suggests that negatively-valued identity content may impose 'self-hatred' and portrays a force-ful attack on one's self-esteem, which is the key principle of identity development (Jaspal and Siraj 2010).

In the modern era, identity development has inflicted massive impacts on Muslim gay men across the world, as they are keen to come out of the closet (Bereket and Adam 2006, 2008, Minwalla et al. 2005). Jaspal (2010) states that with regard to the Identity Process Theory proposed by Breakwell (1986) and extended by Vignoles et al., (2006), the dimension of this theory is based on the principle of assimilation-accommodation which absorbs the new information generated in the identity structure by which evaluation process is carried out to study the content of identity structure as well as the threats of identity that incurs.

The principles in Identity Development Theory (Breakwell 1986, Vignoles 2006) are summarized below:

- **Continuity** is associated with the context of time and situation by which an individual is bound to cope with their identity over time. The cha-racteristics of this principle include understanding, an ability to maintain progression and compliments.
- **Distinctiveness from others** reflects the uniqueness of one's personality and attitude from the other parties. This means the uniqueness and difference in a person's act will constitute attraction and contribute towards identity development among a specific circle of people.
- **Feeling control and in control** refers to the feeling of confidence and the ability to control their life besides maintaining self-esteem. So, through this, one will have the confidence to merge with the community and tend to develop their identity publicly.
- **Feelings of personal and social worth** refers to the social context by which one is likely to associate themselves within the community and feel the acceptance by the society in relation to their identity. Besides that, social worth is crucial as it creates a path for an individual to portray their identity with confidence.
- **Belonging** refers to the need of maintaining feelings of closeness and the acceptance of people without prejudice. The aim of this principle is to instill a sense of belonging among people so that they will be able to participate and mingle freely.
- **Meaning** refers to the need and importance of finding the significance and purpose of one's life. This is because through meaning, one will be able to verify the motive of their life goals and develop their identity as they wish.

Several scholars, such as Brewer (1991) and Yip (2005) propose that individuals tend to identify themselves within the social groups in order to satisfy the opposing motives based on the principles of distinctiveness from others and belonging. So, this has inevitably proven that these two principles are commonly

referred to in the context of identity development, while the principles of continuity, feeling control and in control, feelings of personal and social worth, and meaning are least used to determine the identity development process.

3. Method

A systematic review was conducted and the review process consisted of the four stages described below.

3.1. Formulation of inclusion and exclusion criteria

Before searching the literature, the following inclusion criteria were detailed. To start with, each distribution ought to be significant, implying that the publication should cater and examine Muslim gay men, social expectations and community acceptance. Secondly, the publication of the journals should be in English so that the authors and readers can understand. Thirdly, the time traverse of the literature search was restricted to 2010-2017 to give an outline of the latest research in this field.

3.2. Development of a search strategy

With a specific end goal to build up a pursuit methodology fitting to the principle motivation behind this audit, different terms were used, such as 'gay men', 'Muslim gay men', 'homosexuality', 'discrimination', 'social expectations', 'Islamic', 'Islamic countries', 'gay men's lifestyle' and 'gay rights'. The technique used to search for publications concentrated on title, abstract, and keywords in request to obtain publications with a clear focus on Muslim gay men. In perspective of this, it was trusted that the key terms identified were relevant.

3.3. Identification of relevant publications

All the publications were searched from two databases: Scopus and Web of Science. The abstracts of the publications were screened thoroughly for significance. If the abstract did not provide adequate data, then the full content was filtered to decide if the publication met the inclusion criteria. The initial online searches of the previously mentioned information pool distinguished 100 articles for the subject term Muslim gays. In the process of removing the duplicates and perusing the unique, 80 articles were retained for screening at the full text level. Out of these, 57 articles met the preliminary selection criteria. And finally, 30 articles were examined and included in the final literature synthesis.

4. Data analysis and discussion

Prior research on Muslim gay men states that the Identity Process Theory conceptualizes identity as dynamic, and a product of interaction or communication

between individuals and social context (Breakwell 1993). Examining the articles proved that 'gay men', to be more specific 'Muslim gay men', are vastly looked upon as sinners and a disgrace to the community. Despite the fact that it is such, the level of tolerance and acceptance towards Muslim gay men or gay men in general has improved drastically over the years. This is due to the fact that the need to accept 'one' as such despite the religious beliefs is requisite to avoid death and self-hatred amongst gay men. Another reason is that the majority of Muslim gay men do not want to believe the idea of change even though it is against their religious beliefs since they are of no harm to anyone in general.

After reviewing all the articles, there were three themes that synthesize empirical findings and data-driven theoretical propositions on Muslim gay men. The three themes are: (i) factors affecting the identity development of Muslim gay men, (ii) societal expectation of Muslim gay men, and (iii) the implications of developing the identity of a Muslim gay man. The analysis of the data and its discussion are explained below.

4.1. Theme 1: Factors affecting the identity development of Muslim gay men

The theme above that was derived by analyzing the articles, answers the question that has been mentioned earlier. This particular theme was derived from a total of 10 journal articles. The authors that examined this theme are Bonthuys (2012), Hamdi, Lachbeb and Anderson (2016), Roggemans, Spruyt, Droogenbroeck, and Keppens (2015), Buijs, Hekma, and Duyvendak (2011), Peterson (2010), Jones (2016), Breen and Karpinski (2013), Berggren, Bjørnskov, and Nilsson (2016), and Jaspal and Siraj (2011). Based on these studies, there are two factors that affect the identity development of Muslim gay men. The first one is the audience and context, and the second one is the social norm.

Audience and context is defined as the public's opinion on the development of Muslim gay men. Bonthuys (2012, 2008) highlights that heterosexual men are indisputably more negative towards gay men. Moreover, individuals have a tendency to express more antagonistic demeanors based on their conventional perspectives of the family and conservative religious views. If they have had any pessimistic encounters with gay individuals alongside with their companions, their hatred of homosexuals is high (Bonthuys 2012). Apparently many recent South African surveys show that religious views are the main influence of the perception of an individual (Bonthuys 2012). On top of that, Roberts and Reddy (2008) found that age, education levels and urban residence also influence the perception towards being a Muslim gay. In terms of age factor, the ones who are in the age group of 16 to 24 alongside with the ones who are above 50 years old are keen to express their views on being gay openly and are very supportive about it. In terms of education, those who have attained higher level education are more likely to show positive perception on being gay. On the other hand, urban residents who are from the metropolitan areas tend to accept and portray positive perception towards gay men whereby those who are from the non-metropolitan area or rural area are much reserved and not great supporters of gay men.

There are different moral standards for Muslims and non-Muslims, with gay Muslims being judged more brutally, "on the grounds that a Muslim should know, should realize that it is not right" (Bonthuys 2012). A few participants in Bonthuy's study indicated that they might totally segregate any of their family members who is openly gay to elude themselves from the shame that they might face in the near future. On the other hand, some of the participants feel that by not separating all ties with a gay relative would be commensurate to approving the conduct. Surprisingly, some believe that, having a sibling who is gay might inter-rupt the process of another sibling from getting married thinking that the in-laws might have a perception that they were not brought up well. Some other participants feel that the act of removing a member of the family who is gay is not going to help them put forward his misdeed and if they cannot change him then there is no point in ostracizing him.

The second factor that affects the identity development of gay men would be the social norm. Social norms in this context refer to how gays are being perceived socially. Many individuals have had the fear of being seduced by their gay peers (Buijs, Hekma, and Duyvendak 2011). One of the participants in Buijs et al's study admitted that he "felt threatened when [the gay] guy hit on [him]. It made [him] feel like a rat in a trap. And trapped rats bite". Despite this petty issue, public policies are being amended to assert the equality and civil rights of gay men compared to how it has been in the past, and this has encouraged the public to avoid expressing negative attitudes towards the gay community socially (Breen and Karpinski 2013). Since the religious beliefs are strong and unquestioned, the only attempt that would allow an individual to have an identity and self-worth is by not being gay. To add, a gay man in line with this reasoning and securing equal treatment and not getting punished, he should be allowed to marry and adopt as a heterosexual would (Berggren, Bjørnskov, and Nilsson 2016).

The adequacy of the technique of self-introduction to constructive portrayals with respect to the gay character lies in the degree to which it can change the debilitated individual's personal representations of what it means to be who they are. This might be dependent upon one's level of religiousness, the relative significance of religious character and the degree to which the mental intelligibility rule is subjectively organized by the person (Jaspal and Siraj 2011). Therefore, acceptance of an individual's sexuality is purely based on one's level of competence towards that issue.

4.2. Theme 2: Societal expectation of Muslim gay men

This section discusses the second theme which is the societal expectation of Muslim gay men. Societal expectations are divided into two categories; (1) personal desire and principles (I decided what I am) and (2) positive religious views of an individual. This specific theme was derived from the following authors: Eidhamar (2014), Thompson (2015), Callahan and Vescio (2011), Jaspal and Cinnirela (2010), Kıraç (2016), Jahangir and Abdul-latif (2015), and Sakallı-

Uğurlu and Uğurlu (2015). Predominantly it is believed that an individual has all the authority and rights to decide his sexual orientation and preferences.

The majority of the gay men in the studies revealed that they cannot share their sexual orientation to anyone because it is illegal in Islam. They felt that they did not have a place in the religion since they are sinful. At first, many of them felt sad and underappreciated, but over the years they decided to make a firm decision not to read the Qur'an anymore. Since it is against the religion many Muslim gay men felt that they were not accepted in Islam and decided to let go Islam and its principal (Eidhamar 2014). However, some of the Indonesian gay men in Eidhamar's (2014) study decided to retain their own faith because they believe that they cause no harm and damage to anyone. Unlike race, homosexuality is a concealable shame based on behavior. Individuals may see sexual minorities as their battles of their observations that they are allowed to cover their out-gathering status and that their gay conduct is a choice itself (Callahan and Vescio 2011). A gay man who has a partner will eventually make it easier for him to accept his sexuality and increase his respectability of being gay. Along these lines, psychological coherence through association of personalities comes to fruition inside the social generation of cozy connections (Sakallı-Uğurlu and Uğurlu 2015).

The second societal expectation is the positive religious views of an individual. By summoning God as the maker, homosexuality cannot be seen contrarily since on the off chance that it was not right this would probably suggest a component of blemish in God. This could conceivably undermine the progression of their Muslim character, which requires the confidence in an impeccable God (Jaspal and Cinnirela 2010). They are probably going to believe that religious convictions can now and then be traded off to secure, protect the social and economic well-being and that there are numerous more essential things in life than religion. Despite the fact that they are religious, they likewise tend not to permit religious convictions to impact their ordinary undertakings (Kıraç 2016).

4.3. Theme 3: Implications regarding the identity development of Muslim gay men

A total of 13 articles discuss the implications regarding the identity development of Muslim gay men (Hamdi, Lachheb, and Anderson 2016, Jahangir and Abdul-latif 2015, Safi 2013, Jaspal and Cinnirela 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, Hatzenbuehler, Hasin, Maclaughlin, Keyes, and MPhil 2010, Petersen and Hyde 2010, Saraç and McCullick 2015, Anderson and Koct 2015, Bonthuys 2012, Ng, et al. 2013, Bonthuys and Erlank 2012, Omar 2012). The implications here refer to the conclusion that can be drawn from something, although it is not explicitly stated. In these studies, the scope of implications regarding the identity development of Muslim gay men is divided into two categories, namely negative consequences and positive consequences. Based on the analysis, it is prudent that positive consequences prevail over negative implications. As for the positive implications, there are four elements that have been extracted from the journal articles reviewed, which include boosting one's self-esteem, supportive feedback, positive judgment from others and legislation or also referred to as the rule of law.

For the first element which is boosting one's self-esteem, Hamdi (2016) states that people have the conception that a heterosexual is muscular, athletic and commits himself in gym trainings, thus displaying hyper-masculinity. Therefore, people often associate this conception with virility and strong heterosexuality, also known as the quality of having strength, energy and a strong sex drive. Thus, this conception has overridden the existence of gay men in a sports context as they do not realize that gay men can also be athletes. Therefore, by assimilating this element, homophobic threats can be prevented as sport serves as a strategy of resistance and protection over such threats.

The second positive implication is gaining supportive feedback from the 'significant others' in their lives. For instance, the idea of same-sex marriage is accepted in certain states because the main motive is to ensure that all citizens have access to the same kinds of public benefits just as other people. Safi (2013) opines that there are several families who tend to show the same love, affection, and attention for their children despite being gay as love and family ties symbolize the purity of actual love. For this community, being gay is not an issue at all and having a gay family member is certainly acceptable and this proves that there is a possibility of moral support.

Thirdly, the positive implication highlights the notion of positive judgment from others. It is becoming common in Indonesia that same-sex orientation is viewed as a gift from God and thus, such relationship is permissible in Islam and shall not be rendered forbidden (Jahangir 2015).

The last positive implication is the legislation or the rule of law which has legalized the same-sex orientation in a few states. The British have safeguarded the rights of British Muslim gay men, thus enable them to come out of the closet and live life just like the heterosexuals (Jaspal 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013).

There are three negative implications discussed in the reviewed articles: misconceptions and misjudgments, criticism and against religious views. As for the first element which focuses on misconceptions and misjudgments, gay cosmopolitanism has had a massive impact on gay men as they are being treated as an asset for purposes of work, sex, and other commodities. Thus, this includes an element of danger as gay men are being traded and might incur potential threats which lack a sense of humanity as they are being utilized and commercialized in the global market. Furthermore, a large number of gay men are raised in an environment in which homosexuality and homosexuals have traditionally been undervalued, disrespected, discriminated, hated and excluded by the society (Petersen and Hyde 2010, Sara 2015). In addition, homosexuality is also seen as a sin in a few states. Therefore, gay men are hated, not tolerated and despised. Even among those who pretend to be open-minded and understanding, their ultimate concern is to understand how penetration occurs between two persons of the same sex and not about how love evolves between people of the same sex. Hence, it is not acceptable for a man to be gay as they are denounced and refuted due to the misconceptions that gay men lose their sacred masculine identities, and that takes

into serious consideration as masculinity is crucial in one's identity development (Hamdi, Lachheb, and Anderson 2016).

Secondly, the negative implication is frequently associated with criticism. For instance, the prevailing generalization about gay men in Tunisia is that each gay man involved in anal sex is addressed as feminine. This effeminacy is the beginning of threatening vibes toward them in a way that antagonistic vibes are do not exist against the individuals who penetrate other men (Hamdi 2016). Moreover, discrimination of gay men is commonly identified in the form of vulgar harassment. For example, Hamdi (2016) states that gay men are subject to various kinds of abuse and they have been addressed as fags, atheists and *mwabna*. This clearly proves that gay men are being criticized and disrespected merely because they are gay. Besides that, it has been reviewed that men who commit homosexual intercourse are guilty of having committed a sin analogous to illicit sexual intercourse (Jahangir 2016). Hence, it can be precluded that criticism against gay men has not only caused threats to them, but has also locked them in a dark space, hoping for a ray of light to live their life just like other people.

Last but not least, the most frequently faced negative implication is that the Muslim gay men are said to be against religious views, thus labeled as the sinners. Jahangir (2016), Sanjakdar (2013), Sara (2014), Shah (2016) point out that this negative view on gay men is influenced by the Quranic verses:

> *Most surely you come to males in lust besides females; nay you are an extravagant people* (Qur'an. Shakir's translation. Verse 7:81).

> *What! Do you come to the males from among the creatures? And leave what your Lord has created for you of your wives? Nay, you are a people exceeding the limits* (Qur'an. Shakir's translation. Verse 26:165–166).

Besides that, engaging in a homosexual act is absolutely immoral and a serious deviation from the inherent nature of man, and these acts of defiance against human nature are also even viler and uglier than adultery and are forbidden in Islam (Bonthuys 2012). Furthermore, Ng (2013) states homosexuality is strongly condemned and sexual intercourse among the same sex is considered sinful in Islam. It is sinful because it violates the plan of God, present from creation, for the union of male and female in marriage. Homosexual behavior is also disgusting because it symbolizes sexual term as a revolt against God, immoral and against the rules of nature which leads to hatred towards Muslim gay men (Anderson 2015).

5. Conclusion

There are three themes which emerge from the analysis of recent literature on the Muslim gay men. The three themes are factors affecting the identity development of Muslim gay men, societal expectation on Muslim gay men and implications regarding the identity development of Muslim gay men. This systematic review has identified two factors that affect the identity development of Muslim gay men, which are audience and context followed by social norm. The second

theme, societal expectations of Muslim gay men, brings to the fore two sub-themes, which are personal desire and principles (I decided what I am) and positive religious views of an individual. Last but not the least, the third theme, implications regarding the identity development of Muslim gay men, was discussed in two categories (positive and negative). The positive implications are boosting self-esteem, gaining supportive feedback, positive judgments and the legislation which favors gay men. Whereby, the negative implications are misconceptions and misjudgments, criticism and being seen as against religious views. These findings indicate that being a Muslim gay man, one should overcome all sorts of obstacles to pursue an ordinary life as a gay man. One needs to neglect his religion and beliefs to attain self-satisfaction and self-acceptance. Up to now, an individual's choice of being homosexual is still debatable.

6. Suggestions for future research

As for the continuation of research studies which keep moving forward, there are several recommendations for future research. First, future research should analyze audience, context, social norm and age as potential factors that stimulate overviews on Muslim gay men. In addition, future research should continue to unscramble the complexities of identity development and how the Muslim gay men come out of the closet with regards to the principles of continuity, feelings of personal and social worth, feeling control and in control, belonging, meaning and distinctiveness from others. The existing literature has figured out the principles of belonging and distinctiveness from others which thoroughly explains the necessity of identity development, but fails to provide accurate and clear evidence on the other principles. Therefore, more research should be carried out to explain the incomplete views.

Authors' contributions

ST collected the data and drafted the paper under the supervision of RAR.

RAR participated in the design of the study and helped in writing the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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