St. Stephen's College

The Lived Religion of Indonesian Gay Male Christians

in Partnership

by

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Abstract

This study investigates the ways in which Indonesian gay male Christians in partnership (IGMCPs) make sense of their spiritual lives and develop their lived religion when they try to form and maintain a committed same-sex relationship in a church and a society that disapprove of that relationship. Thirteen IGCMPs participated in the study, which employs an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Lived religion is used as a conceptual framework as its basic tenets take into account the significance of IGCMPs' lived experience in forming their beliefs and their spirituality. This bottom-up approach offers a new and fresh perspective on discussing the issue of homosexuality and Christian beliefs, beyond the top-down doctrinal approach, which tends to be more conservative.

Five themes emerged from the participant interviews. The participants believe that their relationship is not sinful, that their life journey is guided by God, that their partnership is sacred, and that their spirituality grows through the partnership. Furthermore, the participants displayed a lack of enthusiasm for having their relationships blessed as they prioritize their parents' blessing over spiritual blessing. This finding does not support the assumption that IGCMPs experience a need to have their relationship ritualized or blessed in order for them to properly value that commitment and to empower them to face the negative attitudes of the church and of society. This unenthusiastic attitude toward a relationship blessing is caused by two factors: a deeply ingrained belief in the importance of *restu* (parents' blessing) as a key to living in harmony, and the non-cohabitating living arrangement experienced by most IGCMPs, which results in the lack of a sense of permanency in their relationships.

This finding shows that in the current situation in Indonesia, IGCMPs do not need and are not asking for a same-sex union ritual. The church can help IGCMPs, therefore, by providing ritual or pastoral care that aims to reconcile IGCMPs with their families.

   Keywords: Lived religion, gay couple, spirituality, sexuality, Indonesia, same-sex relationship, Christian ethics, IPA, same-sex blessing, marginalization, LGBT parental support

To Ross Edmond Lonergan, the love of my life,

without whom this dissertation would not exist,

and to the memory of my mother

who worked so hard and endured so much to see me prosper in life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Being gay in Indonesia has meant living in a condition of vulnerability, particularly in recent years. Public attitudes toward LGBT people have shifted from relatively tolerant to homophobic amid a growing conservatism in the world's largest Muslim country (Westcott, 2017). A survey conducted by the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) in 2008 found that the vast majority of Indonesians (95.4%) considered homosexuality to be something that is "always wrong" and that cannot be justified (as cited in T. W. Smith, Son, & Kim, 2014). Five years later, the Pew Research Centre (2013) reported that 93% of the population believed that homosexuality was morally unacceptable. A recent survey conducted by the Wahid Foundation (2016) among 1,520 Muslim respondents shows that LGBT is the minority group most disliked by Muslims, who represent 90% of the total population. In Southeast Asia, a recent study by the Asia-Pacific Social Science Review found that public attitudes toward lesbians and gay men in Indonesia are more negative than those in five other countries in the region: Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines (Manalastas et al., 2017).

Being a gay person in partnership can exacerbate this disapprobation. In May 2017, two young gay men, both university students, were caned in Aceh, while thousands of people looked on; many of the onlookers jeered as the couple were being flogged (Simanjuntak, 2017). This incident occurred after the gay couple were seized by vigilantes who burst into their home and took them to the authorities for engaging in homosexual sex. Aceh is the only province in Indonesia where homosexual acts have been criminalized as the province was granted permission by the national government to adopt Islamic bylaws. Same-sex relations are not illegal in other provinces although a

conservative Islamic group has recently sought to have same-sex relationships outlawed nationwide by requesting that the Constitutional Court change the Criminal Code[1] (Hermawan, 2016). Nevertheless, gay couples are still living in a condition of vulnerability because of several factors: the absence of government protection of LGBT rights (Arivia & Gina, 2016); a media bias that commonly links homosexuality with a decadent lifestyle and violent anti-social behavior (Human Rights Watch, 2016; Zuhra, 2013); lack of knowledge and education about sexual orientation and gender identity and expression or SOGIE (Badgett, Hasenbush, & Luhur, 2017); and the misleading information given by some medical professionals who have labeled homosexuality as a mental disorder and claimed that gay people suffer from psychiatric disorders (Jong, 2016).

Gay couples also face challenges within the family. It is often difficult for parents to accept their gay son's sexuality, not to mention his same-sex relationship. Heterosexual marriage is considered to be an inevitable step toward maturity and a mark of adulthood, and many parents believe that they have a duty to guide their children to enter into heterosexual marriage. Under this strong cultural pressure, many gay men decide to marry a woman in order to meet societal expectations and to fulfill their familial duty and obligations (Howard, 1996). Gay couples who choose to build long-term same-sex relationships and to avoid heterosexual marriage will have to deal with conflict and rejection from their families. In Indonesia, family has the greatest influence

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[1] The request was denied by the court on December 14, 2017, however the group would continue to fight for their cause at the House of Representatives.

on LGBT people's lives (UNDP, 2014, p. 9). When relationship with families is broken, the result is usually emotional scars and loss of the support that gay couples desperately need in a hostile society.

There are many single gay men, gay couples – and their families – in Indonesian Christian churches. As a loving community, the church should be playing an active role in manifesting God's love and providing a safe space for gay men who are socially devalued, negatively stereotyped, and rejected by their families and communities. Yet the church cannot play this role as long as it holds a negative view of LGBT people. This non-conducive atmosphere motivated leaders of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) to issue a pastoral letter in June 2016. The letter affirmed that LGBT people are created and loved by God and that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality, and it urged churches to accept their LGBT members as "the body of Christ" (Campbell-Nelson, 2016).

Regrettably, many churches rejected the PGI's bold statement and even accused the Communion of straying from the true Christian faith ("Bold Support for LGBTs by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia," 2016). This rejection was not surprising. Most churches in Indonesia believe that sexual relationships and sexual expression belong exclusively within heterosexual marriage and, therefore, that same-sex relationships are unacceptable. A recent survey among Christian youth in the denomination Gereja Kristen Indonesia (GKI) found that 80% of the respondents did not want the church to accept same-sex relationships ("Seberapa Progresif Pemuda GKI dalam Isu Seksualitas dan LGBT? [How Progressive is GKI's Youth on the Issue of Sexuality and LGBT?]," 2017). As for attitudes among members of the clergy, Soselisa's

(2013) research reported that pastors from the Protestant Church of West Indonesia (GPIB), one of the largest denominations in the country, generally accept gay Christians as long as they remain celibate. Forming a homosexual relationship is considered sinful and immoral. GPIB's stance, which is derived from a traditional interpretation of Scripture passages that refer to homosexuality, is shared by most Indonesian churches.[2] The church's negative portrayal of gay people and of same-sex relationships also comes from a lack of scientific knowledge of human sexuality, a negative public attitude toward gay people and same-sex relationships, and the hidden nature of Indonesian gay Christians. Many pastors still do not know gay persons or gay couples in their parishes on a personal level. This situation makes it difficult for pastors to realize the struggle of these parishioners and to include them in dialogue on LGBT issues. As a result, the church usually portrays gay people as uncommitted Christians who have little to do with spirituality because they have chosen a sinful lifestyle which contradicts the teaching of the Bible. Gay Christian partners in relationship are portrayed as impious individuals who are only interested in same-sex genital expression.

Despite a common belief that gay people are unspiritual, studies have shown exactly the opposite to be true (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Burr, 2009; Empereur, 1999; Foster, Bowland, & Vosler, 2015; Gross & Yip, 2010; Halkitis et al., 2009; Hollowell, 2012; Rodriguez, 2006; Shallenberger, 1996; Tan, 2005; Andrew K. T. Yip, 1997c, 2003). Research has also shown that spirituality/religiosity is an important aspect of committed same-sex partnerships (Rostosky, Otis, Riggle, Kelly, & Brodnicki, 2008;

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[2] This traditional doctrinal interpretation of homosexuality is also held by the National Council of Churches in Singapore (*A Christian Response to Homosexuality* 2004)

Rostosky, Ridge, Brodnicki, & Olson, 2008; Andrew K. T. Yip, 1997c). These studies were conducted in Western countries, but it can be reasonably assumed that they hold some truth as the experience of being a religious gay person is a universal phenomenon. However, in Western countries there is a much higher level of social and religious support for same-sex relationships than exists in Indonesia (Cameron & Berkowitz, 2015; Masci, 2015).

To date I have not seen any research that addresses the issue of the religiosity/spirituality of Indonesian gay Christian couples. In Malaysia, a neighboring country whose cultural background is similar to that of Indonesians, Goh (2017) has constructed a queer theory and theology based on his research of the lived experiences of gay and bisexual men in Malaysia and Chua (2014) has done a research on Malay Muslim gay men in Peninsular Malaysia. There are a few studies available regarding the life experience of Indonesian gay persons which have been conducted in the Islamic community (see Anam, 2013; Boellstorff, 2005; Davies, 2010; Dzuklarnain, 2006). They include a small body of substandard research conducted by college students (see Kusuma, 2012; Mariani, 2013; Noviantoro, 2015). Research on the lived religion of Indonesian gay couples is even sparser.

I believe that the lack of empirical research on the spirituality/religiosity of same-sex couples in Indonesia, combined with the inability of gay couples to share their experience due to stigmatization, has impeded Indonesian churches from moving beyond their stereotypical image and biased perspective of same-sex partnerships. Therefore, I am convinced that research in this area is greatly needed in order to provide a more accurate understanding of the life experience of gay couples so that the church can move

beyond the common stereotype and arrive at a more balanced perspective and thus gain an ability to evaluate and understand these couples and their relationships.

Background

Doctrine is closely connected to people's life experience. G. B. Smith (1912) states that all doctrines expressed in the Bible were built to answer humans' question of how to preserve their faith. As each human faces new circumstances and religious experiences in life, the nature of the question can change. Consequently, the content of doctrine should undergo a corresponding change in order to remain relevant. It cannot remain constant because a primary factor in the construction of doctrine is "the inner life of men [sic]" (p. 97). In Protestantism, there exists always openness toward constructing a new perspective on theology or biblical interpretation. Traditionally, four main interweaving sources have been acknowledged within Christian tradition for the construction of Christian theology: Scripture, tradition, reason, and religious experience (McGrath, 2011). It is important to note that tradition (the body of teaching that is passed on) is also not static, but is instead living and dynamic. It can change as new and different situations arise although its essential content is not modified. This essential content is not an abstract proposition; it is instead the truth passed down from the living Christ. Therefore, the church needs to carry out "an active process of reflection in which theological or spiritual insights are valued, assessed, and transmitted from one generation to another" (McGrath, 2011, p. 422).

Nelson (1992) points out that the traditional theology of sexuality has undervalued reason and religious experience while overemphasizing Scripture and tradition. The result is a theology of sexuality that is one-directional in nature; it is only

concerned with what Scripture and tradition say about our sexuality instead of asking what our spiritual experience tells us about our sexuality and how human science, which came from reason, can provide insight for our theological reflection and understanding of Scripture (p. 21). This theology of sexuality cannot affirm gay sexual identity and relationship, and it has put gay Christians in partnership in a category of people who have not just "fallen into sin" but are "living in sin."[3] This theology is irrelevant for gay couples because it is not congruent with their life experience. Many Christian gay couples perceive same-sex relationship as much more than genital activity. It is more about life sharing. Even their sexual activity is not seen as an expression of lust, but as a means of communication and communion that enables the partners to find authentic humanness as they move from isolation into relationship (Nelson, 2008). As a result, many gay Christians will naturally embrace same-sex relationships, regardless of the church's position on homosexuality. The absence of a relevant and realistic sexual theology and sexual ethics leaves gay Christians to form a committed intimate relationship with their own rules, customs, and moral standards with which to integrate their sexuality and spirituality (Kundtz & Schlager, 2007). Consequently, their belief in God and their spirituality will not necessarily be congruent with the church's dogma.

The incongruence between a person's belief and the church's dogma is not an uncommon phenomenon. McGuire (2008) argues that ordinary people basically do not commit to an entire, single package of beliefs and practices prescribed by an official

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[3] In conservative churches, a gay person is considered having "fallen into sin" if he occasionally engages in homosexual activity as long as he does not embrace his sexual identity as gay. However, when a gay person accepts his sexuality and has a gay partner, he is considered to be a person who is "living in sin" because he practices the "homosexual lifestyle."

religion. People construct their religious concepts and practices not purely based on religious dogma and sacred texts, but they are also inspired by their reflections on daily experience (embodied practices) as they try to make sense of their lives. This construction is known as lived religion (religion-as-lived). Lived religion is not merely personal or individual; people construct their religious worlds together with others who share similar experiences as they engage in conversations about religious/spiritual topics in their everyday lives, forming what Ammerman (2014) called a "spiritual tribe" (p. 199).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the ways in which Indonesian gay male Christians in partnership (IGMCPs) make sense of their spiritual lives and develop their lived religion when they try to form and maintain a committed same-sex relationship in a church and a society that disapprove of that relationship. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach will be used in this qualitative research (J. A. Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Research Questions

How do Indonesian gay male Christians in partnership (IGMCPs) make sense of their spiritual lives and develop their lived religion when they try to form and maintain a committed same-sex relationship in a church and a society that disapprove of that relationship? I will answer the following subsidiary questions embedded in the main research question:

1. What is it like for IGMCPs to be in a church where people disapprove of their relationship with someone they love?

2. What kind of lived religion do IGMCPs experience as they continue in a relationship that is not recognized or blessed by the church?

3. How will IGMCPs' experience of marginalization by the church affect their relationship?

4. Do IGMCPs perceive a real need to receive a relationship blessing ritual?

Significance of the Study

Academically, this study will add to the body of knowledge about religiosity/spirituality in same-sex relationships in Indonesia, particularly in the category of LGBT people's beliefs and religious practices. I hope that this study will generate sufficient interest so that other researchers will investigate the lived religion of lesbian or bisexual Christians in Indonesia, topics which have not been discussed in this study.

With regard to the church ministry, I hope this study can contribute to the discussion of homosexuality within the Indonesian church. Despite the fact that member churches of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) seem to agree to disagree on gay issues (Yuliana, 2017), the PGI pastoral letter has provided an opening for Christian leaders to initiate a dialogue about homosexuality. Unfortunately, the dialogue that has taken place in churches so far has mainly revolved around biblical interpretations and the church's doctrinal stand on gay issues. Only a few church communities have gained insights from psychologists and psychiatrists, and the lived experience of ordinary gay Christians in church has not been taken into account at all. As a result, conversations about homosexuality usually resort to abstract arguments conducted by straight Christians. By presenting the real-life experience of IGMCPs through this study, I hope

that the church's discussion on homosexuality can be guided by a spirit of understanding and compassion and that eventually the church can be better equipped to minister to its gay members. I hope that by recognizing the struggle faced by IGMCPs, church leaders and counselors can become more aware of their situation and can minister to gay Christian couples more wisely and more compassionately.

This study can broaden the discourse on homosexuality in the church. Foucault (1990) argued that when discourse on sexuality proliferates, the increased discourse does not merely result in an abstract intellectual analysis, but it becomes a significant factor that contributes to a change of public perception and understanding of human sexuality. Discourse on sexuality can unintentionally challenge the repressive system and bring a new understanding of sexuality, including homosexuality (pp. 43-44).

Definition of Terms

Sexual Orientation

The American Psychological Association (2008) defined sexual orientation as "an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to men, women, or both sexes" and as "a person's sense of identity based on those attractions, related behaviors, and membership in a community of others who share those attractions" (American Pyschological Association, 2008, p. 1). A recent APA publication indicates that sexual orientation does not always appear inside the gender binary of "male" and "female" as it "occurs on a continuum" (American Pyschological Association, 2015).

Gay Men

Gay men are defined as "men whose primary emotional, erotic, and relational preferences are same-sex (homophilic) and for whom some aspect of their self-labeling acknowledges these same-sex attachments. Designation as gay refers to "the sex of one's (actual or imagined) intimate partner choices, not gender expression, which may take a variety of forms" (Bieschke, Perez, & DeBord, 2007, p. 21). In this study, the term "gay" refers to gay men.

Same-sex relationship

A loving/sexual and committed relationship between two people of the same sex whose lives are deeply intertwined. The relationship is both relatively enduring and important to them and is characterized by frequent interaction and a strong and intense influence that the partners have on each other in diverse activities, domains, or topics (Peplau & Cochran, 1990). Although the term "same-sex" refers to a homosexual person, sexual activity is not taken as a necessary or an exclusive criterion to define same-sex relationship.

Lived religion

Lived religion is the study of religion as experienced by ordinary people in everyday life. It explores how religion is actually lived in one's life. It is an examination of religion "as it is shaped and experienced in the interplay among venues of everyday experience…in the necessary and mutually transforming exchanges between religious authorities and the broader communities of practitioners, by real men and women in situations and relationships they have made and that have made them" David D. Hall (1997, p. 9).

Spirituality

There is a broad range of definitions of the term "spirituality." In this study, spirituality is defined as a determination to pursue personal morality, a deep relationship with God, a loving and respectful relationship with other people, and a deeper sense of oneself. I agree with Burr (2009), who perceives spirituality as "a relational and connecting term," which always involves relationships (p. 21). Spirituality takes us outside of ourselves and causes us to care about another person at a deep and sacred level (Helminiak, 2006). In short, relationship and awareness are two important keywords in understanding spirituality.

Religiosity

Religiosity is the quality of being committed to religious beliefs and practices that can be expressed through participation in religious activities, either in public (such as attending church services) or in private (such as personal prayer and meditation).

Assumptions

- Although the concept of sexual orientation should be seen as a continuum rather than as a set of discrete categories, particularly in the social constructionist view (Bohan & Russell, 1999; Caplan & Caplan, 2015), it is still important to describe the three common categories: homosexual, heterosexual, and bisexual (Bieschke et al., 2007).

- Homosexuality is not a mental disorder. To date we do not know exactly what causes a person to have homosexual orientation. However, gay individuals "experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation" (American Pyschological Association, 2008).

- Respondents who took part in this study are assumed to have answered the interview questions accurately and truthfully.

- One year of partnership is enough to validate respondents' willingness to build a committed long-term relationship.

- Respondents who took part in this study are assumed to be self-identified IGMCPs whose sexual identities are stable.

Scope and Limitations

This study will focus on self-identified Indonesian gay male Christians in partnership who are at least 18 years of age, who have been in a committed same-sex relationship for at least one year, and who during the period of this study (September 2016 – October 2017) were active members of either a Protestant or Catholic church community. I have not studied the life experience of Indonesian lesbian and bisexual Christians, although they may have similar experiences, because the IPA approach requires the sample to be as homogenous as possible. Furthermore, given the ideographic nature of IPA, which focuses on a detailed account of individual experiences and on explaining the complexity of human phenomena (J. A. Smith et al., 2009), the number of participants was limited to thirteen. Participants were recruited only from large Indonesian urban centers to which people tend to migrate from various other regions of Indonesia. This study does not cover the life experience of IGMCPs from small cities and rural areas due to the difficulties of finding gay people in those places who would be willing to participate in this study. Moreover, Berkus's (2003) study demonstrates that there is a different identity strategy formation between gay people who live in urban areas

and those who live in suburban and/or rural areas. Therefore, limiting respondents to those from urban areas maintained the homogeneity of the sample.

This study also does not include IGMCPs who remain in a heterosexual marriage. Boellstorff (1999) argues that most gay Indonesians marry and have children. However, there are no statistical data available to validate his claim. Married gay Christians who have built a same-sex relationship are confronted with more complex issues. Therefore, another study is needed to explore their life experience. Finally, gay Christians who have left the church are also not included in this study because this study does not focus only on the participants' spirituality, but also takes into consideration their religiosity.

For the literature review of material written by Indonesian scholars in the Indonesian language, this study has relied on three online resources that are accessible[4]: (1) www.onesearch.id, an online database that collects materials from Indonesian libraries, museums, archives, and e-resources; (2) The Indonesian Publication Index (IPI), an online journal database that currently consists of more than 3,000 Indonesian academic journals from universities and colleges across the country; (3) http://e-resources.perpusnas.go.id, an online database of the Indonesian National Library. Some journals and/or research reports which may have relevance to the research were not available in these online resources. In order to access these materials, it would be necessary to visit a large number of libraries in Indonesian universities and search for each resource individually. Due to the time-consuming nature of such a project, it is not

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[4] According to Wiryawan (2014), only 5,900 out of more than 7,000 scientific journals can be accessed through the database and only 16 journals are categorized as international journals and are registered in international indexes (Scopus, Compendex, and web of science). Moreover, only 109 journals are registered in the Directory of Open Access Journals) in 2013.

feasible to include these materials as sources. As a result, there is a possibility that not all

information in the Indonesian language about this topic will be included in the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine how Indonesian gay male Christians in

partnership (IGMCPs) make sense of their spiritual lives and develop their lived religion

when they try to form and maintain a committed same-sex relationship in a church and a

society that disapprove of that relationship. The examination relies on the concept of

lived religion as a conceptual framework. Therefore, this chapter begins with a

description of lived religion, along with a rationale for its choice as a basis for this study,

followed by a review of current literature related to the study.

Lived Religion as A Conceptual Framework

Lived religion is an examination of how ordinary people practice their religion in

their everyday lives. The concern of lived religion is "what people do with religious

idioms, how they use them, what they make of themselves and their worlds with them,

and how in turn people are fundamentally shaped by the worlds they are making as they

make these worlds" (Orsi, 2002, p. xx). The notion of lived religion is not the same as the

concept of popular religion although the latter also investigates "the lived and

unstructured religion of subordinated groups" (Possamai, 2015, p. 781). In popular

religion, "the religion of the masses/common folk" is usually placed in contrast to "the

official religion or the religion of the intellectual/religious specialists" (Hinnells, 1995).

Scholars often identify, isolate, and undermine forms of religious practice that destabilize

or transgress the official teaching of the religion (Orsi, 2002). For example, scholars

categorize certain mystical-religious practices of common people as "superstitious" or

"primitive." Moreover, religious expressions that blur the distinction between the sacred and the profane are labeled as "not religious." Orsi believes that the categorization of certain religious phenomena as authentically religious and others as perversion is a social construct that emerged as an effort "to contain and control religion by definition" (p. xv). He argues that the Western concept of religion in the modern era was constituted during the period of religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and during the period of industrialization and of the colonization of Asia and Africa in the ninetieth century. The dominant power defined what practices could be considered religious or not religious and what practices could be considered "essential to a particular religious and cultural world" or unessential/marginal (p. xviii). This definition and categorization justified social and racial hierarchies in Western countries and in their colonies.

The realization that we can unwittingly regard religious phenomena with a biased lens led religious studies scholars to develop a more holistic approach toward studying religious phenomena, an approach known as lived religion. In this relatively new framework, religious practices are examined in their historical and cultural context, and the study is more concerned about what people make of themselves with their religious practices. There is a dynamic integration between religion and experience because people "do not merely inherit religious idioms"; instead they "appropriate religious idioms as they need them, in response to particular circumstances" (David D. Hall, 1997, p. 8).

Ammerman's (1997) study of the individual religious lives of congregational members in the American mainstream churches found that people do not coherently and consistently follow the church's doctrine. For example, some people in conservative

churches do not accept traditional definitions of the Bible's inerrancy. Yet this lack of acceptance does not mean that they consider the Bible to be irrelevant; instead they draw from it certain principles that are relevant to their own life experience and apply those principles as their life guidance. People use "religious creativity," as David D. Hall (1997) puts it, to creatively construct their personalized theology to make sense of what they have experienced in daily life. Ordinary religious people engage in "the practice of theologizing" as they journey through everyday life circumstances (p. 8-9). Through this practice of theologizing, the individual's belief system is reconstructed. This process may result in a mixture of the belief in orthodox doctrines that comes from a religious institution and the belief in unorthodox doctrines derived from many sources, including personal religious experiences. The existence of unorthodox doctrines in this personalized theology or belief system does not indicate that people undervalue their religion or religious teaching. On the contrary, it signifies the importance of religion in people's lives. Ammerman (2014) depicts religion as "inherently a totalizing identity" that makes religious people "walk around in a religious bubble" (p.194). Even in everyday mundane and secular social life, such as in the workplace, religious individuals cultivate a religious consciousness and weave "a layer of spirituality into the fabric of their individual lives" (p. 196). This religious consciousness drives the practice of theologizing, resulting in a personalized theology.

The existence of individual religious creativity is clearly seen in cases where a religious idiom defined by institutional religion can hold different meanings for different groups of people. Hall and Brown's (1997) study of the English Puritans in early New England found that the meaning and experience of "holiness" were not fixed among

them. It was polysemous because individuals reinterpreted what this term meant to them based on how it could be relevant to their life experience. Scholars of lived religion, then, require "the hermeneutics of hybridity" to redefine the concept of holiness as understood and experienced by a particular group of Christians (p.11).

This coherent way of studying religion has created a paradigm shift among social scientists. They have moved from studying religion at the institutional level, where the focus is on religious dogmas and institutions, to approaching religion at the individual level. The concept of lived religion is also used by theologians and scholars from religious institutions (Possamai, 2015). Ganzevoort and Roeland (2014) link lived religion with practical theology as they point out that the domain of lived religion, praxis, is also the object of practical theology. The term "praxis" is considered to be broader than "practice." It refers to the everyday religious practices of many people: "what people *do* in religious respect" (p. 94). However, for the study of lived religion to be classified as practical theological research, it needs to focus on a religious dimension of a certain praxis and/or the praxis should be approached from a religious perspective (p. 96). The research will not question whether something is religious or not, but "what it means when someone defines something as religious or not," so the researcher should critically analyze the labeling of something as religious or not religious (p. 97).

I use lived religion to study the religious/spiritual life of IGCMP's because its basic tenets offer a new and fresh perspective on the issue of homosexuality and Christian beliefs. Christians commonly rely on doctrinal teaching to discern whether the relationships of IGCMPs are acceptable or sinful, without realizing that doctrine was constructed from Scriptural interpretation shaped by the interpreter's hermeneutic lens,

social and cultural values, and religious traditions. If the interpreter uses a heterosexist lens in interpreting Scripture, the result is a doctrine/teaching that condemns homosexuality as sin and asserts that all gay Christian couples are immoral. Using church doctrine to judge the religiosity or spirituality of IGCMPs is a top-down approach that does not take into consideration the IGCMPs' lived experience. On the other hand, using lived religion is a bottom-up approach that considers how IGCMPs connect their beliefs and their sexuality to form a unique spirituality that is in line with the reality of their lives. This approach enables us to be more understanding instead of judging the religious/spiritual life of IGCMPs. An Indonesian blogger, Wilson Kanadi, is right: "Those who judge will never understand, and those who understand will never judge."

McGuire (2008) found that gender difference profoundly affects how people make meaning of their religious practice and experience because gender permeates many aspects of life, and people "experience their material bodies (including their socialized senses and culturally formed body norms) as closely linked with their religion-as-lived" (pp. 159, 161). I argue that sexuality also profoundly affects how people make meaning of their religious practice and experience because sexuality is "an intrinsic part of an embodied self" (Tolman, Bowman, & Fahs, 2014, p. 759). For gay people, homosexuality is embodied in their life experience and it shapes how they understand and respond to the social world. Gay Christian couples will not passively accept whatever the church wants them to believe when they know that the church teaching is irrelevant to what they experience with their sexuality. They will go through the process of theologizing, where they will accept and preserve as their belief certain teachings that are relevant to them, while other teachings that are irrelevant, such as sexual theology that

condemns their sexual identities and relationships, will be adjusted or totally rejected. Gay couples will construct an alternative sexual theology that is unorthodox but functional and more relevant. In this theologizing process, gay couples will draw from many resources to construct their unorthodox belief system; such resources may include personal reflection, common sense, personal interpretation of Scripture, cultural wisdom, universal values, and queer theology. As a result, their belief will be an amalgamation of orthodox belief and unorthodox belief. In Figure 1, below, I show how this theologizing process works.
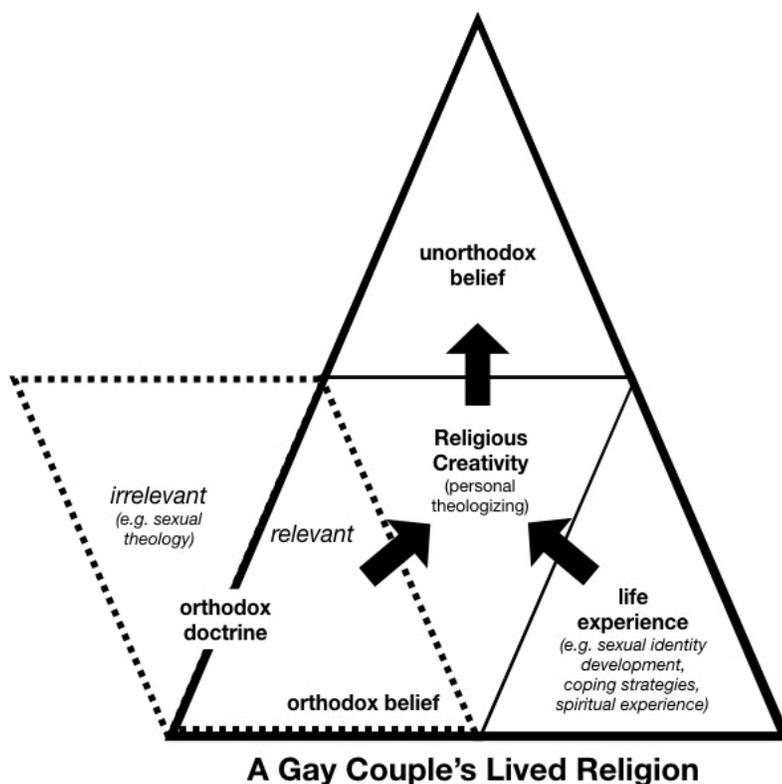
Figure 1. The Theologizing Process of Gay Christian Couples

Review of Research

The Conservative View of Gay Christian Partnerships

Conservative Christians (whom I call the traditionalists) consider a committed, loving partnership between two people as sacred, as long as the couple are heterosexuals and their relationship is consecrated in the marriage ritual of the church. Several arguments are used to support this claim. First, as pointed out by Zaloudek (2014), Scripture uses the Christ-groom/Church-bride metaphor to describe how a married couple (husband and wife) should relate to each other. In Eph 5:22-28, Christ is symbolized as groom or husband and the church is symbolized as bride or wife. Husbands should love their wives sacrificially as Christ (the groom) loves the church (the bride), while wives should submit to their husbands as the church (the bride) submits to Christ (the groom). This Christ-groom/Church-bride metaphor, taken literally by the traditionalists, is often used as a prescriptive model of marital relationship. In this view, the institution of marriage is sacred because it is through marriage that a heterosexual couple can experience the revelation of God's nature and intended relationship with humans (p. 624). In other words, marriage is sacred if it is heterosexual, monogamous, and patriarchal, where male headship is acknowledged and the traditional gender roles of the husband and wife are clearly defined. A gay couple partnership is definitely not sacred because it cannot manifest the unique relationship between husband and wife that reflects the relationship between God/Christ and people/church.

The second argument is cited by Edwards (2007). He mentions that the traditionalists have regarded marriage as sacred because they take a realist view of

marriage where marriage is not seen as a human construct, but instead as the most important human institution designed by God. Because it is a divinely ordained institution, it has existed as part of nature and as a universal norm throughout human history. In this view, gay couple relationship is regarded as a profane form of sexual relationship that is against nature. Worse, social recognition of same-sex relationships is considered to be a threat to traditional marriage in that it will pollute the sacred status of the marriage institution (p. 249).

Zaloudek (2014) and Edwards (2007) invalidate the two arguments above. Zaloudek's study of contemporary Evangelical heterosexual couples found that while they embrace the symbolic ideal of male headship, in reality they act out their relationship in more pragmatic, egalitarian ways. Radical changes in society and the family over the past several decades, which have put women in an equal position with men, have driven couples to embrace more egalitarian models of marriage. Their lived experiences have shaped their interpretations of the Christ-groom/Church-bride metaphor in order to make it meaningful for their relationships and their spirituality (p. 625). Gender-role ideology is no longer believed to be an essential factor that defines the sacredness of marriage. The second argument has been countered by Edwards using Durkheim's theory of sacred and profane. The religious right claims that marriage is sacred by locating it within the domain of nature. It is sacred because of its status as a "divinely ordained institution." In fact, sacredness is not an intrinsic quality. It is merely "a symbolic representation of cherished ideas and ideals." Marriage is sacred for the religious right because it "symbolizes deeply held values, relationships, and institutions" (p. 248). Furthermore, Edwards argues that the religious right's attempt to cast

heterosexual marriage as sacred is "inextricably linked with attempts to protect an epistemological order linked to masculine authority" (p. 247). As same-sex marriage can dismantle the notion of masculine authority, it is seen as a threat to heterosexual marriage. It may even be labeled as blasphemous, in order to maintain the distance between the sacred and the profane. In conclusion, the claim to define marriage as sacred here is ideological and political in nature. The claim does not fully reflect the biblical truth. The Bible suggests that Jesus Christ never married nor laid a foundation for "Christian marriage." When asked about marriage, he simply quoted a passage from Genesis (Jewish scripture) to explain the Yahwist view of marriage. Moreover, there was no church ritual for solemnizing marriage between Christians before the eleventh century (Martos, 2014) because the ancient church valued celibacy over marriage. The concept of "traditional/nuclear family" and the centrality of marriage has only been known in the last 150 years (D. B. Martin, 2009).

Another argument, made by Thomas (2008), a contemporary Evangelical Christian author, claims that marriage is sacred because God designed marriage as an instrument to help husband and wife to be more holy. Bound permanently in Christian marriage, they face their own selfishness and non-Christian attitudes and eventually are encouraged to change their attitude and become more Christ-like. Marriage is like a school, where a couple must work hard to acquire an unselfish and sacrificial love, and while doing that, they grow in godliness. The notion of sacredness, in Thomas's argument, is not inherent in the marriage institution itself. Marriage is sacred if the couple are willing to discipline themselves to live unselfishly so that they can have a deeper loving relationship. I argue that this kind of loving relationship can also be accomplished

through a committed same-sex partnership; therefore, a same-sex relationship can be as sacred as a heterosexual marriage relationship.

The traditionalists' objection to affirming the sacredness of a committed, loving same-sex partnership is rooted in their theological view of homosexuality. Robert Gagnon, a scholar whose work is cited by many conservative church leaders, believes that all humans are inherently heterosexual (Gagnon, 2010). Based on Genesis 2:18-24, he argues that Scripture supports the notion of gender complementarity, where God split humans into two sexually differentiated beings. Consequently, heterosexual marriage is the only way to reunite those two complementary sexual others. Two males or two females cannot restore that union of "one-fleshness" because it requires "two constituent parts, male and female, which were the products of the splitting" (Via & Gagnon, 2003, p. 89). A person who is erotically attracted to the sex that he belongs to is basically yearning for himself or for "what one wishes to be but in fact already is." Therefore, that person lives in "sexual self-absorption and narcissism or, perhaps worse, sexual self-deception" (p. 91). Gagnon concludes that a gay individual cannot love God: "Persons who violate the command of God cannot be said to love God whose will they reject" (p. 51). Moreover, anyone who actively engages in homosexual behavior carries "a heightened risk of loss of salvation" (p. 41).

Gagnon's claim is understandable because, in the traditionalist view, a homosexual act is not merely sinful. It is "an abomination" and/or "a perversion." Erickson (2013), an Evangelical theologian, defines the word "abomination" (from the Hebrew words *shiqquts* and *to'ebah*) as "an act particularly reprehensible to God" or as sins that "are not simply something that God peevishly objects to, but that produce

revulsion in him" (p. 593). Furthermore, the word "perversion" (from the Hebrew word *awah*) is defined not merely as isolated acts of wrong doing:

> [It is] an actual alteration of the condition or character of the sinner. The one who sins becomes twisted or distorted as it were. The true nature for which and in which the human was created (the image and likeness of God) is disturbed. This is both the result and the cause of sin (p. 593).

The conservative view is very clear: any form of same-sex relationship is an abomination, as long as it includes a homosexual act. The notion of gender complementarity remains a prevalent idea held by Christians, including Indonesian Christians. Interestingly, Boellstorff (2007) notices that this idea is also shared by most Indonesian Muslims. In Islam, the sin of homosexuality is considered to be worse than the sin of adultery (*zinah*), because *zinah* is "a disorder in order" while a homosexual act violates "the fundamental order of the world" as it disrupts "the harmonious complementarity of the sexes" (p. 141).

The notion of gender complementary has been challenged by scholars. Dan O. Via in in his response to Gagnon (Via & Gagnon, 2003), argues that the notion of biological or anatomical complementarity is not supported by the biblical texts. Brownson (2013) argues that there is no way to prove that the original Adam of Genesis is a sexually undifferentiated human being divided into male and female. Furthermore, the focus of Genesis 2 is not on the complementarity of male and female, but rather on their similarity. The one-flesh union in Genesis 2 refers to a kinship bond, not a physical complementarity. Furthermore, progressive scholars argue that the broad moral logic of the Scripture texts does not condemn committed, loving, and consecrated same-sex

relationships and offer various biblical interpretations and theological arguments to affirm that a committed Christian same-sex relationship is neither sinful nor inferior to a heterosexual relationship (Achtemeier, 2014; Cheng, 2011; Gaede et al., 1998; Jennings, 2003; W. S. Johnson, 2012; D. B. Martin, 2006; Newlands, 2010).

Almost all churches in Indonesia subscribe to the conservative view of homosexuality. Same-sex relationship is an abomination. The Catholic church refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2016) , where homosexual practices are seen as "the sins gravely contrary to chastity" (para. 2396). Consequently, gay individuals who are living together certainly live against God's will. The only way to fulfill God's will is by terminating the relationship and living in chastity. The *Catechism* states:

> These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition. Homosexual persons are called to chastity. (para. 2358).

This doctrinal statement is also shared by many Protestant churches. When the Communion of Evangelical Chinese-Indonesian Churches (PGTI) issued a pastoral letter in 2016 to counter the Indonesian Communion of Churches' (PGI) pastoral letter, they wrote:

> Believing in Scripture, we reject homosexual behavior because it is against the order of creation and inconsistent with what God planned when He created humanity, which is made up of men and women…. Homosexual people need to be healed and cured…. Those who have experienced the power of Jesus Christ will have the power not to surrender to their sexual desires. Instead they will have

self-control and live in chastity ("Surat Penggembalaan Persekutuan Gereja-gereja

Tionghoa di Indonesia," 2016).

The traditionalists believe that someone who lives against God's will or is "living

in sin" cannot experience God's guidance in their life until they repent of that particular

sin. Consequently, a gay couple's life journey will not be guided by God as long as they

continue their relationship. Erickson (2013) explains that people who are living in sin

become God's enemy; therefore, their relationship with God will be negatively affected.

They will experience divine disfavor, guilt, punishment, and death (p. 619). Sins will also

affect their relationships with other people and make them unable to empathize and

unable to love (pp. 635-636). Finally, sins will drive them to live in enslavement, flight

from reality, denial of sin, self-deceit, insensitivity, self-centeredness, and restlessness

(pp. 632-635).

The traditionalists categorize gay Christians who are living in same-sex

relationship as unspiritual persons. In Scripture, particularly in 1Co 2:14-15, St. Paul

defines "a spiritual person" (*pneumatikos*) as "someone who sought to live under the

influence of God" instead of letting himself or herself be obsessed or preoccupied by

personal satisfaction (Sheldrake, 2012). The mark of a person who grows spiritually can

be seen through the existence in that person of nine attributes that St. Paul called "the

fruit of the Spirit." These attributes are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5: 22 - 23). The attributes are relational in

nature because they become apparent as we strive to develop a deep relationship with

God and a loving and respectful relationship with other people. Therefore, spirituality is a

relational and connecting term because it always involves relationships (Burr, 2009, p.

21). Spirituality grows when a person pursues a deeper relationship with God and other people. This basic notion of spiritually is widely accepted among Christians, including the traditionalists. Lovelace (2002), an Evangelical writer, claims that the goal of authentic spirituality is "to become absorbed in the love of God and other persons," and the substance of real spirituality is love (p. 18). However, this definition was then narrowed down when the author asserted that the love of God should be based on "the fear of the Lord" that comes from an awareness of God's holiness and one's depth of sin (p. 21). Furthermore, this spirituality cannot be achieved by human initiative; instead it is given by the Spirit of God as a gift only to a person who lives in holiness according to Scripture and believes in God who is revealed in Scripture (p. 28). In this narrow definition, non-Christians and gay couples cannot experience spiritual growth because they are not living in holiness. People who are non-Christians do not believe in Christ, so the Holy Spirit it not yet working in their lives. Gay couples also cannot experience spiritual growth because the fact that they are living together in homosexual relationship confirms that they are not God-fearing people.

Research on the Religiosity/spirituality of Gay Christians

Despite a common belief that gay people are unspiritual, studies have shown exactly the opposite to be true. J.L. Empereur (1999), the founder of The Institute of Spirituality and Worship in the Catholic church, pointed out the fact that most spiritual directors who have counseled gay clients have found that those clients pursue a spiritual life and that they are usually "mature, committed men and women who are active in their churches, and whose lives are of the highest integrity" (p. 34). His observation was

supported by "The Report of the Task Force on Gay/Lesbian Issues" presented by the

Commission on Social Justice of the Archdiocese of San Francisco in 1982 (pp. 33-35).

Further research, by Burr (2009), of 30 gay, lesbian, and bisexual people shows that 90%

of them still participate in some sort of spiritual practice and most consider themselves as

possessing a profound spiritual outlook in life. Furthermore, research by Tan (2005) of 93

gays and lesbians revealed that gay people espoused a high level of spiritual well-being.

Using instruments that measure "religious well-being" (RWB, measuring how one relates

to God) and "existential well-being" (EWB, measuring one's sense of life purpose and

satisfaction without religious reference), the study found that gay individuals have a high

level of RWB and EWB. These findings discredit the notion that gay people are

spiritually impoverished. On the contrary, they appear to have rich spiritual lives. Tan's

study also showed that gay people who have a high EWB, indicated by having a positive

image of themselves and their life's purpose, are more likely to overcome internalized

homophobia and feelings of alienation, even if their healthy spirituality does not entail a

reconciliation with the church's teachings and beliefs. A similar result was shown in

Burr's study: "the healthiest homosexuals are those who confidently reject the idea that

they have a psychological disorder" (Burr, 2009, p. 68).

The majority of conservative Christians believe that there is no such thing as a

gay Christian. This term is considered an oxymoron because being gay is perceived as

falling into a sinful lifestyle. As a result, many gay Christians live in a stigmatizing

climate where their religiosity/spirituality is questioned. This stigmatization is not the

unique experience of Indonesian gay Christians. In fact, the lived experience of gay

Christians in Indonesia is similar to that of gay Christians in America's Bible Belt

(Barton, 2012); of gay Evangelicals in the United States (Thumma, 1991), in the United Kingdom (Andrew K. T. Yip, 1997b), in the Netherlands (Ganzevoort & Roeland, 2014), and in Hong Kong (Man, 2003); and of gay Catholics in Ireland (O'Keefe, 2014). These gay Christians all live in a hostile social environment that causes them to be unable to be open about their relationships and to face a lack of support from church and society, yet many of them have not relinquished their religiosity and spirituality. In Indonesia, many gay people and gay couples continue to practice their religiosity publicly and/or privately. Howard (1996) describes this phenomenon in his anthropological fieldwork among gay men in Jakarta from 1991 to 1994:

> All the men of this study shared a capacity to maintain and follow contradictory religious conceptions in changing situations. The Christian and Islamic men of this study all recognized that their religion prohibited homosexuality…. I suggest that the common view that the Indonesian gay world was a dangerous and disorderly pace was underpinned by these religious prohibitions of homosexuality. However, the men of this study… also integrated religion and prayer into daily life in the "gay world".… Such an integration suggests that the men of this study possessed a substantial ability to manage contradiction and maintain a degree of continuity as they moved between the "gay" and "normal" worlds (pp.70-71).

A comparative study conducted by Sherkat (2002) measures and compares religious commitment among heterosexuals, homosexuals, and bisexuals in the U.S. based on the 1991–2000 General Social Surveys. Four aspects were analyzed: church attendance, level of apostasy, frequency of prayer, and biblical belief commitment. The

study found that when compared with heterosexual men, gay men appear to have similar rates of church attendance. Considering that the choice of heterosexual married men to attend church is influenced by their family, Sherkat argues that the average heterosexual man would attend church far less often than homosexual men if the marriage and family factor were not taken into consideration. Gay men are more active in religious organizations and also have a higher frequency of prayer. However, they have slightly less faith that the Bible is the inspired or absolute word of God and are significantly more likely to be apostates.

Research on the Religiosity/spirituality of Gay Christians Couples

A study conducted by Rostosky, Ridge, et al. (2008) indicates that religious/spiritual values are considered to be important resources for gay Christian couples' relationships. Their qualitative study of 14 same-sex couples reveals five interesting facts. (1) Each couple holds a spiritual worldview that influences their values and choices. They often "sanctify" their relationship by giving it spiritual meaning and by rejecting doctrinal beliefs that reject and demonize their sexual identities and relationships. (2) Couples recognize and respect their partner's differences in religious beliefs and practices and learn to compromise. (3) Couples are involved in religious and/or spiritual activities together as an expression of their spiritual values. (4) Couples maintain their relationships in their families and community even if they are discriminated against. (5) Couples receive support for their relationship from family members and affirming religious communities.

This study also reported that over half of the couples have been through a process of

rejecting doctrines that condemn their relationships and adopting affirming spiritual worldviews and beliefs.

Another study, by Johnson (2011), of 150 Christians in same-sex partnership, shows that gay couples' religiosity/spirituality is related to their commitment and relationship satisfaction. Similar to the research findings regarding heterosexual relationships conducted by Mahoney et al. (as cited by J. M. Johnson, 2011), the study proves that proximal religious construct predicts relationship satisfaction and commitment. Johnson uses Mahoney's concept, which divides religious construct into proximal and distal variables. The proximal variable includes participating in joint religious activities and "sanctifying" one's relationship either theistically (believing that God is manifest in one's relationship) or non-theistically (perceiving one's relationship as sacred), while the distal variable includes experiencing a high level of individual religiousness and having the same religious affiliation as that of a partner (homogamy). Johnson found that distal variables did not affect a gay couple's relationship satisfaction and commitment, but proximal variables did. The study shows that gay couples' belief in the presence of God in their relationship and in the sacredness of their relationship has a positive impact on their relationship satisfaction and personal commitment.

Regarding relationship commitment, the study of Andrew K. T. Yip (1997b) addresses the issue of sexual exclusivity in gay couple relationships. By constructing a typology based on gay male Christian couples' sexual expectations and sexual behavior, he divided gay Christian couples into three categories. (1) Category A: couples who expect the partnership to be sexually exclusive and are behaviorally so. (2) Category B: couples who expect the partnership to be sexually exclusive but in reality are

behaviorally non-exclusive because either one or both partners eventually violates the sexual exclusivity commitment they made in the beginning of their partnership. (3) Category C: couples who expect the partnership to be sexually non-exclusive and are behaviorally so.

Yip recruited and interviewed gay Christian couples from each category. While research evidence argued that gay male couples in general tend to demonstrate a trend toward sexual non-exclusivity over time, the study found that gay Christian couples who fit into category A can maintain sexually exclusivity for a long period of time (the mean length of participants' partnerships was 9 years and 5 months). This ability to maintain sexual exclusivity is based on the couples' traditional Christian values. These couples consider sexual exclusivity to be a symbol of total commitment between partners, a symbol of complete mutual satisfaction the partners provide for each other, and a symbol of their commitment to traditional Christian sexual ethics that are usually applied in heterosexual marriage: faithfulness, monogamy, and fidelity. Gay Christian couples in category B reported that their first outside sexual encounter took place unexpectedly, not as a result of their dissatisfaction with their sexual relationship. In category C, gay Christian couples who began their partnership with the expectation of sexual non-exclusivity differentiate between "making love" with their primary partners and "having sex" with casual sex partners. Yip points out that their decision to have a sexually non-exclusive relationship is a result of the absence of Christian guidelines for same-sex partnership and of the rejection by Christian couples of Christian sexual ethics. The participants built their own sense of morality that justified their sexual non-exclusivity.

Managing Conflicts Between Sexual and Religious Identity

Gay Christian individuals/couples instinctively use diverse coping strategies to address conflicts between sexual identity and religiosity or to counter negative religious experience. A study by Rostosky, Otis, et al. (2008) found that stigmatization by the church has made many gay couples prefer to express their religiosity in an internal or private form (such as prayer, meditation, Scripture reading) rather than in a public form (such as attending worship service). This strategy of shifting the form of religious expression does not mean that they underestimate the significance of religion.

Ganzevoort and Roeland's (2014) narrative research of gay Christians describes four other coping strategies that gay Christians use to negotiate between conflicting identity elements of religion and homosexuality: (1) choosing a "religious lifestyle" by committing themselves to religious groups and downplaying or even rejecting homosexual identity elements; (2) choosing a "gay lifestyle" by renouncing their religious affiliation; (3) living in compartmentalization, where people belong to two different worlds (exclusive groups) that support different values, and moving from one identity to the other; (4) integrating sexual and religious identity by fully accepting themselves as gay Christians.

Ganzevoort and Roland argue that people can shift from one coping strategy to another until they find one that suits them; however, their ability to choose alternative coping strategies depends on their religious discourse.[5] The study mentions four types of discourse.

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[5] Religious discourse refers to how religious individuals use language in the context of their faith. For Christians, it involves how they talk about God, immortality, miracles, salvation, prayer, values, ethics (Ostroman, 2006).

(1) Holiness-victory discourse, where life is perceived as a constant struggle with sin and temptation and Christians should pursue victorious/holiness living through personal conversion, a born-again experience, and sanctification through the power of the Holy Spirit.

(2) Subjectivity discourse, where people believe and expect that God communicates directly and personally to them in their lives, the focus being on a personal relationship with and experience of God.

(3) Obedience discourse, where one's life is perceived as a journey of obedience to God's law in Scripture, which is believed to be inerrant and absolutely authoritative.

(4) Responsibility discourse, where a person emphasizes personal responsibility – instead of depending on the church's teaching – to know and to decide what is God's will for one's life journey.

Holiness-victory discourse and obedience discourse rely on a strong external authority, while subjectivity discourse and responsibility discourse have a weaker reliance on external authority. As a result, people with holiness-victory or obedience discourse have a narrower space to explore alternative coping strategies because this move will be seen as disobedience or rebellion. In order to have more options, people with holiness-victory discourse have to transcend that discourse and reframe it in subjectivity discourse, while people with obedience discourse have to reframe their discourse toward responsibility discourse.

I believe that gay Christian couples who want to maintain their relationship and also their participation in the life of the church will not adopt the first coping strategy (choosing a religious lifestyle) because it entails the termination of their relationship. The

second coping strategy (choosing a "gay lifestyle") is also not an option because they do not want to relinquish their religious attachment. The options for them are either compartmentalization (the third strategy) or integrating their sexual and religious identity (the fourth strategy). Compartmentalization is not the best option although in many cases it is unavoidable, particularly if the couples live in a close-knit society with strict and conservative religious beliefs or if by being an openly gay couple they will be confronted with the possibility of losing their family, job, and community. Compartmentalization requires gay couples to keep their sexual identity and relationship hidden from most people around them and to erect barriers to isolate their "gay life" from other parts of their lives. This is essentially a transitional phase that cannot be maintained over an extended period of time because it creates a psychological tension that has to be resolved (Rosario, Yali, Hunter, & Gwadz, 2006).

Compartmentalization can undermine a couple's mental health. Mahaffy's (1996) study of 163 self-identified lesbians concludes that a homosexual person who holds two different, irreconcilable beliefs will experience psychological discomfort known as cognitive dissonance. The findings also show that the lesbians who struggled with cognitive dissonance held an evangelical identity and that more than half of the participants altered their beliefs rather than leave the church or live with cognitive dissonance. This change included participating in therapy, separating spirituality from religion, and disregarding Scripture passages that condemn homosexuality and affirming belief and tradition that welcomed them (p. 397). A study in Australia conducted by Subhi and Geelan (2012) confirmed that gay persons who live in compartmentalization suffer from depression, self-blame and guilt, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and alienation.

Another study, by Barton (2012), among gay Christians in the U.S. Bible Belt shows that

gay persons who live in compartmentalization experience depression, low self-esteem,

and a sense of worthlessness. For gay Christian couples, compartmentalization results in

a great deal of stress and tension in their relationships. Since their relationship is

unknown and unrecognized, they feel as though they are carrying on a surreptitious affair

and that their relationship is flawed and inferior. The inarticulation negates those

relationships and the importance of them, making tough times much tougher and making

it more difficult for the couples to build relationships that last. A similar struggle was also

found in gay Christian couples in England who participated in Yip's mixed methods

research (1997c).

Compartmentalization can evolve into the rejection of religion, but it can also

trigger an effort to integrate gay couples' religious and sexual identity (the fourth

strategy). This is the most advantageous coping strategy for gay Christian couples

although their religious communities will not acknowledge or appreciate their integrated

identity as gay Christians, not to mention gay Christians in partnership. This integration

does not necessarily mean that they have to openly proclaim their sexual identities or

sexual relationships in front of an antagonistic church or community. Integration of

religious and sexual identity comes from the inner self, and it can be achieved through an

identity negotiation (Thumma, 1991) or through reframing the discourse toward

subjectivity discourse or responsibility discourse. The theologizing process is needed for

identity negotiation or discourse reframing. Andrew K. T. Yip (1999) study provides an

example of how a gay person and/or a gay couple can reframe their discourse. Yip

interviewed 60 gay male Christians in partnership and found that only 10 of them

(16.7%) had stopped participating in church. The rest continued to participate in church activities despite the church's rejection of same-sex identities and relationships. Yet these gay Christians were able to resolve the dissonance between their sexual and religious identities, using what Yip called "the politics of counter-rejection" of the Church or "attacking the stigma and the stigmatizer" (p. 50).

Yip's analysis of respondents' accounts reveals four arguments used in this politics of counter-rejection: (1) that the church is ignorant regarding sex and sexuality; (2) that the church is ignorant of all sexualities as part of God's creation; (3) that the church misinterprets biblical passages on homosexuality; and (4) that the church is not infallible. These arguments enable gay Christians to discount the credibility of the church. Another study by Yip (1997a) mentions two other arguments that gay people use as the politics of counter-rejection: the ontogeneric argument (for example, all sexualities are created, sustained, and blessed by God) and the use of positive personal experience to explain that the homosexuality that the church disapproves of does not reflect the kind of homosexuality that they personally experience.

I consider this last argument unique and important because it is not built upon an intellectual debate on Christian doctrine; instead it proceeds naturally from personal reflection, spiritual experience, and common sense. It demonstrates that knowledge of gay-friendly theology is not a prerequisite for a gay person to work on the process of theologizing. Yet theological knowledge (such as knowledge of gay-friendly theology) is important to provide a solid and coherent theological stand for gay people, a stand which will eventually strengthen their integrated personal belief. This belief is not totally in line

with traditional church doctrine, but it is also not totally different. It is a synthesis of orthodox and unorthodox belief.

While Yip's (1997a, 1999) study shows how identity negotiation can be achieved through the individual theologizing process, a study by Thumma (1991) reveals how identity negotiation can be achieved collectively through the process of socialization. Thumma studied an Evangelical gay Christian group called "Good News," a parachurch organization built for gay Evangelicals who feel the need to resolve their cognitive dissonance without losing their Evangelical identity. This is a difficult task because the basic tenets of Evangelical belief are the doctrine of inerrancy of the Bible and a traditional moral conservatism that rejects homosexuality.

Thumma describes five steps used by Good News for this identity negotiation: (1) Members are convinced that it is permissible to alter the traditional doctrines that are irrelevant because this alteration is also Bible-based and therefore does not undervalue the validity and efficacy of the Bible. Members are convinced that this process of doctrinal revision is a spiritual quest. (2) The revised doctrines are thought to bring about identity revision. The pre-alteration doctrines are depicted as part of a belief system that arose from flawed reasoning and incorrect learning; then specific Bible passages that have been used to condemn homosexuality are reinterpreted using a historical-critical hermeneutic (an approach that is rejected among Evangelicals). (3) These cognitive activities are followed by evangelistic activities. Members who have been liberated are encouraged to spread the Gospel of God's love to gay people while continuing to attend their local Evangelical church. They also hold activities that are common in Evangelical churches such as prayer meetings, Bible studies, and spiritual retreats. (4) The newly

revised identity is maintained by group members through negating and devaluing their former identity, seeing people outside the group (either conservative churches or secular gay groups) as "unenlightened." (5) The group members maintain their strict adherence to orthodox doctrines that are not related to their sexuality, such as the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, sin and salvation through Christ, and biblical inspiration.

Thumma concludes that this identity revision can be accomplished because of two factors: the willingness of the individual to be an active negotiator and the group dynamics that promote change. I describe this process as a collective process of theologizing. It is clear that there is a religious creativity involved in this process. Good News members maintain their holiness-victory discourse and/or obedience discourse; however, some content of these discourses has been altered. The religious beliefs and practices of the Good News members look quite similar to those of the traditional Evangelicals. Thumma reported that these gay Evangelicals forcefully affirm their Evangelical heritage and often become even more pious and orthodox. However, their doctrines on human sexuality and on the inerrancy of the Bible, and their ethical position on many issues, are completely unorthodox.

In recent years, some organizations similar to Good News have been established; these include The Reformation Project (www.reformationproject.org) and Evangelicals Concerned Inc. (ecinc.org). Furthermore, many progressive scholars have provided gay Christians with biblical interpretations that support same-sex relationships. Yip (2012) reports on the emergence of lesbian and gay-affirming sexual theology in the West, an emergence that is reflected in the abundance of scholarly research on LGBTQI religiosity/spirituality that can be divided into three categories: defensive apologetics (re-

contextualizing Biblical passages which have been conventionally used to reject homosexuality), revelation of religious texts that contain same-sex eroticism and intimacy, development of a sexual theology and ethics from human embodiment and experience. All of this research serves as an important resource for empowering gay Christians in the process of theologizing. Unfortunately, much of it is inaccessible to ordinary ICGMPs. Regardless, the lack of access to these resources is not a hindrance for IGCMPs in carrying out the process of theologizing because they can use their personal reflection and spiritual experiences to creatively construct their personal theology.

Maintaining A Committed Same-sex Partnership

There is a misconception that same-sex partners do not desire and are not capable of maintaining permanent relationships. Peplau and Cochran's (1990) review of same-sex relationship research in the U.S. indicates that between 40% and 60% of gays are involved in a steady relationship at any given time. Moreover, the degree of relationship satisfaction of same-sex couples is not significantly different from that of heterosexual couples.

Many same-sex couples who have maintained long-term relationships consider monogamy agreement to be important. Gotta et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative study that examined the difference in commitment to monogamy among lesbians, gay men, and heterosexuals at two points in time (1975 and 2000) using responses of 6,864 participants from two archival data sets. They found that there was a significant decrease in the percentage of gay men that reported having sex outside their relationship or having a meaningful extra-relational love affair after they became a couple; this was especially the

case among the younger cohort of gay men and lesbians who desired longer-term monogamous, committed, and legally recognized relationships. A study by Green and D'Augelli, et al. (as cited in Gotta et al., 2011) concludes that the increasing acceptance of same-sex couples in U.S. society has contributed to increased monogamous commitment among younger gay men as the social and legal support resulting from this acceptance has encouraged these couples to solidify and maintain their commitment. The study also shows that the frequency of conflict experienced by same-sex couples is no different from the frequency of conflict in heterosexual relationships.

What makes same-sex relationships endure? A recent qualitative study by Riggle, Rothblum, Rostosky, Clark, and Balsam (2016) investigates 31 same-sex couples who have been in relationship for 13 to 41 years (mean length = 22.6 years). The study reveals six factors that have contributed to the longevity of these relationships.

(1) Communication: having daily communication and being open and honest with each other and treating each other with respect and kindness when they communicate.

(2) Similarities in values related to goals, experiences, and ideas, backgrounds, and spending habits.

(3) Complementary similarities and differences (their appreciation of their similarities and/or differences has created an acceptance of and respect for each other).

(4) Sharing experiences by spending time together.

(5) Commitment to the relationship by working continually on their relationship as the relationship grows and changes.

(6) Support from others, especially from members of families of origin and friends.

The six factors mentioned above will be difficult to achieve if a couple is in a non-cohabiting relationship.

A study by Haas and Whitton (2015) using qualitative data from 526 individuals in cohabiting same-sex relationships in the United States shows that cohabitation is significant for gay partnership. Living together is an important symbol of relationship commitment and permanence. Cohabitation signifies a major step in a couple's relationship and it is the strongest level of commitment possible for couples who live in a place where same-sex marriage is not available. It is "a primary symbol of serious commitment" because it indicates the couple's willingness to build a permanent long-term relationship and to leave a situation where their relationship is merely seen as a temporary "dating" relationship" (p. 1249). Participants reported that cohabitation made them a family, enabled them to share a life together, and provided them with emotional benefits such as the possibility of enjoying time together.

Strohm, Seltzer, Cochran, and Mays (2009) held a quantitative study of people who were living in a non-cohabiting relationship, also known as an LAT ("Living Apart Together") relationship, including gay couples. They estimated that around 15% of lesbians and 17% of gay men in the United States are LAT. This non-residential partnership was more appealing for same-sex couples who did not want their relationships to be stigmatized. LAT relationships can keep sexuality more private than living together in the same place. The study examined the difference between couples in LAT relationships and couples in cohabiting relationships. It shows that people in LAT relationships "perceive similar amounts of emotional support from partners, but less instrumental support than cohabiters perceive" (p. 1). In other words, there is no

significant difference between those in LAT relationships and cohabiting partnerships in terms of how much individuals say their partners understand their feelings. However, couples in LAT relationships are less likely to say that they can heavily rely on their partners for help when they face a serious problem. It is unsurprising that Haas and Whitton's (2015) study indicates a growing desire among same-sex couples to be married, supposing that same-sex union or civil marriage is available.

Civil marriage has indeed strengthened gay couples' relationship commitment, according to a comparative study carried out by Solomon, Rothblum, and Balsam (2004). The study compared gay and lesbian participants who had entered into civil unions in the year following the legalization of same-sex unions in Vermont, gay and lesbian men and women who had not entered into civil unions, and heterosexual married men and women. They found that gay men not in civil unions were significantly more likely to report that they had seriously considered and discussed ending their relationship than were gay men in civil unions and heterosexual married men. The study also shows that gay men in civil unions were closer to their family of origin than gay men not in civil unions because the legalization of their relationships resulted in more visibility to their family and society. Another study, by Schecter, Tracy, Page, and Luong (2008), indicates an additional positive impact of the formalization of same-sex relationships. Around 25% of same-sex couples in the study chose not to mark their commitment with any ceremony while the majority (75%) had formalized their relationship in non-legal commitment ceremonies, legal weddings, or both. These couples reported that the ceremony had greatly impacted their sense of commitment. It also resulted in a higher degree of recognition among those in their social circles, regardless of the legality of the ceremony. Couples who legally

married also reported unforeseen and unexpected but profound impacts of getting married: a qualitative deepening of commitment, a feeling of release from marginalization and internalized homophobia, a sense of entitlement to call their partner wife/husband and to receive recognition of their legal status, and a changing attitude in family and professional relationships toward more acceptance.

Social support from family and community is indeed important for gay couples. When Todosijevic, Rothblum, and Solomon (2005) examined relationship satisfaction, affect, and stress among 313 same-sex couples who had entered civil unions in Vermont during the first year of this legislation, they found that the specific stress experienced by gay couples resulted from concern about violence/harassment from society and the issue of HIV/AIDS, whereas lesbian couples experienced more stress related to negative family reaction to their sexuality, including rejection, lack of support, and lack of understanding of their sexual orientation. Despite the fact that same-sex relationships have many similarities with opposite-sex relationships, research shows that many gay couples obtain less social support from family members than heterosexual couples (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Kurdek, 2001). As a result, they often have to rely more on their intimate relationships as a source for such support. The lack of social support, particularly if it is caused by the stigmatized status of the couple's same-sex relationship, can create stress that affects same-sex couples' relational well-being and their individual mental health (LeBlanc, Frost, & Wight, 2015).

Research on same-sex relationships in Indonesia is sparse. Howard's (1996) three-year anthropological fieldwork study (1991-1994) conducted among lower-income gay men of various ethnicities in Jakarta shows that the centrality of heterosexual

marriage is a major challenge for gay people in maintaining a committed same-sex relationship. He points out that in Indonesia, every man is required to get married and have children in order to become "dewasa" (an adult/a whole person). Only when a man gets married, can he effectively function as a dutiful husband and provider and thus be considered an adult who has fulfilled his "kodrat" (essential divinely inspired nature). For parents, seeing their sons married and raising families of their own is considered to be the fulfillment of their final and most important task in life. As a result, a man decides to get married not only for his own sake, but also to fulfill his parents' life goals and to maintain harmony with significant social others. Getting married also opens the way for a man to receive emotional and financial support from both his own family and that of his wife. This centrality of marriage forces many gay couples, usually gay men with lower income, to marry a woman for the sake of performing their duty and fulfilling their obligations to the family. In the meantime, they try to maintain their same-sex relationship after marriage. This relationship is usually not stable and is difficult to maintain for the long term. Howard reported that most gay men who are able to avoid marriage are financially successful; they have the financial means to distance themselves from family pressure and eventually find a same-sex partner. Some men try to escape from the social pressure to get married by forming long-term relationships with foreigners and eventually migrating to other countries at the cost of breaking their relationship with their family.

Howard's finding about the centrality of marriage is confirmed by Boellstorff (1999, 2005), who points out the paramount importance of heteronormativity in Indonesian society. He sees that heterosexual marriage has been perceived as a coming-of-age ritual and the only acceptable basis for a pious life, particularly among Indonesian

gay Muslims. A study by McNally, Grierson, and Hidayana (2015) affirms that the

centrality of marriage is still in place today. Nearly all of the young, single gay men of

the ninety-nine who participated in their 2015 research planned to get married and have

children in order to maintain social harmony within their families and communities. The

importance of maintaining social harmony also explains why compartmentalization (a

coping strategy to manage multiple and conflicting identities by concealing one of them,

depending on the context) becomes a way of life for many Indonesian gay men and why

many gay couples' relationships are nonpermanent and unstable.

The Necessity of Affirming Rites for Gay Couple Partnership

According to Van Gennep (1960), human beings need rituals to enable them to

grow into maturity. Rituals are especially needed in times of transition or in times when

people experience spiritual discomfort that prevents them from growing and being whole.

These rituals are known as rites of passage. One of the most common transition rites is

the marriage ritual, which marks the transition between the end of living alone and the

beginning of living together. Rites of passage consist of three phases: separation from the

old status, transition, and incorporation into the new status. When the relationship is

sanctioned with a life-passage ritual, the couple's commitment is properly valued. As a

result, they have an opportunity to receive the social and spiritual support they really

need to stay together.

When gay couples begin their partnership, they also face a significant transition in

their life. Furthermore, they experience spiritual discomfort because living in a gay

relationship puts the partners into the category of "living in sin." Theoretically, they need

a ritual or ceremony to mark their transition, to strengthen their commitment, and to receive encouragement that can empower their journey, knowing that they are blessed by God and supported by a community that accepts them as they are. Marcus (1998) describes why a ceremony like this was so important for his same-sex partnership:

> The ceremony changed how supported we felt in our relationship by our friends and family, who treated us differently after we'd made a public commitment…. Everyone who attended the ceremony… had the opportunity to see that our love and our commitment were no different than the love and commitment between a man and a woman who marry…. He is no longer my boyfriend, a potentially temporary thing; he is my partner. Now, for example, when we get invitations, they are always addressed to the two of us. Our young nephews and nieces call us "uncle" (Marcus, 1998, p. 151).

The absence of affirming rites means that a couple's commitment is not properly valued and they are denied the opportunity to receive social support. It is unsurprising that in the past, the craving for a same-sex blessing ritual has driven many people to seek such kinds of blessing secretly. Before the twentieth century, there were many cases where certain kinds of ritual were used to bless the unions of same-sex couples. In 1578, two Portuguese men were said to have performed "a criminal ceremony" because they married in Rome using a standard heterosexual marriage rite (Jordan, 2013). Bray (2006) observes the existence of sworn friendship in England from the high Middle Ages into the nineteenth-century. There were same-sex Christian couples whose friendship was either memorialized by church monuments or blessed using a rite of sworn friendship. Bray is not sure whether the friendship had a sexual aspect, but he is certain that the rites

were related to traditional marriage rites as they included an exchange of rings and a shared communion. However, they were neither the same as nor based on marriage rites. Jordan (2013) shows that in the United States, as early as seventy years ago, same-sex couples celebrated unions performed by regular clergy of disapproving denominations in homes or locked churches or performed in renegade churches or communities. Since the 1970s, individual pastors have been openly performing same-sex union rituals in some U.S. cities. Similar cases occur in Indonesia, where, I was informed, some pastors and Muslim clerics have also secretly blessed same-sex couples. In all of these cases, it is clear that same-sex couples need a ritual to signify or mark their commitment to the relationship. The absence of such ritual can drive them to create their own private rituals to compensate for that absence.

Booker and Dodd (2009) point out that gay couples whose relationships do not undergo any social rituals to signify each person's commitment to the relationship experience some confusion or ambiguity about how to define their relationship. To cope with the absence of ritual, they create private rituals or events, such as moving in together or merging finances, to signify varying degrees of seriousness. Marcus (1998) interviewed forty gay and lesbian couples in the United States who had been together for nine to fifty years. All of these couples entered their committed relationship long before gay marriage was recognized in mainline churches. He found that more than half the couples had exchanged rings and some had had non-religious public commitment ceremonies. Some Christian couples went to church and after the worship, swore an oath which indicated that they considered themselves married. One couple engaged in seven personal marriage ceremonies during the nearly two decades they had been together.

Although personal ritual can be created and held privately, the absence of public rituals will result in a sense of illegitimacy because there is no witness to validate the same-sex couple's relationship. For this purpose, social recognition may be obtained by inviting friends and family to a party where the couple can create a unique ritual to mark the relationship.

Chapter 3: Research Design

The central question of this present research is how do Indonesian gay male

Christians in partnership (IGMCPs) make sense of their spiritual lives and develop their

lived religion when they try to form and maintain a committed same-sex relationship in a

church and a society that disapprove of that relationship. This is an exploratory question

that can be investigated most effectively through qualitative research, particularly

employing the phenomenological research approach.

I chose the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach for two

reasons. First, IPA is a qualitative research approach that is interested in examining how

people make sense of major, life-changing experiences. It assumes that every time

humans are confronted by a life-changing experience, we as "sense-making creatures"

will naturally reflect on the significance of what is happening (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p.

3).The IPA approach seems to be ideal for the current research because it focuses on the

experience of IGCMPs who decided to get involved in a long-term same-sex relationship.

This decision definitely propelled them into a major life-changing experience because

they were forced to negotiate their somewhat conflicting, or even irreconcilable, cultural,

religious, and sexual identities. Second, IPA is designed as a means not only to explore

participants' experiences, but also to examine their perceptions or interpretation of their

experiences. These interpretations are reinterpreted by the researcher. This twofold sense-

making process creates a multi-perspective means of looking at the phenomenon which is

intended "to maximize holistic understanding rather than to achieve consensus or truth"

about the phenomenon (Coyle, 2010). Discussions related to the spirituality/religiosity of

gay Christians are usually polarized into two competing theological positions because there is no consensus around nor definition of truth. This research is not interested in evaluating whether the participants' beliefs or interpretation of their spiritual/religious experiences are "true" or authentic according to certain theological positions. Instead, it is directed toward obtaining a holistic understanding of the IGCMPs' lived religion. Therefore, the IPA approach is highly appropriate for this research.

I will present a brief description of the philosophical underpinnings of the qualitative methodology being used, followed by the specific research design utilized for this study.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience or the "life world" (Van Manen, 1990). The term "life world" means the world or reality as experienced by a person through his or her point of view. Phenomenology focuses on a *phenomenon,* which means "that which appears" or a thing that appears or manifests itself in the consciousness of the experiencer (Moran, 2000). When a phenomenon appears, it is usually experienced in a pre-reflective or "taken-for-granted" mode. Subsequently, we conceptualize, categorize, or give meaning to the phenomenon. We study this phenomenon in order to return to and re-examine the experience, to take a fresh look at our experience and possibly uncover new or forgotten meanings (Laverty, 2003). A phenomenological analysis will not explain or discover causes; instead it will clarify the meanings of the phenomenon being investigated.

Inaugurated by Edmund Husserl, phenomenology was initially a disciplinary field of philosophy that studied the structures of experience and consciousness from the first-

person point of view (D. W. Smith, 2013). Later, this philosophy evolved and was applied to various types of phenomenological research methodology that aimed to describe and/or interpret the common meaning of a phenomenon experienced by several individuals in a composite description of the essence of that phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). All methods have the same objective: to explore the structure or the essence of life experience, to shed light on an experience that may otherwise be taken for granted in our lives, and to understand the phenomenon of the experience. However, scholars have come up with different concepts around the philosophical ideas of terms used in phenomenology, such as consciousness, intentionality, and phenomenological reduction. Even scholars who agree on certain philosophical ideas interpret and apply the philosophy differently. Therefore, there is no singular concept, idea, or methodology in phenomenology.

There are three major phenomenological research approaches. The first two, descriptive and interpretive phenomenology, are traditional, longstanding approaches, while the third, heuristic phenomenology, is newer and more like narrative enquiry. Pure descriptive phenomenology was invented by Husserl, who insisted that the task of phenomenology is to study phenomena as they appear through consciousness. Phenomenological research attempts to find the essence of the phenomenon by describing types of subjective acts of consciousness (mental activity or experience) as well as the objective content of consciousness. This is not an easy task because the examination of the structure and content of the conscious experience is usually inhibited and distorted by one's assumptions about or scientific knowledge of those experiences. For that reason, Husserl proposed the method of bracketing or phenomenological reduction, which

involves "setting aside our prejudgments, biases, and preconceived ideas about things" to focus on analysis of experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).However, this idea has been criticized and rejected by some scholars, primarily Martin Heidegger, who argued that bracketing out preconceptions is neither possible nor desirable because researching lived experience is an interpretative process (Van Manen, 1990). Husserl's method has been modified and applied in a series of more concrete steps by scholars such as Adrian van Kaam and Amedeo Giorgi to meet the expectations and demands of conducting modern human science research (Van Manen, 2014).

The descriptive research method is suitable for studying a phenomenon that is not well known or familiar. Participants are expected to describe their experiences of that phenomenon, not to interpret them. The researcher also should make no interpretation because any description that is developed must be based solely on what is given by participants. The aim of my research is not only to describe the experience of IGCMPs, but also to know how participants make meaning of or interpret their experience. Therefore, descriptive phenomenology is not a suitable approach for this research.

The heuristic method was developed by Moustakas (1990). In contrast to the idea of bracketing, this method requires researchers' involvement. Researchers need to recreate the phenomenon being investigated in a certain way so that it becomes their own lived experience (Moustakas, 1990, p. 39). It is assumed that by experiencing the phenomenon, researchers will be able to enter into a process of discovery and fully understand the essence and the depth of the phenomenon. Moustakas differentiates between codified knowing and tacit knowing (Kenny, 2012). Codified knowing can be transmitted in formal systematic language and is explicit in nature. In contrast, tacit

knowing is personal, subjective, context-specific, implicit, and it is closely related to intuition. As tacit knowing is a crucial component in the heuristic method, researchers should maintain the attitude of being completely open to discovering new meanings through observation, personal reflection, and intuition, until they reach the illumination phase, where themes, qualities, and patterns of the phenomenon emerge and a new awareness or understanding of the phenomenon presents itself (Casterline, 2009). The heuristic method is deeply personal and inward in nature because it uses the self ("my perspective") as a starting point of research. This method is particularly suited for use in the field of counseling and psychotherapy. This research is more outward in nature as it focuses on participants' religious/theological perspective toward their life experience; therefore, the heuristic approach is not appropriate for this research project.

Hermeneutic/Interpretative Phenomenology

This study utilizes the interpretive research method, which is designed not only to describe a particular phenomenon but also to demonstrate how individuals make meaning of it. In contrast to Husserl's argument that the intended meaning is conceived in human consciousness, Martin Heidegger argued that consciousness is not separate from the world. The intended meaning is conceived in being and language. Phenomena are not directed from human beings (as knowers) out into the world; instead they come into being as humans relate with things and with one another in the world. Therefore, the main issue is not consciousness, but *being*: "what it is to be in the world in various intentional ways" (Vagle, 2014, p. 38). Our historical background includes what we have been given from our culture since birth, what has enabled us to understand the world. It is through this understanding that we experience and interpret phenomena. When a certain

phenomenon manifests itself, we find ourselves in states of being and later "exercise a formative and affective effect" on our being (Van Manen, 2014, p. 27) and give meaning to the experience using our language. In this perspective, phenomenology is always both descriptive and interpretive because it always requires linguistic and hermeneutic interpretation. As our understanding of the everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it, bracketing or negating our own experiences is impossible. Personal awareness is intrinsic to human beings. Therefore, the interpretive method moves beyond the description or the essence of the experience and seeks meanings that are embedded in everyday life or lived experience (Moran, 2000).

In practice, the interpretive method allows the researchers to use their prior knowledge and insight when the phenomenon is being investigated in order to interpret and uncover its hidden meaning. Instead of distancing themselves from participants, researchers should reduce the distance between them. While conducting in-depth interviews, they are interested in how people make sense of their lives, their experiences, and the reality of the phenomenon. To really understand participants' opinions and perceptions, researchers also have to know their social and cultural context so that they can develop a more accurate and appropriate interpretation (Benner, 1994). The result is a descriptive representation not only of the phenomenon, but also of the phenomenological meaning and significance of the phenomenon in relation to its context.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA research attempts to examine in detail how participants make sense of or interpret a certain phenomenon; therefore, it aims not only to explore their experiences but also to explore their perceptions of that phenomenon. In the process, the IPA

researcher engages in a double interpretation or hermeneutic activity. At first, participants interpret their own experience when they tell the researcher about their case. Subsequently, the participant's interpretation has to be reinterpreted by the researcher as he/she explores in detail the similarities and differences between each participant's case and finds common themes that emerge from summarizing all of the participants' experiences. It is the recognition of the researcher's central role in making sense of the participants' experience that differentiates IPA from other descriptive phenomenological approaches (Pringle, Drummond, McLafferty, & Hendry, 2011).

IPA has its theoretical foundation in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography. The approach takes on Heidegger's idea that human beings are immersed or "thrown into a world of objects, relationships, and language" (J. A. Smith et al., 2009, p. 18); therefore, they are always involved in meaning-making activities in their engagement with the world. Consequently, phenomenology is always interpretative in nature. IPA also takes into account Merleau-Ponty's idea of the importance of *body*-subjects or the embodied nature of how a human being relates to the world. The body shapes the fundamental character of our knowing about the world. Our perception of "other" always comes from our own unique embodied perspective; therefore, the lived experience of every participant in IPA research should not be generalized or overlooked. Another leading figure in phenomenological philosophy, Jean-Paul Sartre, contributed to IPA the idea that human nature is more about becoming than being, and the ongoing project of becoming occurs in encounters with others. For this reason, the process of analysis in IPA should take into account participants' experiences not in isolation, but in their context and their relationship with the world and others. Overall, IPA recognizes

that the outcome of qualitative analysis represents an interaction between participants'
accounts and the researcher's interpretative frameworks.

IPA uses hermeneutics to interpret participants' textual data in order to offer
meaningful insights which "exceed and subsume the explicit claims" of participants (J. A.
Smith et al., 2009, p. 23). It utilizes the hermeneutical circle that focuses attention on the
dynamic relationship between the part and the whole. To understand a particular part of
the data, the researcher will look into the whole. To understand the whole, he/she will
look into the parts. The researcher may move back and forth through different levels of
data analysis. In the process, the researcher's pre-understanding is revised and a deeper
understanding of the phenomenon is formed.

In general, IPA concepts and data analysis procedures are similar to those of other
Heideggerian phenomenological approaches such as that of Leonard (1994). However,
IPA uses an ideographic approach (a tendency to specify instead of generalizing) by
capturing the detail and conducting a depth analysis of each participant's data. As a
result, IPA studies use a relatively small sample size. Also, themes are carried forward
from the first participant account to build on or add to subsequent accounts. Because the
sample is small, it should be as homogenous as possible. For this purpose, the researcher
should carefully define the relevancy parameters for all participants.

Participants

Participants were recruited through three recruitment methods. First, IGCMPs
whose names are in my personal contact list were asked through a phone call whether
they wished to participate in this study. Second, participants were recruited through peer
referral from leaders of LGBT organizations. I contacted these leaders and explained the

purpose of the research and the criteria for participants needed for the study. Subsequently they passed the information on to those who might have an interest in participating. One leader posted a recruitment notice on the page of his secret Facebook group. LGBT leaders then gave me contact numbers of those who were willing to participate. Third, the snowballing sampling method was used, whereby participants who volunteered referred others (including their partner, as long as he met the criteria) whom they believed would enjoy participating.

An electronic mail was sent to everyone who wanted to participate, along with an attached copy of the Informed Consent Form stating the purpose of the research, outlining participant confidentiality and rights, and providing my email address and cell phone number (see Appendix A, and Appendix B for the English translation). The soft-copy of the Informed Consent Form was given prior to the interview so that potential participants would be aware of what taking part in the interview would involve. A few days later, I called them to determine whether they had decided to take part in the study, after discussing the information written in the consent form to ensure that they were fully informed and capable of giving consent.

Participants were recruited based on three criteria: that they were an Indonesian Christian gay male, at least 18 years of age, that they had been in a committed same-sex relationship for at least one year, and that they were active members of either a Protestant or Catholic church community. Thirteen persons agreed to participate in the research. Three persons were contacted through my contact list, six persons were recruited from peer referral, and four other persons joined the research project through snowballing

referral. Three of these referrals were participants' partners who are Christians. Figure 2 maps the participant recruitment process.

This sample size includes the three participants of the Pilot Study. This number is adequate as IPA is primarily concerned with a detailed account of individual experiences and with realizing the complexity of human phenomena (J. A. Smith et al., 2009).
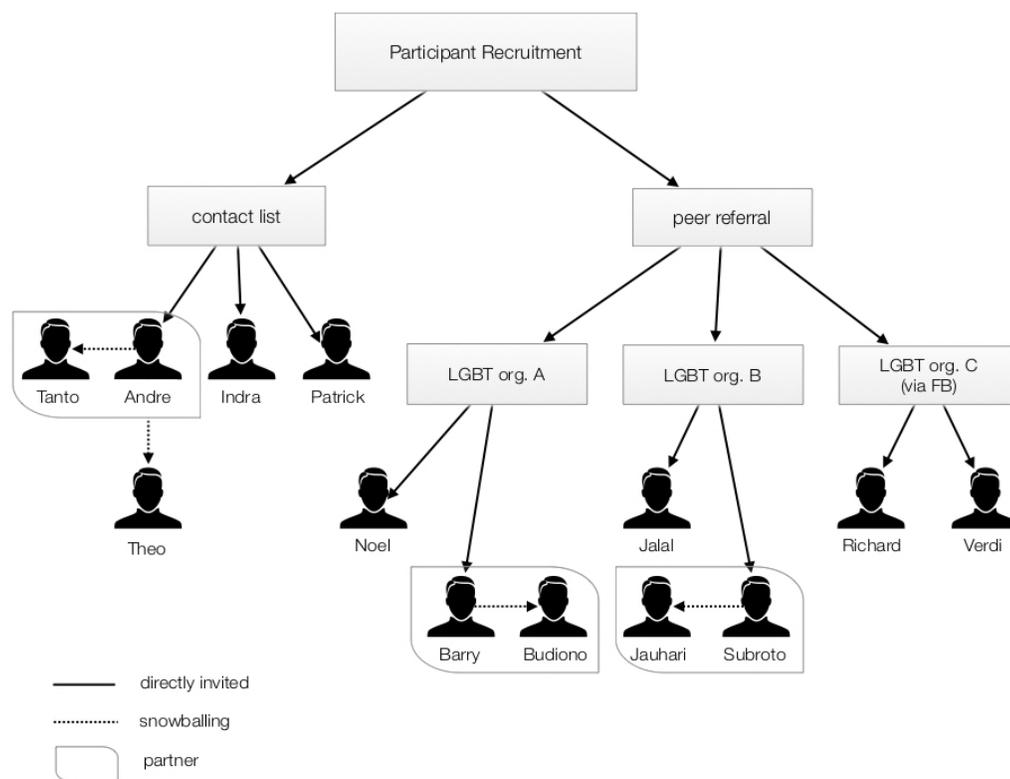
Figure 2. Participant Recruitment Process

Data Collection Procedure

Interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient to each participant; locations were also selected with participants' privacy in mind. Five sets of interviews

took place in private homes and five others in quiet reserved rooms/spaces in restaurants or hotels, based on the participants' recommendations. Before the interviews began, a hard copy of the Informed Consent Form was given to participants and was explained. I asked if they had further questions regarding the Informed Consent and reminded them that they were free to withdraw from this research at any point. Finally, I obtained participants' signatures on the consent form. Participants then signed the form and completed the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix C), a written questionnaire that consists of basic demographic information, including age, ethnicity, educational background, occupation, religious denomination, involvement in church or other religious institution, etc.

A semi-structured interview with 14 open-ended questions was used (see Appendix E), ensuring sufficient flexibility to adjust the questions to the participant's responses. The duration of the interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes for each participant. All information provided by the participants was stored digitally. The interviews were recorded with an audio digital recording device while I made additional notes as needed. Pseudonyms were used for interviews to ensure that anonymity is maintained.

After each interview session, the digital recordings were transferred to my laptop computer, using the participant's pseudonym as a file name.

Data Analysis Procedure

I applied the J. A. Smith et al. (2009) guidelines for IPA to analyze the data. A verbatim transcription of each interview was made using the computer program InqScribe. The transcription includes notes of notable non-verbal utterances, significant

pauses, and hesitations. Following the transcribing process, I read the first transcript while listening to the audio-recording version numerous times in order to determine the overall structure of the interview and to immerse myself in the data. I underlined text that seemed important and made notes and exploratory comments on the side, categorizing them into descriptive (describing the content of what is said), linguistic (exploring the specific use of language), or conceptual (analyzing the implicit meaning of what was said). The next step was to develop emergent themes, then to search for connections across these emergent themes until a set of themes that fit with the whole account was found. The process was repeated for the next participant's transcript. Finally, I looked for common patterns across the cases until the final set of themes that was shared by the participants was formed. All transcripts, exploratory comments, emerging themes, and final themes were written up in the Indonesian language (*Bahasa Indonesia*). In writing up the results, I translated the themes and excerpts from the transcript into English.

Trustworthiness

An IPA research project uses the "double hermeneutic" process, where the researcher is not a distant observer, but is fully engaged in interpreting a phenomenon explained or interpreted by participants. Rodham, Fox, and Doran (2015) noted one weakness in the process is that the researcher's preconceptions and/or experiences can lead to over-interpretation in the analytical process. In order to minimize this bias and to ensure the trustworthiness of the data analysis, they suggest that the researcher develop "a curious stance" toward new phenomena that will emerge from the data under investigation and develop "a reflexive attitude," an awareness of the potential influence of his or her own preconceptions (p. 62). They recommend that researchers listen to the

audio recording of the interviews instead of totally relying on the transcribed text to analyze the data because the interviewee's voice (words, intonation, volume, and emphasis) convey more complete information about the interviewee's point of view and bring into awareness the researcher's own biased perspective, which should be acknowledged (p. 67). I followed their recommendation in analyzing the data in this study.

Pringle et al. (2011) point out another weakness of the IPA approach. The results of ideographic studies that use small sample numbers can be subjective even though the small sample allows for a richer depth of analysis. However, these weaknesses can be eliminated if the result is sufficiently related to current literature to ensure that the research result is objective and transferable (p. 22). In the present study, each theme that emerged from the data analysis has been related, in the discussion section, to relevant literature.

Some added measures were taken in order to reinforce validity. First, I took pains to ensure that the group of participants was reasonably homogeneous. Therefore, only participants who matched the criteria could be included in the study. Second, a considerable number of verbatim extracts were taken from the participants' interview material to support every argument being made. Third, I wrote a summary of each interview and sent it to the respective participant to double-check whether I had correctly interpreted his account. Participants were given an opportunity to correct the interview data or to add further clarification.

Ethical Considerations

As this research topic requires the use of very sensitive and personal information, the questions asked in the interview were carefully chosen and were reviewed and approved by an ethics review committee before the interviews were conducted. Informed consent to participate was ensured through providing an Informed Consent Form (Appendix A), which clearly set out information about the study, including the purpose of the research, what taking part would involve, who would have access to the data, and how it would be stored. Upon meeting each of the participants, I ensured that he had read and understood the contents of the Informed Consent Form. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without needing to give a reason for doing so.

Confidentiality, safety and anonymity are critically important for participants as they tend to keep their sexuality hidden. To avoid threat or harm to the participants, to others, and/or to the researcher, each interview location was carefully selected together with participants to ensure that it was safe. To prevent participants from experiencing distress caused by sharing sensitive information, I reminded them that they could choose not to answer certain questions during the interviews. Participants were assured that the research findings would be anonymous and would use pseudonyms that they chose. If any information used could unintentionally give clues to the identity of the person, that identifying information would be removed to anonymize the data. In such a case, I would discuss the matter with the participant. Without his approval, the information would not be used at all.

To protect the security of the data, I avoided sensitive references in any e-mail communication and deleted any e-mails from participants as soon as I read them to make sure that they were not traceable. I have used two separate places to store participants' data. Their names and all their demographic data are stored digitally in an external drive in a password-secured electronic file that was put in a locked drawer in my home. Only interview transcripts with pseudonyms are stored in my computer using a password-secured electronic folder. All original data will be securely kept for two years following the final publication of the research findings and then they will be physically shredded or will be digitally wiped/destroyed permanently so that they cannot be recovered. I will delete all emails to and from participants and will also ask co-researchers/informants to delete their emails to and from to reduce traceability and to increase anonymity once the research is complete. When the computer used to work on the data for this research comes to the end of its life, the hard drive will be destroyed so that any data remaining in hidden files is not recoverable.

All data collected may only be used for the present study. The research report that includes non-identifying data (such as a participant's words quoted in this dissertation) may be used for secondary research and/or publication without permission. However, to re-access the primary data for secondary use, permission should be granted by participants with approval from the Research Ethics Committee. For the data to be used in any other research, such research must be authenticated and authorized by St. Stephen's College and the researcher must agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information.

Chapter 4: Overview of Participants

This chapter provides a demographic overview of the participants, followed by a summary of each participant's story. Research findings in qualitative research are usually composed of emerging themes supported by excerpts from participant interviews. Excerpts come from fragments of participants' stories that are sewn together in a conceptual order. Their stories themselves are not presented. Yet this research includes their stories in order to provide a context or life setting (*sitz im leben*) as a basis for understanding the participants' backgrounds, perspectives, and life experiences, and how these factors are reflected in the research result.

Demographic Overview

The participants included in this study are 13 IGCMPs, ranging in age from 19 to 59. All participants were from urban centers on Java island. Most participants came from Christian families (76.9%) and almost all still participate in the life of the church. 61.5% attend church regularly. More than half (53.9%) came from Christian denominations that strongly condemn same-sex relationships (Roman Catholic, Charismatic, and Evangelical churches), 38.4% came from denominations that are relatively moderate, unsure, or hold a divided opinion about same-sex relationships. Only one person (7.7%) came from a free church, which is so far the only church in Indonesia that openly affirms and accepts

same-sex relationships.

Table 1

Demographic of Participants

Variable	n^a	Percent
Age		
15-20	1	7.7%
20-30	5	38.4%
31-40	3	23.1%
41-50	2	15.4%
51-60	2	15.4%
Denomination		
Roman Catholic	4	30.8%
Evangelical / Charismatic	3	23.1%
Mainline Protestant	5	38.4%
Free Church	1	7.7%
Church Attendance		
High	8	61.5%
Moderate	1	7.7%
Low	4	30.8%
Participants from Christian Family	10	76.9%

Note. $^a n = 13$.

Six participants who took part in this research are members of couples (three couples), while the other seven are ICGMP individuals whose partners did not meet the criteria for participating in the study. These ten couples have been together for between one and 18 years. Fifty percent of the couples are ethnically mixed and fifty percent have inter-religious relationships. The high percentage of IGCMPs who chose their partner

from a different ethnicity and/or religion is quite different from the majority of Indonesian heterosexual couples' preferences. The survey of Parker, Chang-Yau, and Raihani (2014) among more than 3,000 young people indicates that most of them did not agree with the idea of inter-religious marriage because they perceived that their religion forbade it. Moreover, marriage with people of different ethnicities often creates tension and can even result in rejection by the couple's family of origin.

Table 2

Demographic of Couples

Variable	Percent
Couples' relationship length (average): 5.5 years	
Interfaith Couples	50 %
Interethnic Couples	50 %
Cohabiting Couples	50 %

In a heterosexual relationship, having a partner from a different religion and ethnicity creates an obstacle for the couple in obtaining parental and social approval for the relationship; securing such approval for a couple in a same-sex relationship is vastly more difficult. This obstacle can be overcome if the couple moves to another city and lives together, far from their family and community. However, moving in together is often not possible for young couples, who are expected to live with their parents until they get married. Fifty percent of the couples who participated in this study do not live together, mostly those who are under 50 years old. These non-cohabiting couples manage to meet only on weekends or even less frequently. Although they know that this

Table 3

Couples' Religion, Ethnicity, Age Difference, and Living Arrangement

Couple	RL	Partner's Religion	AD	Partner's Ethnicity	Living Arrangement
Richard & NN	1	different (Islam)	2	different (Javanese)	cohabiting
Noel & NN	3	same	1	different (Sundanese)	non-cohabiting
Budiono & Barry	1	same	6	same	non-cohabiting
Theo & NN	2.5	same	0	same	non-cohabiting
Tanto & Andre	4	same	3	same	cohabiting
Indra & NN	1	different (Islam)	9	same	non-cohabiting
Patrick & NN	4	different (Confucianism)	10	same	non-cohabiting
Verdi & NN	6	different (Islam)	4	different (Javanese)	cohabiting
Jauhari & Subroto	18	same	10	different	cohabiting
Jalal	15	different (Islam)	23	different (Javanese)	cohabiting

Note. RL = Relationship Length (years). AD = Age Difference (years). Pseudonymns are used for all participants.

living arrangement is not satisfactory and they hope that some day they can live together, cohabitation is not an option that can be realized in the near future.

Participant Profiles

Richard (age 19)

Richard had been interested in men since he was child. He tried to date women several times when he was a teenager, but he discovered that he did not seem to be as interested in women as his friends were. When he was sixteen years old he tried to obtain information from the Internet about what he was experiencing and became aware through this process that he was gay.

Richard came from a charismatic Christian background. Some preachers in his church said that homosexuality was a sin, but Richard thought it was impossible that as a child of God he would be condemned by God because he loved God and he was also certain that God, as a father, loved him as his child. Because he knew that he could not change his orientation, he was certain that God would accept him the way he was.

One day when he was walking in a shopping mall he met a 21-year-old Muslim man. The two men became friends and a month later they came out to each other. Before long, feelings of friendship turned into feelings of love. In the beginning Richard was not sure that he wanted to pursue a relationship with this young man, but the friend's presence always seemed to make him feel happy and peaceful and cheered his day. So they became lovers.

When Richard was very young both his parents died and he went to live with relatives whose economic status was low. Thus, he was forced to drop out of school and to work in the family's neighbourhood coffee stand. After some time, Richard asked his partner to work with him in the shop. The two young men were given a small salary and

Richard's partner was allowed to stay in Richard's room in the family's home. This
arrangement brought some light into an otherwise dismal existence for Richard.

Richard has romantic notions about his relationship and when he met me he asked
if I knew of a pastor who could bless his relationship with his partner. He strongly
believed that a blessing given by a pastor would bestow the power of God on the
relationship. Sometimes he feels guilty when he has sex with his partner because they are
not yet married or their relationship has not yet been blessed. Nevertheless, as he has
made every attempt to achieve this blessing, he is certain that God still looks with favour
on his relationship. In the meantime, he asks God's forgiveness in his prayers and
believes in God's love for him and his partner.

Noel (23)

Noel has been emotionally interested in men since he was in elementary school.
In junior high school, he and his friends learned about the gay world from the Internet
and movies, and it was at this time that Noel realized he was gay. In a short time, he was
able to accept himself as gay; he never thought that there was anything wrong or sinful
about his sexual orientation. Noel went on to attend an all-boys Catholic high school. In
that school, some of his friends told him in secret that they also were attracted to males,
but it was not until the end of his high school years that Noel had his first sexual
encounter. When he was first kissed by a male, a young man five years older, he was
afraid that he would contract a disease like AIDS. While he was in university,
nevertheless, he started to explore the gay world, joining an underground gay community
on campus. Noel realized that for Catholics, homosexuality was considered by the
Church to be a sin, but he did not believe that being gay made him a sinner. For Noel,

having a gay relationship fulfills God's command to love. Sinning is having a sexual relationship that betrays the commitment to faithfulness or having a sexual relationship without commitment for the sake of pleasure.

For the past three years, Noel has been partnered with a twenty-four-year-old Orthodox Christian. From the time he was small he had a dream to marry the man he loved. His relationship faces significant challenges, however. His partner's father is a strictly conservative Muslim who does not like Christians. In fact, his partner must hide from his father and other family members the fact that he has converted to Orthodox Christianity. Noel's parents are conservative and devout Catholics. His mother always asks him when he is going to get a girlfriend, and his father says that he wants to have grandchildren. This is understandable because Noel is the eldest son in the family. When the LGBT issue blew up in the media in early 2016, his mother asked him again why he did not yet have a girlfriend. She then asked, "You are not gay, are you? Please don't be gay!" Noel brushed his mother off with his answer but her questioning threw him into a dilemma. On the one hand, he cannot be honest with her about his sexuality because he loves her and does not wish to upset her, but on the other hand he knows that if he continues to fail to tell the truth, when the truth does come out at some point in the future, it will break her heart even more cruelly. The pressure from Noel's family is increasing day by day and he is asking himself if he continues in his relationship with his partner whether he is an egotist because he is opposing his will to that of his parents. On the other hand, if he has to sacrifice his relationship just to get married and fulfill his parents' wishes, does this mean that his parents are egotists? He wonders which option he should choose. Noel and his partner feel comfortable with their sexual orientation. Their only

problem is how to tell their parents about their relationship without hurting them too

deeply.

Budiono (24)

When Budiono was in elementary school he liked to hug his cousin when the boy

was shirtless. In junior high school, he found a gay pornographic video on the Internet,

which led him to understand the meaning of gay and, because he enjoyed the video, to

realize that he himself was gay. During that time Budiono was living in a small town, so

it was difficult for him to find other boys who were gay. When he finished high school,

he started having platonic intimate relationships with men.

When he moved to a large urban center for work he began to explore his sexuality

in encounters with other gay men arranged through dating apps. It was at this time that he

first thought of having sex as being sinful because it was against the teaching of the

Catholic Church. Moreover, these casual sexual encounters did not give Budiono the

fulfillment he was seeking. Eventually he realized that he wanted to have a long-term

relationship that did not only focus on sex but was also centered on love and faithfulness.

Not long after that, a friend introduced him to Barry, a thirty-year-old LGBT activist in

Jakarta. They have been in relationship for one year.

Budiono was a religious person; he always faithfully attended Sunday Mass and

even went every day to morning Mass. However, the Catholic teaching about sin led him

to cease attending Mass regularly once he had a partner. His concept of God became

more universal, which is why he now refers to God as the Universe.

Budiono has planned several times to come out to his parents and to his siblings

but has continued to procrastinate in this regard. His family is Catholic and he knows that

if he comes out or his parents find out he is gay they will be shocked. Therefore, he has "come out" to them as a former Catholic as a first step in the process. His mother was very sad when she learned of his decision to leave the Church, but for Budiono, this first "coming out" is a bridge his parents must cross before accepting him as gay.

Theo (28)

Theo has been interested in members of the same sex since he was a child in his hometown in Central Java. When he started to experience wet dreams during junior high school, he always imagined a man's body. Until he graduated from high school he continued to ask himself whether or not this was normal. When Theo moved to Jakarta to attend university, he met in his first semester a friend on campus who was openly gay. He asked the friend many questions about being gay and realized in this process that he also was gay. The friend wanted to introduce him to the gay community but Theo refused the offer. At the same time, he felt relieved because he had finally received the answer to the questions he had always asked about his sexuality. Knowing that he was gay led him to seek out more information about homosexuality on the Internet and to finally look for gay men like himself on dating apps.

Theo had his first sexual encounter when the openly gay friend he had met in the first semester of his studies slept over in the room he was renting. When his friend started to touch him, he rebuffed him as he felt that the friend was attempting to sexually abuse him. It was not until the end of his college years that he met a gay couple and learned that not all gay relationships are only about sex. It is possible to have a long-term relationship that is more concerned about sharing a life.

Having lived in Jakarta for almost ten years, Theo felt lonely and decided to find a partner to share his life. Finally, he met John, a twenty-eight-year-old Christian. They are both from a charismatic church. Now they have been together for two and a half years. Every Sunday morning, they go together to a large charismatic church. While Theo possesses the talent and ability, he has declined to participate in church ministry because he does not want people to talk about his being gay should they at some point discover his sexuality. Moreover, he does not wish to become a stumbling block for other members of his church.

Theo can feel God's providence in his relationship. His parents and John's parents accept them as very close friends and accept them into their homes. Every time Theo returns home to Solo he talks about John to his Mom and she sends *oleh-oleh*[6] for John when Theo returns to Jakarta. However, Theo does not know if his Mom is aware that he is gay. What he does know is that his family usually mocks transgendered individuals when they see them on television. He also knows that his brother's wife, who lives in Sidney, is very homophobic. For these reasons, Theo has not yet come out to his family.

Both Theo and his partner are under constant pressure from their parents to get married. Theo's mother said that until he gets married her duty as a mother is not finished. Theo and John have given numerous excuses for their failure to marry. However, they have both decided that they will not enter into a heterosexual marriage. Theo hopes that some day he and John can receive a blessing for their relationship.

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[6] Oleh-oleh is a present that people bring to close friends or family members after they return from a trip. It is usually local food or beverage from the place they have visited.

Tanto (30)

Tanto is the only male of his parents' four children. He attended Catholic school from the first grade and realized in elementary school that there was something different about him. In junior secondary school, he struggled with his sexuality, realizing that his attractions were different from those of his friends. He kept asking God why he was like this. Receiving no answer to his prayer, he became interested in following Buddhist teaching. He liked to participate in the Buddhist ceremonies at a certain temple because they made him feel at peace. In the temple, he was taught that he became gay from a karma that he had acquired in a past life. Gradually, Tanto became a very devout Buddhist, going to the temple four times each week, wearing religious garb and keeping his hair in the prescribed style. He felt at peace in the temple, but when he returned to his everyday life, which was in great contrast to his experience in the temple, his inner conflict returned. After many years of being active in the temple, he was appointed to be a teacher in the community and remained in that position for five years. He led seminars on Buddhist teaching in many locations. Once he tried to have a relationship with a woman and planned to marry her, but in the end, he said, "I decided to stop being someone else. I just wanted to be myself." During that time, there were many young Buddhists who saw him as a role model, but Tanto gradually distanced himself from the temple community.

In 2009 Tanto came out to his parents and siblings. His parents could not accept him at the time, but his sisters supported him. They convinced his mother that there was nothing wrong in being gay. At first his mother felt that this all happened because she had not raised her son properly, but his sisters convinced her that Tanto had always been gay

and could not change. Gradually the whole family was able to accept him and the family's acceptance became a turning point in Tanto's acceptance of himself as a gay man and his belief that God had made him the way he was.

When Tanto was looking for a partner, he found Andre. They have been together for four years. Tanto worships with Andre in Andre's church. He feels comfortable in this parish because the atmosphere in worship is quiet, as in the Catholic church or in the temple, but this church does not condemn people like him. He felt relieved when he learned that there are pastors in this church who do not condemn gays as sinners.

For Tanto, it is important that the church offer a blessing for his and Andre's relationship. If such a blessing ceremony can be held, Tanto and Andre want their parents to be present.

Barry (31)

Barry comes from a very devout Catholic family. When he was in junior secondary school, he lived in the dormitory of his all-boys Catholic school, and it was there that he had his first sexual encounter. In high school, he tried to date women but found that he was not interested. He sought more information on the Internet about being gay. When he finally realized that he fit the profile of a gay person, he immediately accepted himself, experiencing no denial. He was sure that he could only take a man as a lover. When he was a university student in Jogjakarta he tried to find people like himself and became involved in the gay community on campus.

Since he was a teenager he has been involved in the church. When he was living in his high school dormitory he attended Mass every day before going to classes. He attended Mass every Sunday, became a cantor, and served as an altar boy. When he

realized that he was gay he didn't think it was a sin or something strange; that is why he did not hesitate to tell his friends that he liked men, shocking them. He felt comfortable and content when he was in love with a man, just as happens in a heterosexual relationship. He wondered why it was wrong or sinful to love someone sincerely.

Barry's strong self-confidence led him to secure a volunteer position with an NGO in 2006 and he has been working with that organization since that time to actively fight for LGBT rights. One day he joined a demonstration organized by transgendered and gay people; the demonstration was covered by television news. His mother was shocked when she saw Barry on the news and asked him whether he was a part of that group, in other words if he was gay. Barry confessed that he was indeed gay. His mother was upset and cried and forbade Barry from continuing his studies for a period of time. He was required to stay at home because his mother believed that he was being influenced by that "bad lifestyle." His relationship with his mother deteriorated and he wanted to run away from home; however, he loved his mother too much to carry out such a plan. He attempted to rebuild communications with his mother and to show her that even though he was gay, he was still the Barry that his mother always knew. His mother finally allowed him to continue his studies, and two years later when he graduated university his mother said to him, "Well, I guess there is nothing I can do, is there? However you've decided to be, you are still my son." Barry's relationship with his mother improved from that point; he could be more open with her even though she sometimes said that she wanted him to get married and have children.

Barry believed in the concept of soul mates; he was really sure that God had a plan for his life and that God would give him a man to be his partner. Therefore, when he

finally met Budiono he believed that it was God who arranged their meeting and brought them together as a couple. Barry is now working in legal advocacy for fellow LGBT persons who are in trouble. He is openly gay and does not hesitate to introduce Budiono as his partner to his friends. The only place he does not want to be open is in the Catholic Church because he does not want his mother to be ashamed because of what people might be saying behind their backs.

Barry has long had a dream that he and his partner will receive a blessing in church or at least that some day he will go to church with his partner and they will go to the altar and recite their vows. When he imagines the blessing or celebration of their relationship, what is most important for Barry is the presence of his mother. The blessing of a parent is very important to him because now he has a very close relationship with his mother.

Indra (32)

Indra realized that he was different from other boys when he was in elementary school as his classmates bullied him and called him a sissy. At home his grandmother also beat his legs with a rattan switch if he displeased her. All of this made him grow into an introverted person who found it difficult to trust others. In junior high school Indra had very few male friends, but one of them was very close, like a boyfriend, even though they both tried to copy the other students by dating girls. In the last year of junior high school, Indra watched a psychology program on TV that discussed the Kinsey scale. Indra thought he was bisexual because he liked boys but he also had a girlfriend.

Indra then tried to learn the church teaching about homosexuality. He was interested in studying in theology school to find out more about the issue of

homosexuality and Christianity. A donor agreed to finance his studies in a conservative

theological school. He stayed in the school dormitory and tended to make close friends

with only one person at a time and always with a male. He would sleep with the friend

and they would hug each other although there was no sexual relationship. Ironically, it

was in that dormitory that he began to learn about pornography and meet other gay men

through Friendster. Even though the school sometimes talked about homosexuality as sin,

Indra did not feel that he was a sinner because his sexual attraction was based more on

love than on lust. He compared his feelings with what happened between David and

Jonathan.

When he was sent on an internship to a location far from Java, he became very

close to a man with whom he carried out mutual masturbation while at the same time

dating a woman in order to hide his sexual orientation. When he returned to the school,

Indra was failed by the school and expelled because the school did not allow interns to

date women. He was bitter with the school's judgment. Fortunately, a lecturer from

another theological school agreed to accept him in his school and allowed him to transfer

his credits from the first institution.

It was in that chaotic situation that Indra began to meet his friends from Friendster

and to have sexual encounters with them. He felt guilty because those relationships were

based on lust and were short-term as a result. Moreover, he became infected with

gonorrhea, an experience he saw as God's punishment for the oral and anal sex he

engaged in. After that time his sexual expression consisted only of mutual masturbation.

Indra then decided to seek a relationship based on intimacy rather than on sex. He had a

partner for six years and the relationship gave him a sense of peace. However, they could

only meet once or twice a month. Indra said that while he didn't think that sex was so important, physical contact, like hugging, was. He and his partner were unable to meet regularly, so over the years the bond between them diminished. He longed for someone with whom he could share his life in a lasting, committed relationship. In the past year, he formed a relationship with a Muslim man; however, this man is really afraid that the relationship will be discovered by others. Given that his partner is so closeted, Indra is not confident that his dream can be realized.

In the meantime, Indra has rejected all the conservative doctrines he was taught in theological school. His theological view has become more liberal; he now considers himself to be a universalist. However, he admits that he is still a Christ follower who works among the marginalized.

Andre (33)

Andre sometimes felt angry with himself when he was in elementary school. His school friends said that he was a sissy. He felt different. In high school, he tried dating girls but did not feel comfortable. Then, in his college years, he realized that he was gay because he had always been attracted to men. He began to look for others like himself. Through the IMRC chatting application he was able to virtually meet other gay men and even found a boyfriend through that app. His boyfriend broke off the relationship after only a few months and Andre could not bear the sense of disappointment, so he called his parents and told them about the relationship. His parents were very shocked and told him that homosexuality was a sin, quoting verses from the Bible. They continued to do so, making Andre feel guilty. Every time he went to church he felt that there was a barrier between him and God. Andre then followed his mother's advice to date a woman;

however, the relationship lasted only a few months. After realizing that his sexual orientation could not be changed, he began to doubt that he was a sinner.

Andre searched the Internet for more information, finding a gay Christian friend with whom he could discuss these issues. This friend said that his mother was able to accept him because she believed that the essence of Christianity was love. Eventually Andre gained more self-acceptance. He began dating men and even found a partner without his mother's knowledge. At the same time, his mother continued to keep an eye on him. One day, she discovered his relationship and wanted to scold his partner and his partner's parents. Fortunately, the scolding never took place. His mother cried and told Andre that she was disappointed because she had failed to raise him properly. Both Andre and his mother were wounded by those events and their relationship deteriorated, until one day his mother's friend told her that she should accept her son; otherwise, she would lose Andre.

In 2012, finally, Andre's mother met with him and told him that she wanted to accept him fully and wanted him to introduce his boyfriend to her. At first Andre was shocked and suspicious, but finally he was convinced that his mother was genuinely accepting him and his partner. That event became a turning point in Andre's life. Not only was his relationship with his mother restored but so was his relationship with God.

Andre has now been in a relationship with Tanto for four years. Tanto's family has accepted Andre as their gay son just as they have accepted Tanto. Their relationship has brought positive change to both of them. All of this has made Andre feel very grateful, and for this reason he wants to share his experience to give strength to people like himself. He has a hope that his and Tanto's relationship can one day be blessed. He

wants to receive the words of God that are usually pronounced by the pastor during the marriage ceremony: "What God has joined together let no one separate."

Patrick (37)

Patrick, 37, came from an evangelical tradition. He had a born-again experience when he was in the first year of junior secondary school. When he was in elementary school he realized he liked older boys, and during puberty he became aware of his sexual orientation through self-reflection. He always pictured a male figure in his sexual imagination and longed for a closeness with an older male. He experienced inner conflict when he realized that same-sex attraction did not comply with church teaching. In his high school years, he tried to suppress his sexuality by focusing on his studies and on church activities. However, when he entered college he could not continue suppressing his sexuality. He began to date a gay Christian man who was Patrick's age. Their relationship lasted three years, during which they attended church together and participated in church ministry together. The inner conflict and guilty feelings followed him but he tried to ignore them. He said that the guilt was "put in a box." The relationship made Patrick's life more cheerful; he said it was like living a dream. Unfortunately, after three years the relationship ended as his partner passed away.

Five years ago, Patrick tried to seriously reflect on his existence as a gay man before God, but that reflection still could not provide him with any satisfying answers. He was not yet fully convinced that being gay was not a problem in God's eye. On the other hand, he became more critical when looking at doctrine or biblical interpretation that was neither realistic nor humanistic. Even though the struggle was not finally resolved, he decided to accept himself as a gay man because he knew that he could not change his

sexual orientation. He did not want to live a life of casual short-term relationships, so the best option was to have a long-term partner with whom he could share his life.

Four years ago, he met a 47-year-old gay Confucian man who had been divorced and they built a relationship. Considering his partner is not Christian and he himself is not convinced that he is worthy in God's eyes, Patrick doesn't think that he needs a blessing for his relationship. What he needs is legal recognition from the state so that his and his partner's civil rights as a gay couple can be protected. However, as they realize that this is not possible in Indonesia, he and his partner have a plan to leave Indonesia and live in another country that can honor them as a gay couple. Patrick's parents and his partner's parents do not know that they are a gay couple. Patrick's mother became Christian twelve years ago, and she really hopes that Patrick will marry very soon because he is the oldest child and the only son in the family. His parents have asked him many times to get married. Patrick has no plan to come out to his parents.

Patrick said that only one percent of his guilt feelings remain. He continues to attend church and worships. He often prays alone. He believes that God is still with him and does not deny him even though he sometimes feels unworthy before God. For Patrick, God is the only thing that cannot be taken from him.

Verdi (38)

When Verdi was a child he realized that he was different because he liked to play with girls and he liked female things. During his junior high school and high school years, he tried to date girls, copying his friends, but he never felt comfortable doing this. When the school held a camping trip he was attracted to the bodies of the other boys in his tent. However, he tried to hide his attraction. Verdi's family is traditional Chinese and

never talk about sex. Verdi found out that he was gay through information he found on the Internet.

In his college years his homosexual attractions became more powerful. When Verdi had a relationship with a man during this period, he left the church and became an atheist. He was angry with God because he could not understand why God had made him gay. In 1998 there was a riot in Jakarta in which Chinese women became a target for gang rape. One day, Verdi's sister was chased by a group of men, so she ran away as fast as she could. When she was finally safe and told her story to her family, Verdi realized that God was present and was leading and protecting his family. After this incident, he went back to church after five years of absence. Gradually he came to believe that it was God's will to create him as a gay man; therefore, he had to learn to accept himself.

Four years later, he was very surprised when his mother suddenly said to him that she understood and would not object if Verdi decided not to get married as long as he could find someone who could take care of him into his old age. For Verdi, this was a big thing because it meant that his mother knew he was gay and that she could accept him. Two years after that his mother passed away. His mother's acceptance gave him the courage to be himself. He came out to his close friends, including a few members of the choir in church and one of his pastors. He is grateful that none of them judged or rejected him.

Verdi's father did not know that he was gay until his mother passed away. He learned about his orientation when one day Verdi came to the house with his partner, thinking that his father was not home. They were fighting in the living room and his partner said, "I'm your lover!" Verdi's father overheard the conversation and was

shocked. He refused to communicate with Verdi for three months. Finally, his father began to initiate conversation again but never discussed the issue of his sexuality. Verdi felt relieved. After his father passed away, Verdi learned from his sister that his father was disappointed not because he was gay but because Verdi and his mother had never told him the truth about his son.

Verdi has been living with his 38-year-old Muslim partner for six years. The partner is not open to his family. Since Verdi has been in this relationship he has been more content and his life more comfortable. He still attends church every Sunday, and he is grateful that one of the pastors in his church has a positive attitude toward LGBT people. He even told that pastor that he is willing to share his story if needed to open people's eyes about the struggles of LGBT Christians. He has learned a progressive, gay-friendly Christian theology. In the meantime, outside the church Verdi has been involved with an NGO that is helping to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS among gay people.

Jauhari (45)

Jauhari came from a Muslim family living in a city in West Java. When he was a child he tried to follow Islamic rituals. By the time he was in junior high school he was already living alone. From that time until his college years he tried to have relationships with women for the sake of his family and to be faithful to social tradition. However, all those relationships failed because he was not attracted to his female partners.

After moving to Jakarta, he met Subroto in 1998 and settled into a long-term relationship that has endured until today. Subroto is ten years older than him. Subroto is a doctor and a Christian who deeply desired to be in a long-term relationship. They grew close when Jauhari volunteered to work with Subroto in an organization that campaigned

for HIV prevention in the gay community. He asked Jauhari to meet his parents and unexpectedly introduced Jauhari as his partner and his soul mate; then Subroto told his parents that he wanted to live with Jauhari. During that time, his parents had already matched him with a woman; thus, it was very difficult for the family to accept the couple. Subroto's courage melted Jauhari's heart and he tried to tell his own parents the truth: that he wanted to live with Subroto. His parents expelled him from the family and severed all communication with him for three years. His parents eventually came to understand and accept Jauhari's choice.

Subroto's and Jauhari's courage and the support provided by the gay community led them to decide to be an openly gay couple in order to set an example for Indonesian society. Through the media, they informed the public that they were a couple, and they travelled abroad to have their relationship blessed. Their names became well known because the media covered that "same-sex marriage," which was still considered taboo in Indonesian society. Looking back, Jauhari regrets coming out publicly. He had hoped that by his coming out the public could learn about the positive side of gay couples' lives and that other gay couples would be motivated to follow him. But that did not happen. The media that covered his story and gay issues in general told the stories with a negative slant. As a consequence, Subroto's and Jauhari's lives became difficult. Upon reflection Jauhari determined that what actually mattered most was not having a blessing ceremony and announcing it publicly, but instead receiving a blessing from his parents for living together with Subroto.

When Jauhari began living with Subroto, he converted to Christianity and started to read the Bible, looking for answers as to how God might receive him as a gay man. He

later realized that it was more important to focus on his relationship with the living God. Jauhari's relationship has lasted for eighteen years. He considered his relationship to be God's chosen path for him, so he learned to surrender himself to God while enjoying anything that he must face in the future with his partner.

Subroto (55)

Subroto came from a traditional Christian family. Some of his family members became pastors – his younger brother, older brother, and nephew. He was more interested in studying medicine. From the time he was a young child he recognized that he had a sexual interest in other boys, but he did not experience a sexual encounter until his college years. Information about homosexuality was limited at that time, so it was difficult for him to understand why he was different. However, his medical education made him more aware of human sexuality and enabled him to gain self-acceptance. Because Subroto realized that he was gay and there was nothing he could do about it, he did not experience guilt or feel that he was a sinner. He had the courage to openly admit that he was gay and even built an organization for helping gay people who had contracted sexually transmitted diseases. The more people knew he was gay, the more he was discriminated against as a doctor. Once he was accused of attempting to rape a male patient. His medical career stalled because he was not married. When he tried to become a university lecturer he was rejected, even though he was entirely capable, because he was gay.

Subroto decided not to get married; instead he wanted to live with his partner Jauhari. The most important thing for him was to obtain his parents' blessing, especially that of his father. Subroto assumed that his parents had already learned about his

sexuality from the newspapers, so he decided to ask Jauhari to go with him and tell his parents that they wanted to live together. At first, his family was opposed to that idea, but eventually the opposition became softer, particularly that of his father. His parents' acceptance gave Subroto the courage to have his relationship with Jauhari blessed in the Netherlands. Since that time, they have lived together in Jakarta. Their extended family usually visits the house when they come to Jakarta; the family members prefer to stay with them rather than with other relatives because they know how much they are loved by this gay couple.

Once Subroto created controversy in the Christian community when he was interviewed by a Christian magazine. In that interview, he said that being gay is a grace. Many Christians condemned his statement, but Subroto has truly experienced God's blessing for his journey. Looking back, he realizes how all the events that have occurred in his life, including the eighteen years with his partner, have been a blessing from God.

Subroto also likes to perform charitable medical services. He believes that his sexual orientation should not be a barrier to his performing good works for people. He is happy if the patients he helps can recover or if he can help patients who have no money. He also sometimes gives his opinions to the church, asking it to be more progressive. In the meantime, there are pastors that have given him the opportunity to become a trainer for pastor's capacity development, along with experts from other fields. For Subroto, then, being gay is God's grace.

Jalal (59)

From the time he was in elementary school, Jalal felt confused about himself. He was interested in boys, but he was certain that he was not transgender as he did not like to

wear women's clothes. He did not know that there was a "gay" category. In high school, after he moved to Surabaya, he read a psychological advice column in the newspaper that discussed homosexuality. This was the first time he had encountered the word. He felt relieved because he realized that he was not the only person dealing with same-sax attraction. He wrote a letter to the paper and received the contact address of a gay organization in Indonesia. He began to receive bulletins from that organization and found pen pals.

When he was 22 years old, a friend introduced him to a gay community and he had his first sexual encounter with a man. Jalal then volunteered in a gay organization which was led by an Indonesian senior gay activist. While in that organization he took part in many discussions and gained a great deal of knowledge about human sexuality, anthropology, and sociology, including progressive theology that was LGBT-friendly. The experience of being involved in that organization for many years enabled him to fully accept himself as a gay man. He was convinced that God made him a person with homosexual orientation.

Jalal began a relationship with his first partner in 1982; they were together for eight years, but the relationship ended because his partner decided to marry heterosexually. His partner said that he wanted to continue the relationship after he was married but Jalal refused. Long after that, Jalal found his second partner, a thirty-six-year-old Muslim; they have been together for fifteen years. His partner's family and their neighbors have fully accepted them as a couple. His partner's aunt even allowed them to raise her child from the time the child was born. That child has become like their own and has brought happiness to their family life.

After experiencing all of these life events, Jalal became certain that it is God's will that has allowed him and his partner to live together in harmony for fifteen years. Therefore, he believes that his existence as a gay man is God's blessing, not a curse. So, when he is facing an uncertain future, he has a core belief that God will show him the way in his own time.

Chapter 5: Research Findings

Overview

I will present here a brief overview of the recurrent themes that emerged from the participant interviews, followed by a detailed description of each theme with its corresponding subthemes.

I began the process of examining the lived religion of IGCMPs by discovering particular themes that came from each participant's interview. I focused on examining the IGCMPs' beliefs (their personal theology) and religious practices, which are built upon their life experience as they try to make sense of their spiritual lives as gay Christians who are in a same-sex relationship. I found that while the participants' spiritual experiences were not really any different from those of Christians in general, their perception of God and their beliefs about homosexuality and same-sex relationship are quite different from, or even contradict, traditional Christian doctrine. In exploring emergent themes across participants, I found five superordinate themes and eight subordinate themes. The fifth super-ordinate theme was an unexpected finding: I was struck by the fact that most participants showed a lack of enthusiasm for having their relationships blessed. In contrast, discussion about the importance of parents' blessing emerged unexpectedly in interviews. Table 4 shows all themes and subthemes. It also shows the contrast between the participants' beliefs about their partnership and the conservative beliefs about same-sex relationships.

Table 4

A Comparison Between IGCMPs Beliefs and Conservative Beliefs Regarding Same-sex

Relationships

IGCMP Beliefs Regarding Same-sex relationships	Conservative Beliefs Regarding Same-sex Relationships
Theme #1: Our relationship is not sinful * Our sexuality is God-given * The loving God accepts us as we are * The sense of guilt was not from God	Any form of same-sex relationship is an abomination, an act particularly reprehensible to God
Theme #2: Our life journey is guided by God	Same-sex couples live against God's will. They must terminate the relationship and live in chastity in order to experience God's providence in their life journey
Theme #3: Our partnership is sacred * A True loving companionship * A Committed partnership	Same-sex partnership is a profane form of sexual relationship because it is against God's order of creation and it pollutes the sacred status of the marriage institution
Theme #4: Our spirituality grows through the partnership * The existence of self-awareness * The indispensability of spirituality * The partnerships that foster Christian values	Gay couples are unspiritual persons; therefore, "the fruit of the Spirit" cannot be manifested in their lives
Theme #5: We prioritize parents' blessing over relationship blessing	The LGBT movement in Indonesia brings "a Western homosexual agenda" that demands same-sex marriage[7]

[7] This view is common among Christian leaders (Irwan, 2015) and is shared by other religious communities and public officials (Topsfield, 2017).

Recurrent Themes

Our Relationship is not Sinful

All but one of the IGCMPs in this study believe that being in a same-sex relationship is not sinful. This belief is in opposition to the traditionalist view of homosexuality, which regards any form of same-sex relationship as an abomination. They believe that the Scripture verses often quoted by the traditionalists do not reflect the kind of homosexuality that they experience in real life; therefore, those verses cannot be applied to them. Being in loving and faithful relationship, they do not think that their relationship is an abomination or a perversion. Indra argues strongly:

> When I was in high school, I read the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. I was surprised that it did not mention anything about "sodomy." The story said there were many men who came to Lot's house to rape his male guests. I thought, "Of course those men were sinful!" I myself didn't want to be treated like that! Those verses did not talk about the sin of homosexuality. Even if they talked about "sodomy" as a sin, I don't like anal sex, so those verses don't apply to me…. Yes, I am gay, but I am not a gay as depicted in those verses…. On reflection, I saw that my relationship is like the love relationship between David and Jonathan. There is no sexual abuse there. It's about love and romance. I don't feel guilty because I am in a same-sex relationship. I do feel guilty if I cannot be faithful to my partner.

> Indra's argument typifies those of many of the participants. They realize that their image of God does not correspond to the image of God portrayed or presented by the church. They cannot imagine that their loving God will regard their partnership as sinful.

They agree that God expects them to live in holiness as Christians, but they disagree that the institutional church has the right to regulate what they consider as holy or unholy (sinful) and judge them based on those regulations. As the church treats the issue of homosexuality negatively, they conclude that the church does not understand their struggle as gay couples and therefore call into question its authority to give them religious instruction and guidance. Budiono expresses this point:

> I have been like this since I was born. How can being gay be a sin? I never think I am sinful just because I am gay. When I went to Mass, I felt peaceful, not guilty. I didn't bother with anyone who accused gay people like me of being sinners because my concept of sin is not as strict as that of Catholic teaching. I think the church cannot not easily judge certain acts as sin. "Oh, doing this is sin. Doing that is sin." Isn't Jesus coming to the world to wipe out our sins? I mean, why do we keep focusing on sin? …. Of course, we are all sinners, but I think our life should not be focused on sin; instead we should focus our energy on doing good things for other people…. I also don't think that my relationship is sinful. It is not just a sexual exploration. My relationship is similar to any ordinary heterosexual relationship.

Budiono's critical view of the church is shared by Noel. He regards "the sin of homosexuality" as an ancient doctrine or rule constructed by the church in a particular context. This doctrine is no longer relevant in the contemporary situation. He says:

> As a Catholic, I think there is no problem with being gay. My concept of sin is different from the Catholic view…. Regulations about what is sinful and about how to treat the sinner are bound to a certain place and time. If the Catholic

Church simply applies the ancient rules of the "sin of homosexuality" today,

without understanding today's reality, those rules are not relevant anymore.

I don't do anything wrong in God's eyes by having a same-sex partner. I know it

is wrong in the public's eyes because my choice of partner is different from what

is allowed by the majority. I am probably "wrong" because our partnership is not

approved legally and socially, but it doesn't mean my relationship is sinful.…

When I was in secondary school, I accepted myself as a gay person. I already

knew that in the end I would have a man as my partner.

Andre summarizes Noel's point: "Homosexuality is prohibited by the church, but

it does not mean that it is prohibited by God."

The participants' strong rejection of the traditionalist view that same-sex

relationship is sinful is not based on biblical or theological arguments. Most of them have

never read gay-affirming theological books written by progressive scholars. Most have no

access to books about queer theology because they are not available in the Indonesian

language. Yet participants construct their own gay-affirming theology by drawing from

the validity of their personal experience and spiritual journey with God. Three sub-

themes emerged when the participants discussed why they believe that being gay and

being in a same-sex relationship is not a sin. (1) They believe that their homosexuality is

God-given; (2) They believe that the loving God accepts them the way they are; (3) They

believe that the guilt feelings they experienced in the past did not came from God.

"Our sexuality is God-given"

All the participants in this study went through a long journey of finding and

accepting their sexuality before they finally committed to long-term relationships. All of

them are aware that being gay is not something they deliberately chose; instead it is

something inherent that they have experienced since they were very young. Theo

recounts his experience:

> When I was in secondary school, I realized that there was something strange in
>
> me. Once I started having wet dreams, my dreams were always about men. I did
>
> not know why I was excited by other boys, especially when I noticed their bodies
>
> while we did sports together."

Theo's experience is shared by almost all the participants. Some reported that

people around them already noticed that they were "different" when they were young.

Andre says:

> When I was playing with my schoolmates, they sometimes told me that I was a
>
> sissy and that I behaved like a girl. I used to get angry with myself. I wondered
>
> why I could not control my movements and my appearance.

Through self-reflection, the participants in this research gradually became aware

that they were different. This finding did not substantiate Howard's (1996) claim that

Indonesian gay men usually considered their emerging sense of difference to be a product

of a childhood deficiency of male love (especially if it involved the absence of the

father). Howard also mentions that Indonesian gay men usually believe that they

developed their homosexual identity after an incident of rape or after a long period of

living in a dysfunctional family. These kinds of narratives are often disseminated by the

Indonesian popular media; however, none of my participants regard them as true. Tanto

expresses this clearly:

I know many people say that someone can become gay when they have traumatic

experiences in their childhood…. Even my mother, when I came out to her, said

to me while crying, "Probably you became like this because I mistreated you

when you were still very young. I used to put your older sister's dresses on you." I

said to her, "No, Mom, I don't think that made me gay!" I am not gay because my

family mistreated me or because somebody abused me!

After coming to terms with their same-sex attraction, usually in their adolescent

years, the participants tried to find information about their sexuality from any available

sources outside their community. The younger participants browsed the Internet and/or

made contact with other gays through various social media apps, while older participants

like Jalal found answers to questions about their sexuality from the counseling column in

a national newspaper, a popular psychology magazine, and the members-only gay

bulletin published by a gay organization. Some participants did not know the term

"homosexual" until they were in high school, and they were really surprised to know that

their strange feelings and behavior had a name. Jalal shares his experience:

One day I read the counseling column in a national newspaper; the writer was

responding to a letter sent by an individual who had written about his struggle. He

described how he could not be sexually attracted to women, whatever he tried. I

was really surprised. His description of his situation matched what I had

experienced! The counselor then explained that the person was "homosexual."

That was the first time I knew about this term. The word "gay" was not known

during that time. I was really happy when I knew it. For years I had thought that

probably I was transgender and I was confused as to why I did not like to cross-

dress like a transgender person. Now I knew that I was homosexual, not

transgender. I felt released.

Similarly, Indra knew in his high school years that the term "homosexual" applied

to him:

In high school, I already knew that I was attracted to men, but I learned about

"homosexuality" for the first time when I watched a national TV program. They

were discussing homosexuality and the [Kinsey] scale from 0 to 6. I was

surprised. I thought I must be a homosexual because I always dreamed about men

when I had wet dreams. Yet at that time I was trying to date a woman. So, in my

denial, I said to myself: probably my scale is three. Probably I am a bisexual.

During their adolescence, all the participants had tried to date women, either to

convince everybody else that they were not gay or to convince themselves that,

somehow, they could change their sexual orientation by practicing being straight. Those

relationships did not last, and they struggled to accept the harsh reality that they could not

be sexually attracted to women. Tanto told me about his futile effort to seriously date a

woman in his college years:

Once I forced myself to date a woman. I had already made up my mind to marry

her after we both graduated from college. I said to myself, "Okay, I must try to

prepare myself for marriage." However, I could not make our relationship work. I

just couldn't. Our relationship ended before the betrothal.... Finally, I had reached

a level where I decided to stop being somebody else. I was exhausted. I just

wanted to be myself.

Some of the participants dated women several times, hoping that they would gradually became accustomed to intimacy with a woman. Nevertheless, they did not feel comfortable. Jalal describes how he felt every time his girlfriend touched him:

I've dated [women] many times. I kept on trying, trying, trying, [and] tried continuously, but in the end, I still could not [enjoy the relationships].… When we went out together and she held my hand, I felt … well, disgust…. As I came back to my house, I grabbed soap and washed my hands…. I really felt uncomfortable. Yes, it was like that. I have tried. Since I was small, yes, since [I was in] elementary school, I have thought that it is impossible for me to marry [a woman].… I thought, "What if my parents force me to get married?" Then I imagined what I should do on the first night…. I always thought about it. [Finally, I said,] "It's enough. No! No! I can't do that."

Andre shares this experience. He had a girlfriend but after some time he terminated that relationship because he felt uncomfortable being around her. He then dated a man, but his boyfriend eventually left him. In this seemingly hopeless situation, Andre followed his mother's advice to go back to his girlfriend, hoping that the painful experience of his break-up would make him realize that only a woman could give him the true love he really needed. However, the relationship did not survive. Andre says,

I went back to my girlfriend because my mom wanted me to date her again. It took just a few months before I finally decided that I could not continue that relationship. I just couldn't. At that time, I said to myself, "Okay, I am different. I cannot be with girls."

These failed relationships, combined with all the experiences of constantly being attracted to the same sex, strengthened the participants' gay identity consciousness. An essentialist understanding of gay identity emerges where homosexuality is considered to be an unchangeable condition, permanently engrained in one's being, rather than a merely socially constructed identity. Even Noel, who has studied sociology, argues:

> I knew that theoretically sexuality is fluid and diverse. Probably there is a "choice factor" in it. Yet the reality is I have been like this since I was very young. I was never sexually attracted to women.

Amid the conviction that their homosexuality is inherent, most participants have at one time prayed to God to change their sexual orientation as they thought that God could do what they themselves could not do. Some prayed for years, to no avail. Finally, they became fully aware that they had to accept their sexuality as something that was God-given. Verdi recounts his experience:

> When I fell in love with my boyfriend, I became an atheist because I was angry with God. Why had God created me like this? I prayed so many times, so why didn't God change me? I left the church for five years, but after I experienced how God protected me and my family during the 1998 riot in Jakarta, I came back to the church and tried to be at peace with myself. Well… it's a long process. Finally, I said, "God, if this is what you gave me, I have to accept it."

Other participants did not get angry with God when they realized that God did not change their sexual orientation. They just stopped praying for change. Jalal, a Catholic, speaks for many when he says:

From the time I was in primary school, I prayed every evening – and every night

before I went to bed – asking God to change me so that I would not be interested

in men anymore. I begged him for mercy. I said, "God, please, change me. Please,

God." I constantly prayed like that until I was in my thirties. I prayed with tears.

It's like you pray until there is blood in your tears! And I did not only pray. I also

tried hard to date women. Finally, I stopped praying because in spite of all I had

done, God did not change me…. Then I said to myself, "I don't know what my

life will be, but I know God must give me a way to live my life as a gay person."

Therefore, it is nonsense if a psychologist says, "When you try harder, you can

change your sexual orientation." You can easily say that because you've never

experienced what I've experienced.

It is when participants came to terms with the nature of their sexuality that they

discerned that their sexuality is God-given. Subroto, who has been in relationship for

more 18 years, makes this statement with confidence:

Being gay is a grace because we are created like this by God. We never asked for

it. We also never chose to be gay. It is all God's authority that decided what we

will become; therefore, we have to accept this as God's grace.

"The loving God accepts us as we are"

All the participants firmly believe that God loves them the way they are. The

reason is clear: when God is the one who created their sexuality, it is impossible for God

to reject them because of it. This belief is also supported by Christian dogma that

acknowledges that love is the dominant attribute of God and that God loves the human

race infinitely (Erickson, 2013). In the interview sessions, almost all the participants

described God as a loving God who accepts them unconditionally because they are created in the image of God. Richard, the youngest participant, says:

> I think God loves everyone who seriously wants to come to Him with a humble heart and who always asks for His forgiveness and protection. God knows that we are gay. God knows what is inside our hearts. So I believe God hears our cries. He is Immanuel, God who will not leave us.

Barry, a Catholic, and Indra, a Baptist, relate God's acceptance of gay people to the Gospel stories about how Jesus ministered to the marginalized people who were considered to be sinful and how Jesus embraced those people unconditionally. Barry says:

> I seldom go to Mass anymore because I am disappointed with the Catholic church. They do not care about marginalized people. In my spiritual journey, I did not find God in the church, but rather among LGBT persons who were in trouble. Every time I did legal advocacy work for my fellow LGBT persons, I felt that Jesus was there with us. In fact, it is also Jesus who motivates me to do my work because he said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

Indra affirms Barry's view of Jesus as God who accepts and ministers to the marginalized people:

> I call myself Christian because I follow the teaching of Jesus Christ. For me, compared to all religious leaders, he is the one who clearly shows his stand toward marginalized people like me.

Four participants connected God's acceptance with their experience of being accepted by their parents as a gay son. These participants perceived their parents' acceptance as a paradigm of God's acceptance. For them, having parents who can accept them as gay persons is indisputable evidence of God's acceptance. Andre told me:

> When I am in doubt, I always think, "If my mom finally can accept me as a gay man, how can God as heavenly father not accept me?" …. I have faith that God does not discriminate against people. That's it…. God has touched my life. He has given me a sign that he accepts me the way I am, that even though I am a gay, I am God's creation.

It was the belief in God's acceptance that attracted some of the participants' partners who were initially not Christian to convert to Christianity. Jauhari converted from Islam after he learned from his Christian partner about the loving God known in Christianity. Jauhari offers this reason for his conversion to Christianity: "I wanted to put my faith in this God who does not look down upon my physical appearance." Similarly, Tanto converted from Buddhism and became a member of the GKI church after he went with his Christian partner to an LGBT seminar held in a GKI church, which brought a positive message about God's acceptance. He testifies:

> My background was Buddhist, and I was a devout Buddhist. Every day I prayed the same prayer: I asked for enlightenment so that I could realize who I really am. My prayer was simple: If I am wrong, please show me the truth path of life; if I am right, give me a peaceful heart. I prayed like that day after day, continuously, until I got tired and decided to stop…. Finally, I felt very relieved when I heard that there was a religion in Indonesia, in this case the GKI church, that talked

about God's acceptance of people like me. Since then, I have been attending this church because here I found a God who can accept me as a gay man.

It is interesting that the belief of God's acceptance is also shared by Patrick (37), the only participant in this study who is not completely sure that same-sex relationships are acceptable to God. He pictures himself as "a naughty boy" and feels uncertain about his worthiness in God's eye. Nevertheless, he admits that he, too, is experiencing God's blessing, a sure sign of God's acceptance. He explains:

I don't feel that God has rejected me. Probably it is me who rejected God because I am unworthy. So there is no question about God's acceptance. The question is, Am I worthy as a gay person?

Interestingly, the belief in God's acceptance was also shared by the Indonesian gay Muslims who participated in Boellstorff's (2007) ethnographic study. Boellstorff reported that most of his participants did not see being gay as sinful, or being gay as a minor sin easily forgiven by God, because they were created gay by God. It was a part of God's plan. "It was meant to be that one is gay, yet also meant to be that being gay and being gay Muslims can never be made commensurate" (p. 151). The similarity of view between IGMCPs and Indonesian gay Muslims shows that the process of theologizing is universal. It also demonstrates that the personalized theology built upon people's life experience is so influential that they perceive it as more authoritative than an institutional dogma built upon rigorous interpretation of sacred text and long-established religious traditions.

"The sense of guilt was not from God"

If being gay or being in a same-sex relationship is essentially not a sin, then how can some gay Christians feel guilty when they realize that they are gay? According to Erickson, a conservative theologian, the sense of guilt occurs as a result of committing sin. He defines guilt as "the objective state of having violated God's intention for one" (Erickson, 2013, p. 623). This objective guilt is different from subjective guilt or "guilt feelings" that often come from an "irrational feeling that one ought not to have" (p. 582). Some IGCMPs reported that they never feel guilty for being gay, but others did experience a sense of guilt in the past, particularly before they were able to accept their sexuality. These IGCMPs finally realized that their guilt feelings did not come from God or were not objective guilt; instead the guilt feelings came from the negative views of homosexuality shared and expressed by society. Verdi says:

> I experienced guilt feelings before I made peace with myself. As long as I could not accept myself as a gay man and a Christian, those guilt feelings existed. But now I do not experience them at all because I have been reconciled with God.

Patrick, who came from an Evangelical church background, also thought that the guilt feelings that he experienced did not come from God, but from the strict teaching of his church. He says:

> Yes, there is a conflict. I feel guilty because I was taught that man should love woman…. This is because I grew up in a community that had strict teaching. My previous church and the church to which I belong now are quite strict…. Therefore, there is a conflict that has not been resolved between that teaching and my own personal opinion…. But if we talk about living out our faith, I think the

essence is the same either for straight or gay, for those who are single or partnered: God is love and you have to channel that love to the world.

Theo, a member of a large charismatic church, also experienced a period when he felt guilty for being gay. During that period, he was influenced by his church's teaching that emphasized the necessity of "holy living" through trying to separate oneself from sin. As a result, the church closely examines what is sinful and what is not. After some time, Theo realized that his guilt feelings did not came from God:

> There was a period when I felt guilty and unworthy as a Christian. Yet later I realized that everyone is basically a sinner. Other people are not less sinful than me. Then I thought, "It is not our portion as humans to decide what is to be considered as sin and what is not." Whether or not God will receive us depends on our faith, not on human judgement. And my faith in the Lord Jesus is not affected by my gayness. My faith in him is exactly the same as [that of] straight people who believe in Jesus.

The participants' rejection of the church's teaching of "homosexual sin" was manifested through their religious practices. All the participants with a Catholic background refused to go to Confession to acknowledge that they had sinned because they are gay or have been involved in same-sex relationships. Barry says:

> I was very active in the Catholic church when I lived in the Catholic school dormitory. I went to morning Mass every day. On Sunday, I served as an altar boy, and later I became a cantor. During that time, I never felt that being gay was a sin. I don't know why. A priest used to tell us that we had to confess our sins at least two times a year: before Easter [Mass] and before Christmas [Mass]. I never

confessed that I had sinned because I am gay. I didn't think it was necessary. So I always went to Communion without any guilt feelings.

Jalal, a Catholic who is still active in the Charismatic Catholic community, shares the same experience:

As you know, in the Catholic church we have a ritual of Confession. Until today I have never confessed my "sin of homosexuality" [laughing] because I don't believe that it is a sin anymore.… When I take part in Sunday Mass, I do not feel guilty at all.

Participants who came from a Protestant background dismissed the church's teaching about "homosexual sin" by confidently taking part in Communion. Many Protestant churches in Indonesia observe the ritual of "fencing the table" before every Communion. Church members who are living in sin are warned not to take Communion, in order to protect the "holiness" of Communion from "unrepentant sinners," who should be excluded from receiving the mercy of Christ (Hughes, 2004). This practice was inspired by John Calvin, who drew his argument from St. Paul's exhortation in 1Co 11:27-29: "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." In the conservative view, gay people who are in same-sex relationships (IGCMPs) can be categorized as "unrepentant sinners"; therefore, they should not take part in Communion. Nevertheless, all the participants in this study decided to take part. Andre recalls his experience of taking part in Communion just after his mother found out that he was gay:

After my parents told me that homosexuality was a sin according to Scripture, I felt a sense of guilt that had not occurred in me before. During that time, I thought I was unworthy every time I took part in Communion. Later, I thought, "If I never

take part in Communion, it means I will never be in communion with Jesus!" I

don't want to be separated from Jesus. I believe in Jesus. Therefore, I decided to

always take part in Communion.

Richard, a Charismatic, acknowledges that he never thinks of himself as a sinner

who is unworthy when he receives Communion. He feels peaceful and content every time

he receives the bread and drinks the wine. Moreover, he sees these symbolic rituals as a

sign of God's protection, which enables him to meet any challenges or threats to his

relationship. He says:

> After I came to believe that God loves me, I looked at Communion as a tool that
>
> God uses to shape my faith so that I can be a Christian who loves God and my
>
> partner more…. For me, Communion is also a symbol of protection [and]
>
> salvation.... God's blessing and power are given through that Communion for
>
> anyone who participates with faith. I am not afraid to take part in it; on the
>
> contrary, I experience God's blessing and peace every time I participate in it."

Our Life Journey is Guided by God

The second recurrent theme that emerged from the interviews is an unshakable

belief among the IGCMPs in this study that their life journeys, as individuals and as

couples, are guided by God. Participants used terms like "God's will" or "God's plan"

quite often. Drawing upon the strength of their personal experiences, they are convinced

that they live their life in accordance with God's will. This conviction contradicts the

church's teaching that gay Christian couples are living against God's will and their lives

will not be guided by God unless they terminate their relationship and live in chastity.

They also did not experience the devastating consequences of living in sin as described

by Erickson (2013), such as living in divine disfavor, guilt, punishment, restlessness, inability to love others, and being driven by self-centeredness. On the contrary, they experience God's guidance and providence while maintaining their same-sex relationships. Nine participants (Richard, Barry, Indra, Andre, Patrick, Verdi, Jauhari, Subroto, and Jalal) share similar stories about how they are filled with a sense of assurance that God is with them and that God will always help them to face any challenges that arise in their lives. Jalal, an older IGCMP, shares his experience:

> In the past I often wondered, "If I am not married, what will my future be like? Who will take care of me when I am old? I live alone. All my friends already have children. I see their children accompany them when they go to the hospital." Fortunately, every time I became anxious, there was a voice in my heart that told me, "You may not know what the future will be, but God will make a way for you." … Frankly speaking, I am not too spiritual. I am just an ordinary [Catholic], but God always provides me with what I need. That's why whenever I face a problem, I just pray to God and believe that Jesus will protect me; as the Scripture said, "Cast your anxiety on him." Sometimes I pray before bedtime. Sometimes I say the rosary. I am quite certain that God will always help me, so I keep trying to "give thanks in every circumstance," as the Scripture commands us to do.… Since I have lived with my partner, his extended family has been quite supportive. I have been entrusted to take care of one of his cousins since the day he was born! Eventually he became a part of our family and he perceived us as his parents, too. I am really glad. Probably this is God's answer to my prayer. Probably this son

will take care of me some day. Things like this convince me more that God intervenes in my life. God shows me the way.

Jalal's faith is a mixture of orthodox and unorthodox belief. Like any other Catholic, he prays the rosary and believes that this religious practice is the proper way to ask for God's favor. He also quotes two popular Scripture verses (1Pet 5:7 and 1Tes 5:17) and applies those principles in his life, as many Christians do. However, his belief contains an unorthodox view in that he believes that being gay and being in a same-sex relationship do not prevent him from experiencing God's guidance and providence. Richard, the youngest participant, who is a member of a Charismatic church, echoes Jalal's belief. He speaks for many when he says:

I believe that God is always with me and protects me as his child. God will not humiliate me and will not let me be humiliated. Therefore, I am not ashamed of being gay. God knows who I really am and God knows that I love him. If I ask for God's protection, he will not abandon me.

For Andre, his belief in God's guidance was strengthened by specific events that took place during his journey of building a committed same-sex relationship. After a failed relationship, Andre finally met his partner and has enjoyed a long-lasting relationship. Furthermore, his mother, who rejected his "gay lifestyle" for eight years, finally decided to accept him as her gay son and support his partnership. Looking back, Andre links these two major events in his life with his understanding of God's will. He says:

I always believe that whatever happened in my life, it happened because God let it happen. For this reason, I am always grateful for everything that God has given to

me and I will do my best to take care of everything that God has given. One of God's gifts is my parents' acceptance. I never expected that they would finally accept me and support my relationship. Another of God's blessings is that I could meet my partner. I am really sure that these good things could not have happened in my life if they were not God's will.

For Verdi, his belief in God's guidance was strengthened by the horrific events that occurred in Jakarta during the social unrest of 1998, where many Indonesian Chinese houses were burned and many Indonesian Chinese women were brutally raped. Verdi's sister almost became one of the victims, but fortunately she was able to escape. Verdi's family, including Verdi himself, believe that it was God that had protected each of them. Verdi recalls the story:

> What happened in our family during the [Jakarta] riot became a moment that brought me back to God, after I had been a sceptic for about five years…. On that night, when my sister was walking home from her office, she was suddenly chased by a group of people who wanted to rape her. My sister ran as fast as she could while praying to God and crying at the same time. She said that logistically escape was impossible, never mind the fact that she was running in 12-cm high heel shoes! It was unbelievable that she was eventually able to escape. She said it was the power of God that enabled her to get away from the would-be rapists. This incident really made me realize… (pause) … that God was actually there. God protected our family, including me.

The participants say that they experience God's guidance not only when they live faithfully, but also when they commit sin. Like other Christians, the participants realize

that sometimes they also have an experience of "falling into sin." What they consider to be sin includes a sexual encounter with any person who is not their partner. When falling into sin, they believe that God has not abandoned them; instead God leads them back to living faithfully. Theo, a Charismatic, says:

> Once I had an affair with another man. When it happened, there was a voice in my heart telling me, "You have to repent, and you have to tell him the truth. If you lie to your partner and try to cover it up, some day he will know" … I heard that voice when I prayed. I believed it was God who forced me to tell the truth to my partner in order to keep our relationship healthy. So, finally, I confessed to him that I had been unfaithful.

> From Theo's case, we recognize that while IGCMPs do not consider a same-sex relationship to be sinful, they also do not support the idea of a non-restricted sexual norm. Almost all of the participants in this study believe that gay Christian couples should uphold certain norms that model the traditional Christian marriage principles. They believe that a healthy same-sex relationship should be monogamous and that infidelity and free sex (sexual intercourse without love and commitment) are sinful. Indra speaks of how he felt guilty after he indulged in promiscuous sex in the past. When he ultimately contracted gonorrhea, he saw the affliction as God's punishment for sins that he had committed. However, Indra believed that this failure did not obliterate God's mercy and God's providence in his life. Indra says:

> I always believe that everything that happens in my life, my ups and downs, cannot separate me from God. I acknowledge that I sometimes fail, but I still believe that in all things God works for my good. Even when I do something bad,

God uses that bad experience to make something good. Many years ago, I fell into sin when I followed my fleshly desire. As a result, I contracted gonorrhea. I asked God for forgiveness and repented of that sin. God not only forgave me, but he also used that painful experience to motivate me to become involved in an HIV/AIDS prevention program so that I could help gay friends who had contracted sexual diseases. I believe that God takes control of my life and that I will always follow the path that God has set for me. Every life experience is inter-connected.

Eight participants (Andre, Richard, Noel, Budiono, Theo, Barry, Subroto, and Jalal) believe that having a monogamous and committed same-sex relationship is not only not sinful, but it also a part of God's design for them. Therefore, they are convinced that God has guided them in the process of finding a proper partner. Noel tells the story of how he met his partner:

> I think God guided me in finding my partner. I remember during the few months before we met, I felt despair because I had just broken up [with my boyfriend of the time]. It was very difficult for me to move on. Then he came into my life unexpectedly. Initially we didn't think we would ever be a couple. At first, I didn't even really care about him. However, eventually I began to love him and he felt the same. Now I have been in the longest relationship [of my life] with him. I am amazed at how I was able to find a person who is the perfect match for me, a person who can understand me and really love me. Looking back, I think it must be because of God's guidance…. I think if this were not God's will, God would never have allowed me to enjoy this long-lasting relationship.

Noel's view is shared by Budiono, a Catholic who usually calls God "The Universe" as he believes that the concept of God is more universal than what has been thought in church. Budiono explains:

I believe the Universe has arranged the reality of my life today. The moment I met my partner for the first time or the moment we decided to build a relationship all happened according to the Universe's design. That's why I could meet my partner without using any dating apps as many gay couples do. I met him unexpectedly, without any medium…. That was not my plan. I would never have thought that I could be with him. Looking back, I think the Universe must have been involved in this process. I think I was directed by the Universe to follow this path.

Budiono's partner, Barry, agrees with him. He concludes, "We can be together as partners because God has brought us together and God has united our hearts to love each other." The belief in God's role in guiding IGCMPs to find a partner grows stronger as the relationships last long and stay healthy. Subroto, the participant who has been in partnership for 18 years, shares his reflections:

I have always found that my life journey does not go as I expect it to go. Life is a mystery. As it unfolds, I can see God's will and guidance very clearly along the way. For example, when I met my partner 18 years ago, it seemed like every small event led us to be certain that we should live together. We didn't always realize this when the event happened, but looking back, I can see it clearly. I could not imagine what my life would be if I did not live with him. I guess I could not be as content as I am now. I probably would not have been able to help others or do social work for others [as a medical doctor and as a gay rights

spokesperson] as extensively as what I have. By having him as my partner, I have been given a chance to do things I could not have imagined doing before. For me this is a great blessing. This is God's plan, not mine. It has been totally beyond of my expectation. That's why I never regret being gay. To be gay is a grace. I just need to follow where God leads me in God's mysterious way.

Our Partnership is Sacred

Thomas (2008) claims that heterosexual marriage is sacred because God designed marriage as an instrument to help husband and wife to be more holy, by binding them permanently, confronting them with their own selfishness and non-Christian attitudes, and eventually encouraging them to change their attitudes and be more Christ-like. This kind of loving relationship can also be accomplished through a committed same-sex relationship; therefore, a same-sex relationship can be as sacred as a heterosexual marriage relationship. All the IGCMPs who participated in this study perceive their relationships as sacred for two reasons: (1) They have been directed toward a loving companionship. (2) They uphold the value of commitment as in a heterosexual marriage relationship.

A True Loving Companionship

In Indonesia, same-sex relationships have often been misjudged as the manifestation of gay people's insatiable hunger for forbidden sex. This study shows exactly the opposite to be true. All the IGCMPs in this study testify that their decision to enter into a partnership was not driven by sexual urges or mutual lust; rather it was driven by the need to have loving companionship. Richard's testimony typifies those of many:

When I was looking for a partner, I did not search for a sex partner. I wanted to find someone who loved God and who could accept me unconditionally; someone who could accompany me in a happy time and in a sad time; someone who could be a good working partner…. I think this is about love…. I believe our loving Father in heaven wants his children to live happily with someone they love.

Richard cited non-sexual criteria as the main concern in finding a suitable partner. These criteria consist of a potential partner's spirituality, dependability, and faithfulness. Noel cites other non-sexual criteria. He regards maturity and stability as the paramount criteria over sex and physical appearance, knowing that only a mature and stable person has the potential to be an unselfish partner. For him, finding a mature person is a precondition to building a true loving relationship.

I am not the type of gay man who only wants to have sex. When I start to look for a partner, I am interested in someone who is mature and stable. Physical appearance is not number one for me. I prefer to have a partner who is not handsome or sexy, but wise and open-minded, over having a sexy partner who is selfish and narrow-minded.

While the participants cited non-sexual criteria as the decisive factors in finding a partner, they did not mean that the sexual aspect of a relationship is dispensable. Verdi mentions the importance of "chemistry" when looking for a partner. It refers to a complex emotional or psychological interaction, including sexual attraction. However, the participants realized that they had to look beyond sexual attraction in order to build a long-lasting partnership. Tanto states the importance of having a vision in building a relationship, a distinctive factor that makes same-sex partnership different from

occasional same-sex encounters. Tanto's vision is to have a healthy family, a vision similar to that of any heterosexual married couple.

> My vision of having a partner is the same as the vision of a married heterosexual couple. I want to have a healthy family. We even want to adopt a child so that we can become parents.

Not all respondents have a vision of building a family with children; in fact, most of them do not. Four respondents (Barry, Indra, Theo, and Patrick) specifically mention the vision of having long-lasting companionship. They cannot imagine themselves living alone for a lifetime as they do not think that they have a call to be celibate. According to Scripture, celibacy is a gift. Jesus himself said that the celibacy is not applicable to everyone, "only those to whom it is given" (Mat 19:11). For Theo celibacy is not an option. He needed companionship after living alone for ten years in an apartment in Jakarta, far away from his family home in Central Java. He says:

> For me having a partner is a need. I had been living here for 10 years…. It is too lonely to enjoy my life alone. So I decided to look for a partner, and I finally found my current partner, who during that time was also seeking a long-term relationship…. I am not the type of man who can be independent. I need somebody. I am sure that living together with my partner can shape me into a better person.

Unlike Theo, Barry is an independent person. He is very active in an LGBT organization and is surrounded by friends every day. Still, he does not think that he was called into celibacy. He felt lonely and needed companionship. He says:

I felt there was something incomplete when I lived alone. My life was complete only after I found my partner…. I have someone with whom I can share my life totally, someone who can truly complement me.

The need for companionship also drove Patrick to find a partner. Coming from a strong Evangelical background, Patrick was the only participant who was still uncertain that being gay was not sinful. Yet he chose to be in partnership. For him this is the best available option, based on two considerations: the increasing need to share his life after many years living as a closeted gay person, and the difficulty in resisting sexual temptation in remaining single. His concern is clearly expressed below:

I want to live with someone. For me it is important to be settled. If I am single, I can go with any man, but by committing myself to someone, I will share my life with him only. As I am getting older, I am getting more… well, it's like a box that becomes full of things over some time. That box should be emptied out or the things inside should be reorganized…. It's like… for many years, there were many things in my life that I always kept to myself all the time. At some point, when you are getting older, you need someone to share your burden. You cannot talk about these things with many people, can you? So, if you have someone, that will be good.

In a partnership, I am not relying on physical attractiveness. Beauty fades. We will all be getting old. Then what is the thing that will last? A commitment, right? Hence, I have to guard myself from outside temptations by always remembering how he loves me. There are so many temptations outside, more than in the period before we met.

The experiences of Indra, Budiono, and Verdi, outlined below, perhaps provide the clearest examples of how the decision of the IGCMPs in this study to have a same-sex partner was not driven merely by sexual needs. In the past, they had been involved in promiscuous sex with men for some time. At some point, Indra realized that this kind of sexual relationship was sinful and would only lead to a miserable life. He then decided to find a companion. Indra tells his story:

> Based on my experience in the past, seeking sexual gratification by meeting many gay people will not solve the problem of loneliness and emptiness. It only gives you temporary physical pleasure. After that, you will still feel something is missing. Furthermore, you will feel guilty and unworthy because you use people as sexual objects. Because all of this, I realize that what I need is a committed partnership, where we can share our life together and strengthen each other. This partnership is basically the same as a heterosexual marriage…. So my partnership is not mainly sexual in nature. Sex is not my priority. Frankly speaking, I even don't want to have anal sex anymore [after the traumatic experience of having contracted gonorrhea in the past]. No, that is not what I need…. I just want to live together and build a healthy relationship that leads to a healthy spirituality.

Similar to Indra, Budiono also acknowledges that having a partner by no means gives him sexual freedom. On the contrary, binding himself to his partner cost him more sexual freedom than he had before as he now has to devote himself to his partner in an exclusive relationship. He had to relinquish his sexual freedom in exchange for a "real relationship." Budiono tells me:

Before I found my partner, I did explore my sexuality. I started to find gay friends and had sexual contacts. Eventually what I needed was more than just friends to have sex with. I wanted to have a real relationship and I thought I was ready for that. At first, I was worried. I wondered, "Can I be faithful? Can I maintain this relationship without disappointing my partner?" I was worried, just like a heterosexual man who wants to enter married life. I finally decided to find a partner after I was sure that I was ready to be a faithful partner.

Verdi imagines that his partnership is as typical as that of a heterosexual married couple. When he and his imagined heterosexual partner were still bachelors, they had more sexual freedom. However, self-control was required as they entered into married life.

By my having a partner, my life become more peaceful and more comfortable. I don't have to go anywhere to find someone. As in a relationship between husband and wife, I have learned to be faithful and learned to have more self-control.

A Committed Partnership

The second reason why the IGMPs in this study perceive their relationship as sacred is because they value commitment as the core of their partnership, as in any heterosexual marriage. According to White (2010), commitment consists of two aspects. The first is the contractual aspect, which contains constraints and rules. The second is the declarative aspect, through which we express our love for and devotion to the other person. This aspect can be clearly seen in the wedding ceremony, particularly in Christian marriage rites, where one of the pinnacles of the liturgy is the marriage vow.

In Indonesia there is no social space where a same-sex couple can publicly declare their commitment because same-sex marriage is not recognized either by the church or by the state. An attempt to publicly declare same-sex commitment will cause controversy and condemnation, such as happened when Jauhari and Subroto declared their partnership in 2002. Most of the IGCMPs in this study did not declare their commitment in public; this does not mean, however, that they are less committed than heterosexual couples. The term "commitment" is often used in the interviews, especially when participants were asked about what aspect they considered to be the most important in their relationship. Furthermore, all the participants (except Subroto and Jalal) have committed themselves to a monogamous relationship; therefore, the idea of "open relationship" is rejected as it is seen as a betrayal of their commitment and/or as a sin. Noel says:

> My relationship with my partner is so far so good. It is quite good, actually. Commitment is important to us. That's why for me the concept of "open relationship" is strange. I would feel very guilty if I had a sexual contact with anyone who was not my partner. Probably I would have a mental breakdown if that happened! However, every time I have sex with my partner, I do not feel guilty.

Theo holds a similar view. Although he realizes that open relationship may work for some couples, it is certainly not an option for him and his partner as a Christian couple who believe that monogamous partnership is undebatable. Theo says:

> Well, I can understand if my friends have an open relationship. Probably they are not ready yet to commit themselves to one person only. However, open

relationship is not an option for me. I mean for us as Christians. I mean, if two

people have already decided to live together and have the same goals, why does

their relationship have to be open?

Andre also emphasizes the importance of the commitment to be faithful to his

partner. He realizes that keeping a commitment to monogamy is not easy, especially after

a certain period of time, when their relationship hits the boring routine in the business of

life. Andre shares how he had to discipline himself to hold fast to his commitment and

not let himself be carried away by temporary emotional needs:

I think the most important thing that we should have in a same-sex relationship is

commitment. Our relationship has a shared goal. It is not only for fun…. I know

this is not easy. It is more difficult than building a traditional family because we

have to do everything secretly. We cannot even let people know how we love

each other. The road is difficult, so we have to be committed to each other and

have the same goal: that we will stay together until the end… We have been

together for four years now. As in any other relationship, sometimes we get bored.

However, that is not a reason for us to break up and find another man. We remain

faithful. For me love is a decision, not only feelings. I know that if I leave him

and find another man just because I get bored with him, sooner or later I have to

deal with the same problem with my new partner. Furthermore, there is no

assurance that I will find a better person than him. Therefore, I am always grateful

that I have him as my partner.

Patrick, who is also facing the problem of a boring routine after being together for

more than four years, shares how he manages to sustain a faithful and loving relationship:

Being in relationship with someone for quite some time, you can easily fall into some routines. We have to make sure that we do not get bored because of those routines. Therefore, we have to maintain our communication and spend enough quality time together by doing things that can keep binding us together.

The problem of boredom described by Andre and Patrick is a common problem that can also affect any heterosexual marriage. As a couple becomes settled and life falls into a comfortable and predictable routine, stability usually takes over from the spontaneity that is often displayed during the courtship. In a book titled *The Healthy Marriage Handbook*, which consists of answers from Evangelical leaders to questions on every aspect of the marriage relationship, several questions are related to the problem of boredom. In response to this problem, the book acknowledges that "even the healthiest marriages" experience boredom and suggests the couple spend more time together, keep changing, and also find and nurture shared interests and experiences (Ferrebee, 2001, p. 146). Interestingly, this suggestion is exactly the same as Patrick's strategy in dealing with boredom.

Although long-term partnership can cause relationship boredom, on the positive side it can strengthen the couple's commitment. Jauhari, Subroto, and Jalal, who have been in relationship with their partners for more than fifteen years, give evidence that the longer they live together, the more they realize that their partnership is precious. Jauhari has been in relationship with Subroto for more than eighteen years. Although Jauhari is ten years younger, he is still committed to his partner because he believes that his partnership is irreplaceable. He expresses this point:

I think living as a gay couple is not as easy as living as a heterosexual couple. They can easily find a partner; sometimes their parents even help them find one. When the marriage doesn't work, they can easily find another man/woman. For us it is very difficult to find a suitable and committed partner. It is not easy to find someone like my partner! Many friends of mine couldn't maintain their partnership for as long as we have. Now as I am getting older, I have become wiser when thinking about our relationship. I will not seek another man just for sexual gratification. I also don't demand sex from my partner. I just need him to be my life-long companion. We don't want to live alone in our old age, with no one to take care of us when we are sick. We want to spend our older years together. This is our greatest need.

Jauhari's partner, Subroto, agrees whole-heartedly with Jauhari. As a medical doctor he realizes that his sexual needs are gradually decreasing as he is getting older; however, he finds that his unselfish love grows by his staying faithful in his commitment. Subroto says:

I think our relationship has become long-lasting because of our age. As I am getting older, I never think of finding anyone else. For what? I already found him. Gone is the [sexual] need that steered me when I was under forty. At around fifty, the need for sex is not significant anymore. I just needed a life companion…. My satisfaction now does not come from what I can get, but from what I can give. I am satisfied when I can make someone happy. If I can make them happy, I am also happy. I don't know why I can be like this. This is also a mystery. God's mystery.

It is important to note that for the IGCMPs in this study, the concept of the sacred in a same-sex partnership does not necessarily mean that they have to choose a Christian partner. Five of the ten couples in this study (50%) have a non-Christian partner and four of those partners are Muslim. This suggests that for many IGCMPs, interfaith partnership is not seen as a problem. Having a non-Christian partner will not pollute the sacredness of their partnership. This view is in contrast to that of the majority of Indonesian Christians who believe that interfaith marriage is inappropriate because it violates the principle of "unequally yoked" written in the Bible (2Co 6:14). This view is also held by many Evangelicals who believe that Christians are God's chosen people. They assume that Christians who unite themselves with a person who does not believe in Jesus Christ and disregards biblical truth will not be able to follow Jesus wholeheartedly. The sense of superiority that permeates this theology has contributed to the polemic characterizing interfaith marriage in Indonesia, where religious tolerance is still relatively low. A recent in-depth interview by Richmond (2016) with 28 Muslim-Christian couples based in either Indonesia or Australia shows that many of these couples faced disapproval or rejection by their families or communities. However, many also found that the experience of living together in an interfaith family renewed and deepened their faith. Rather than either or both of the partners losing faith, their faith is strengthened and their religious understanding is broadened as they recognize how God can work in their partner's life in different ways. Nor are religious differences a hindrance to the interfaith couples being religiously connected as both religions uphold common values such as kindness, goodness, and integrity, which they can use as connecting points.

I believe that interfaith partnership is not a significant issue among IGCMPs because – unlike in heterosexual marriage – there is no practical social or religious guidance for choosing a same-sex partner. In this absence of religious guidance, gay Christians have more freedom to set up their own rules in finding a partner. Having been marginalized as sinners because of their sexual identity, they do not see any good reason to marginalize other gay persons based on their religious identity. For Verdi, "chemistry" and commitment are the two main criteria in choosing a partner. He does not mind having a non-Christian partner because he believes that an interfaith couple can support each other's religiosity in a unique way. Verdi shares this confidence in his own positive experience:

> Actually, for me religious difference is not a decisive factor in finding a partner, as long as he is a tolerant person…. Well, now when I am too lazy to go to church, my partner usually reminds me, "You have to go to church!" And sometimes I also remind him, "Why have you not *sholat* (prayed) for some time?"

Unlike Verdi, Jalal found his partner was not a tolerant person when he first met him. He knew that they were not perfectly matched, particularly in the religious aspect. However, he loved his partner and he was very certain that his partner was the one he wanted to spend his life with. He says, "[I knew] my life would be more beautiful when we lived together." He was right because they have been together for eighteen years and he has seen how his partner changed over time and became a very tolerant person.

> I opened myself to having a non-Christian partner because I could accept him the way he was. When we had just started living together he was intolerant. Once I got an invitation to attend a prayer fellowship in church. He cynically said to me,

"Why do you have to go to that kind of fellowship? It is useless!" Then I said, "Hey, this is my right. I don't force you to go with me, but you also can't prevent me from going. This is my right. My business." Then after some time, he could accept me. He didn't complain when I went to religious meetings. After many years he has become a very tolerant partner. Every Christmas and Easter, he says "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Easter." He himself is not a devout Muslim. He never observes the five daily prayers. He fasts in the month of Ramadhan, but only for two or three weeks. Eventually, I accompanied him. We fasted together. It was a wonderful experience and since then I always fast together with him every year, but I also observe fasting every Lent.

Among the other participants who have non-Christian partners, only Patrick, whose partner is a Chinese Confucian, felt unease about having a non-Christian partner. They are committed to each other and they are tolerant of each other; however, coming from a strong Evangelical background, Patrick has been indoctrinated with Evangelical doctrines that tend to be very strict and critical of others who hold a different set of beliefs, insisting that Evangelical doctrines hold the ultimate truth. Patrick's theology made it difficult for him to understand his partner's theological worldview. He explains his concern:

 I must say that I have a conflict of faith because my partner is not a Christian, not like my former partner who passed away…. When it comes to faith, it seems like we don't see eye to eye because our faiths are different. For example, as a Christian I don't believe in superstition. I believe that Satan's power exists, but it does not manifest itself in certain forms. But he believes in those kinds of

things…. He came from a Chinese family with deep-rooted Chinese traditions….

Well, these things did not influence our relationship in a negative way, but

somehow as a Christian, I feel unease.

In conclusion, religious difference in IGCMP partnerships does not make same-

sex relationship less sacred. It does not necessarily decrease the couple's commitment nor

become a hindrance for them in building a selfless loving relationship. However, a person

who has strong religious zeal or a narrow religious conviction will find it difficult to

respect and accommodate his partner's beliefs because being accommodating can be seen

as a sin of "compromising with the world." On the other hand, religious difference can

enrich the couple's relationship, if it is not seen as a threat, but as an opportunity to learn

more about another faith and to nurture a more tolerant attitude. Barry is one of the

participants who values differences. His partner is a Christian, but in principle he would

have no problem if his partner were a non-Christian. He explains:

> I never think that my partner should have the same religion or ethnicity as me. It
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> would be so boring if my partner's background was exactly the same as mine! I
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> like someone who is different from me so we can mutually learn what we don't
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> have from each other. This is what I call "the sharing philosophy."

Our Spirituality Grows Through the Partnership

Contrary to the traditionalist view, almost all of the participants (11 out of 13)

reported that they experience spiritual growth as they share their life together as a couple.

There are three points of evidence to substantiate this claim. First, the interviewees

indicate that they have self-awareness. Second, the participants value spirituality as an

important factor in building healthy partnerships. Third, the participants show that their partnerships foster Christian values or attitudes such as those described in "the fruit of the Spirit." Their experience of living together with all their differences and difficulties has shaped the way they relate to their partners as they are compelled to live in unselfish devotion in order to build a healthy and harmonious relationship. In the relationship-building process, they have learned how to cultivate godly attitudes such as love, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. For Christians, as indeed for IGCMPs, this process is known as "sanctification." In the following paragraphs, I will explicate the three points above to show how the IGCMPs' partnerships foster spiritual growth.

The Existence of Self-Awareness

According to Helminiak (2006), self-awareness is an ability to take us outside of ourselves. In other words, self-awareness enables us to see ourselves as if we were another person observing our feelings, habits, reactions, behaviors, or thoughts. When we have self-awareness, we are aware of our inner self and we can be honest about ourselves. Self-awareness is also an ability to look beyond ourselves. It leads us to ponder our existence and the meaning of life. For Christians, self-awareness leads us to believe in God and spiritual matters as "our minds transcend the here and now" (Adair, 1992). Self-awareness also enables us to build a healthy relationship. As we are able to objectively evaluate ourselves, we know our strengths and weaknesses. We are aware of our needs, desires, and expectations. As a result, when things go wrong in our relationship with our significant other, we will not merely blame the other person. We are able to be introspective and apologize if we have made a mistake. Helminiak believes

that spirituality grows when we have self-awareness because it can take us outside of ourselves and it causes us to care about another person at a deep and sacred level.

It is obvious that during the interviews the participants used the framework of their Christian faith to reflect upon their relationships. They are aware of the reality of God and look at themselves from a religious point a view. This self-awareness enables them to have an introspective mind that leads them to be honest in evaluating themselves. Theo's testimony clearly reflects this view:

> After I had a partner, I didn't feel unworthy as a Christian. On the contrary, I felt that I had become a better person compared with the time when I was living alone…. Through this relationship, I have learned about the value of faithfulness. It's like … once I got bored with him and started thinking of someone else… then I felt like God rebuked me. I was reminded: "You already have a partner who is better than him, so you have to remain faithful to him!"…. Now I don't want to find another man. I have learned to fully accept him, the way he is….

When Theo was tempted to be unfaithful in his relationship, his introspective mind reminded him that his desire was wrong because as a Christian he must be faithful to his partner. Theo's self-awareness enabled him to perform self-evaluation. It also made him realize that the presence of God is so immanent in his life that God can personally "rebuke" him when he does something wrong to his partner. The immanency of God is also experienced by Jauhari, one of two participants who converted to Christianity after they built a partnership with a Christian. Jauhari, once a Muslim, told me:

> In my journey, since I surrendered myself to God, I feel God has become closer to me…. When I am alone in the house, in my bedroom at night, I often engage in

self-talk, but… it is more like a prayer, or like a dialogue [with God] ….

Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror and think, "Am I crazy?" But I enjoy

those moments. I believe that's the way God guides me. It is quite different from

my past experience. I had to recite the Quran or say a special prayer (*shallat*

sunnah) to get wisdom from God's guidance…. Now I just bring into prayer what

I have in mind: sometimes it is my struggle, sometimes my irritated feeling. Then

I keep silence, but not for long…. I then feel God's presence and I talk [to God].

I often think, "I don't care if anybody will think I am crazy. I am alone here and

nobody will know anyway." I think probably I have experienced this phenomenon

because in the past I usually suppressed my feeling. I kept suppressing those

feelings until they exploded… in a unique way like this.

Being a Christian for 18 years (since he met Subroto), Jauhari experiences a close

mystical relationship with God, a relationship that he never experienced when he was still

a Moslem. Although he tries to find a logical and/or psychological explanation to make

sense of the spiritual phenomena he has experienced, it is obvious that his mind

transcends the here and now. His self-awareness gives him the means to view himself

from a religious/spiritual perspective. The self-awareness, particularly the spiritual

awareness, is also apparent in Noel's and his partner's account:

My partner works in a TV station, so sometimes he has to work on Saturday and

Sunday. It means he cannot go to church with me. Whenever he cannot attend

Mass, he says, "Can you please pray for me?" and I say, "Okay, I will pray for

you." Actually, I pray for him every day before I go to sleep. Sometimes we pray

together. When he is free, we go to church together. We either go to my church (a

Catholic church) or I join him in the Orthodox church. When he comes to my

place and sleeps with me, we pray together before we go to sleep!

Noel and his partner really believe in prayer. They believe that prayer will

somehow bring God's blessing on their relationship, so they pray regularly not only in

church, but in their private life. Moreover, the fact that they pray together before they

sleep together demonstrates that they have integrated their spirituality with their sexuality

to some extent. It is clear that Noel and his partner, along with Theo, Jauhari, and many

of the other IGCMPs in this study have self-awareness in their religious/spiritual lives; it

is unimaginable, therefore, to think of them as unspiritual persons.

Many of the participants have also found that as their relationship grows, their

self-awareness in connection with their partner also grows, allowing them to understand

how their partners perceive them and teaching them how to respond to their partners in a

proper way. Budiono told me:

> Before I had a partner, I lived alone and often spent my time off alone. I didn't
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> care about anyone else. This partnership has seriously influenced the way I live
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> and the way I think. I have become eager to know more about my partner and his
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> needs. At the same time, this partnership has taught me more about who I really
>
> am from my partner's perspective.

Like Budiono, Theo emphasizes how his self-awareness has grown after being in

a relationship for four years. It is marked by his increasing ability to show empathy, even

when his partner gets angry with him:

> This relationship really changed me. I've evolved toward thinking of him more
>
> than thinking about myself, and I [now] consider my partner's interests to be more

important than my own.... I have become less egocentric and less selfish…. Now I

have become more understanding and have more empathy for him.... For

example, in the past, if he came home [from work] and got angry with me for no

reason, I would be provoked and I would speak up against him. But now I

understand that probably he acted like that because he was very tired or had a bad

day at the office…. I can put myself in his position and try to be supportive.

Jauhari, who has been in a relationship for 18 years, also affirms the fact that his

partnership can last because there is self-awareness, which guides him and Subroto when

their relationship is in crisis. Jauhari says:

One other thing that has made our relationship long-lasting is that both of us are

self-reflective. Every time I face a problem in our relationship, I think, "What

would happen if you were in his place? What would your reaction be if he treated

you the way you treated him?"

Jauhari's principle is basically the same as the Golden Rule taught by Jesus in

Matt 7:12: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

The Indispensability of Spirituality

Almost all of the IGCMPs in this study acknowledged that spirituality is an

important and indispensable factor when choosing a partner. Noel explains the reason for

this:

For us, spirituality is important because it helps us to do good things. It's like a

guide. Through spirituality we can differentiate between what is good and what is

bad. If my partner did not have good spirituality, it is likely that he would deceive

me or do something wicked to me. Spirituality makes us aware of good values that we have to apply in our life.

Noel perceives spirituality as a requirement for building a healthy relationship because only a spiritual person has an awareness of what is good and a willingness to do what is good. Indra adds another reason why spirituality is important for building a relationship:

Spirituality is important because it makes us aware that we live not only for ourselves, that our lives should be mutual. I expect my partner to have good spirituality because it is necessary to enable us to show respect for each other. Without it, our relationship would be unhealthy. Our relationship would be filled with guilt feelings, or we would have to deal with a parasitic relationship… or we could hurt each other because we could not forgive one another. I don't like a relationship like that; that's why spirituality is important. It has made us aware that there are consequences in everything we do… it's like the chain of life: even a small thing that you do will have an impact on the universe. We should build a life in harmony with others and with nature. When our relationship is in harmony, when we can be united in our diversity, we can have a positive impact on those around us.

For Indra, spirituality is essential because it enables a gay couple to realize what it really means to share their lives. It is a key to experiencing a life-giving relationship that will not only benefit the couple, but will also bring harmony to and enrich the lives of the people around them.

Partnerships that foster Christian values

Having a committed partner is a life-changing and life-giving experience for IGCMPs. Their partnerships change their attitudes and foster values that Christians recognize as "the fruit of the Spirit." For Andre, his partnership motivates him to be more patient and tolerant:

> After I had a partner, my perspective changed. In the past, I always expected him to be what I wanted him to be. Once he reminded me, "I never expect you to be what I want. I am quite accepting. Could you please do the same?" Then gradually I learned to accept him the way he was. This relationship also taught me about commitment, about how I could continue to love him when the romance was gone or when we had a conflict. By deciding to love him unconditionally, I could keep my commitment to be faithful to him.

> For Patrick and Verdi, their partnerships helped them to develop self-control, which is also one aspect of "the fruit of the Spirit." Both said that they have had to discipline themselves not to hang out with friends during the weekend, instead reserving their leisure time for their partners and themselves. Developing self-control has also meant that they have had to learn to control their emotions and expectations. Verdi says:

> I learned to be faithful through this relationship. I came to realize that I should stop fooling around. I also had to control my emotions… and learn how to respect my partner. One thing that I learned in particular was this: "Don't ever try to change your partner. If he finally changes, let it come from his own decision."

> Similar to Verdi, Barry and his partner have also learned that they should not try to control the other's life and become too possessive. Barry says:

I am always learning something new from my relationship with him. I learn about

independence, about sharing, about not being impulsive. In the early days of the

relationship, we were quite possessive: "Because you are the love of my life, you

belong to me." Both of us tried to control each other's life. We became so

dependent and could not be separated…. As our relationship has grown, we have

come to understand how to balance between being dependent and being

independent. Now we really enjoy our time together.… I feel complete when I am

with him… but we can also enjoy the moments when have to be separated

because of our jobs.

Indra has learned the hard way about the importance of self-control:

When my previous partnership failed, I learned one important thing: I was too

possessive. I now realize that to have a healthy relationship, we should be close to

each other but also maintain some distance. The relationship should not cut us off

from the outside world and make us too exclusive and possessive. Only when we

can build a healthy relationship will our partnership became stronger and have a

positive impact on others.

Indra, Patrick, Verdi, and other participants acknowledge that they had to go

through a difficult process before they were able to change their attitudes. The process

included dealing with conflict or unmet expectations, which forced them to compromise

with their partners. The following account shows how Jauhari learned about self-control

when he was irritated with his partner:

I often got irritated because of small things. For example, I was in my room and

he yelled at me from the kitchen, saying: "Jauhari, lunch is ready. You are late!"

I thought, "Why is he treating me like a child?" But I learned to get past my

anger by telling myself, "Imagine if someday he cannot be with you anymore… if

he cannot cook for you anymore. You will miss moments like these. So please do

not complain!" Usually, by thinking like that, I stopped complaining and enjoyed

his cooking…. Yes, I always have to discipline myself not to complain about my

partner. Sometimes by thinking about my age. I am not young anymore…. I can't

stop time. If our relationship ended, would I be able to find another man like him?

Probably not. I am sure I could find someone who wanted to sleep with me for a

night, but it would hard to find someone who wanted to live together for years. If

I did not have self-control, I would destroy this relationship and destroy my life,

too…. Well, I have learned that in living as a family, we can have everything we

want. So we have to be content.

When Jauhari said that he has to be content, he was also referring to the fact that

he and his partner are now in a sexless relationship. For Jauhari, self-control means that

he has to accept his unmet expectation. The participants in general agreed that it is

difficult to build godly attributes, such as self-control, since they often have to learn them

through conflict and disagreements. However, looking back, they believe this value

formation is worthwhile pursuing because it shapes them into mature people. Patrick

speaks for many when he says:

By having a partner, my life was changed in a certain way because we have two

different heads but we have to walk the journey together. Even though basically I

am still me, I usually have to learn how to compromise. This is not easy… but I

have become more mature. I know that I could also have become mature without

a partner, but being with him has helped me to grow… to make my life more meaningful….

It is also important to note that eight of the IGCMPs in this study (61%) are actively involved in volunteer work, helping others in need. Richard is performing social work among the street youth of Surabaya. Noel, Barry, and Jalal work in LGBT organizations that help LGBT people who face difficulties. Verdi and Indra work in HIV/AIDS prevention programs, and Andre offers help to other gay people who are in crisis by guiding them toward self-acceptance. Subroto, as a medical doctor, offers his services to patients who do not have enough money to pay him. I found it interesting that the IGMPs in this study are more active in social ministry than in church ministry. Only one of them (Verdi) is active in church ministry, as a choir member. Theo said that he had actually been interested in joining the church choir, but he abandoned that plan because he did not want to be "a stumbling block" if some day people learned about his partnership. Some of the participants had been active in church in the past, but they also gradually withdrew after they realized that the church could not accept their same-sex partnerships. Barry, who was a lector in the past, shared his experience:

> Why am I not involved in church ministry anymore? Through my spiritual journey, I realized that I find God not when I am active within the church walls, but when I am helping my fellow LGBT people who are marginalized and suffer discrimination… or when I talk to people in the streets. I find God among marginalized people. What Jesus said in the Bible is true: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

We can conclude that the IGMCPs' experience of marginalization by the church has affected neither their relationship nor their spirituality, but it has affected their involvement in church ministry. Many of them said that they were interested in being involved in social ministry because they had been blessed by having a relatively stable and content relationship. They had experienced the love of God: how God had made it possible for them to build a committed partnership. Now they were called to help other LGBT persons who were in trouble. Indra gave another reason for this social activism: he had experienced the pain and horror of contracting gonorrhea, so he wanted to help other LGBT persons who had contracted a sexually transmitted disease. Finally, Subroto, a participant who has been in partnership for 18 years, added another reason why gay couples should be involved in carrying out good works:

> This is what I think: people probably cannot accept us as a gay couple. But if we are doing good things in every aspect of our life, they will accept us, at least as good men or good neighbors…. Through our doing good works or achieving something that benefits society (*berprestasi*), people will respect us without considering that we are gay…. Many people in Indonesia found out that we were a gay couple after we came out in the media many years ago. But we did our best to continue doing good works…. For example, once I conducted research on our tribe's culture and wrote a book. Then I was invited to be a speaker many times. I sat with church leaders and professors…. When our extended family come to Jakarta, either from Malang or Surabaya, they prefer to stay with us here, instead of staying with our relatives who have bigger houses and more "normal" families. I am really glad. They feel comfortable with us because we genuinely love

them… As I grow older, my energy is now channeled into making the people around me happy. If I meet patients who don't have enough money, I examine them for free. If I can make them happy, I will also be happy.

In conclusion, the IGCMPs in this study have clearly shown that they not only acknowledge the importance of spirituality, but they also experience spiritual growth through their partnership. The evidence of this spiritual growth can be seen through "the fruit of the Spirit" that grows as they try to maintain their relationship. When we read their detailed descriptions of their partnerships, we can see the existence of godly attributes such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We can also see their eagerness to care for others through various social ministries. In short, it is incorrect to judge these gay couples' relationships as unspiritual. We should not judge a books by its cover, and the "cover" in this context means the label we stamp on them based on our rigid doctrinal views. In order for us to make a better judgment, the participants' godly attitudes or their "fruit of the Spirit" should be taken into consideration. "For there is no good tree that bring forth corrupt fruit; nor again a corrupt tree that bring forth good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit" (Luk 6:43-44a; ASV)

We Prioritize Parents' Blessing Over Relationship Blessing

According to the rites of passage theory, the IGCMPs in this study have a need to have their relationship ritualized or blessed in order to properly value that commitment and empower them to face the negative attitudes of the church and of society. With no ritual to signify their commitment, they will experience some confusion or ambiguity about how to define their relationship. Moreover, the interviews show that the IGCMPs

in this study have a positive outlook on their spiritual/religious life as couples. They are sure that their relationships are sacred and not sinful, that they experience God's guidance in their journey together, and that their spirituality is growing through their partnership. Altogether, it would be appropriate to assume that there is a real need among them to have their relationship blessed in a kind of affirming rite. This rite should not necessarily be a public ritual such as the gay marriage rituals now held in many Western countries. It could instead be categorized as pastoral liturgy or pastoral rites that come out of a particular pastoral need and that are designed for a specific individual or small group of people (Earey, 2012, p. 231). The affirming rite for gay couples might involve the couple's family only and might be conducted in secrecy.

Nevertheless, the interviews unexpectedly show a lack of enthusiasm among the IGCMPs for a blessing ritual, presuming that a pastor or a priest were able to facilitate such a ritual for them. Only two out of ten couples (20%) consider a blessing ritual to be important. Four couples (40%) said that it would be good to have one, but they do not necessarily need it. Three couples (30%) regard the blessing ritual as not important at all. This finding appears to invalidate the rites of passage theory. However, a closer examination of the participants' profiles and the themes that emerged during the interviews reveals some factors that can explain this phenomenon. The first factor is interfaith partnership. Five couples (50%) have interfaith partnerships, where the IGCMP's partner is non-Christian. As a result, it was understandable that they would not want to participate in a Christian blessing ritual presided over by a pastor or priest. Richard's partnership was an exception. The couple was really interested in having their relationship blessed even though Richard's partner is a Muslim. This was quite

understandable given the fact that the couple is still very young; they have been in relationship for just over one year (it was still in the infatuation phase), and Richard's partner has not acquired a mature religious identity. As a matter of fact, when he came with Richard to the interview session, he told me that he wanted to convert to Christianity.

The second factor influencing the lack of enthusiasm among the participating IGCMPs for a blessing ritual is living arrangement. Five of the ten couples in this study (50%) are non-cohabiting partners; they are living apart because cohabitation is not possible. In Indonesia, it is common for persons who are single to remain in the parental home until marriage. The parents of the non-cohabiting partners in this study (except the parents of Barry and Indra) did not know that their sons were gay and had same-sex

partners. In this circumstance, it is not possible for these gay couples to live together on a

full-time basis. Many of them only manage to meet on weekends and/or holidays, staying

in one of the partner's parents' house, hoping that the parents will continue to believe that

the partner is just "a close family friend." Theo says:

> We have had a good relationship with my family and my partner's family for two
>
> and a half years, but they assume we are just good friends. Every holiday I stay
>
> with my partner's family. I spent time together with his mom and dad, and also
>
> with his sister. But they don't know that we are more than friends. Likewise, my
>
> family also knows my partner as my best friend. When I go home (to Solo) to

Table 5

Couples' Perception of the Blessing Ritual for Same-sex Partnership

Name	Rel. length (years)	Couple's Religion	Living Arrangement	Parents' Blessing	Is a Blessing Ritual Important?
Richard & NN	1	Different	cohabiting	✝ / ✝	
Noel & NN	3	Same	non-cohabiting	No / No	
Budiono & Barry	1	Same	non-cohabiting	No / No	
Theo & NN	2.5	Same	non-cohabiting	No / No	
Tanto & Andre	4	Same	cohabiting	Yes/Yes	
Indra & NN	1	Different	non-cohabiting	No / No	
Patrick & NN	4	Different	non-cohabiting	No / No	
Verdi & NN	6	Different	cohabiting	✝ / No	
Jauhari & Subroto	18	Same	cohabiting	Yes/Yes	
Jalal & NN	15	Different	cohabiting	✝ / Yes	

Note: Rel. length = Relationship length. ✝ = deceased.

> visit my mother for a few days, I always tell her the latest news about my
>
> partner's life. Then, before I go back to Jakarta, she always asks me, "I want to

give you some food (*oleh-oleh*) for your best friend. What kind of food does he like?" So I am not sure whether my parents have actually found out about our partnership and are keeping quiet, or they don't know at all.... We have a dream that some day we will live together. We have started to build… to realize that dream together….

Budiono and his partner are working hard to have their own house because they know that their non-cohabiting living arrangement is fragile. If one day Budiono's partner's parents discover that they are involved in a same-sex relationship, there is a risk that Budiono will not be allowed to stay in his partner's parents' house anymore. Even if a parent knows that his or her son is gay, it does not mean that the parent will welcome the couple to stay in their house. Indra says:

Actually, living apart from my partner is quite difficult for me. Frankly speaking, I need to be touched. I don't know why it is so meaningful for me, but I need it. So I really hope that some day we can live together, but I have to be very careful when dealing with my mom. Yes, she can accept me as her gay son, but she won't be happy if I live together with my partner. Once I shared with her the concept of living together, and she said that my idea was ridiculous. She said, "If you are gay, it's ok for you to be gay. But please, don't do something silly."

Theo and Budiono do not find their living arrangement satisfactory, but they have no better option. The non-cohabiting relationship lacks "a primary symbol of serious commitment," which can only be achieved by living together in a cohabiting relationship (Haas & Whitton, 2015, p. 1249). As a non-cohabitating relationship does not change the couple's living arrangement, the relationship lacks a sense of permanency. Performing

the blessing ritual in this situation would not have a performative effect because it would not be truly marking the couple's transition from one stage of life to another. Under such circumstances, it is little wonder that receiving a relationship blessing is not the prime concern of the IGCMPs in this study. Only cohabiting couples who hold the same religious beliefs (in this case, Christians), such as Tanto/Andre and Jauhari/Subroto, are enthusiastic about participating in relationship-blessing rituals.

The most important factor bearing on the IGCMPs' lack of enthusiasm for a blessing ritual is the absence of parental blessing or acceptance of their relationship. Some of the IGCMPs in the study said that a relationship blessing ritual would be meaningless if their parents were not present in that event to show their support. Barry says:

> Once I thought of having our relationship blessed in [one particular church in Jakarta]. However, I always hoped that in that event, my mother would come. Yes, that's my dream! I want my mother to be there because her presence is more important than that of any of my friends (silent)... I think my parents' blessing is important…. Yes, I am still convinced by this old traditional belief… and I have had a close relationship with my mother since I came out to her. Now I'm more open with her, but… as you know … as with other mothers, she still often says to me, "I want you to get married. I want you to have children." … Well, I think it will take a long process [before I can fulfill my dream].

Barry, like the other non-cohabiting IGCMPs, prioritizes his parents' blessing over a religious blessing. He considers a religious blessing to be useless without the blessing of his parents. This view is common among Indonesian youth, including those in

heterosexual relationships. In Indonesian families, parents play a central role in the lives of their children before they get married (Riany, Meredith, & Cuskelly, 2017). Parents need to be honored and respected while children are expected to consult with their parents on important decisions. Parents' advice and guidance should not be taken lightly. Children are expected to never argue with their parents even if they have different perspectives. Certainly, parental influence significantly shapes children's marriage decisions, even in the contemporary urban middle-class context (Nilan, 2008).

When children start to build a serious heterosexual relationship, their parents will consider whether their children's choice of partner is suitable. If the parents think that the partner is not suitable or appropriate, they will not affirm the relationship and consequently will not give their blessing. To get the parents' blessing (*restu*) is crucial. Children from all religious backgrounds in Indonesia have been taught that they will not have a happy and harmonious life without their parents' blessing. Instead, they will receive sanction from God (*kuwalat*), especially if they hurt their mother's feelings. There are cases where couples still insist on marrying even though their parents disagree with their choice of partner. These marriages are referred to as *kawin lari* (eloping or, literally, "getting married on the run"). It is believed that couples who do not receive *restu* and hurt their parents' feelings will receive divine sanction or punishment (*kuwalat*). It is also believed that, according to the principle of causality, they will experience *karma* or natural punishment. This *karma* is difficult to remedy.

While many modern urban youths probably do not believe in what they would consider superstitious ideas or practices anymore, the concept of *restu* remains deeply ingrained. This was clearly seen in the comments of Jauhari and Otto. They had their

relationship blessed in the Netherlands eighteen years ago, but when they reflected on

that event, they thought that the religious blessing they received was not as important as

their parents' blessing. Jauhari says:

> When I had my relationship blessed [in the Netherlands], I was still young and
>
> full of ambition, self-openness, and idealism. So during that time I needed that
>
> ritual. We would have done anything to have it! But as the years went by, looking
>
> back, I thought, "Actually, what was the meaning of that? It was just like
>
> receiving a piece of paper [to formalize the relationship] …. The most important
>
> thing was that my parents and my family were OK with me. That's the key. Yes,
>
> just that!" After both sets of parents accepted us and each of us was treated like
>
> their son-in-law by the other's parents, we had everything we needed. After that,
>
> we didn't care what people might think about us. Because I think the freedom to
>
> live our life like this came from our parents' blessing (*doa restu orangtua*).
>
> Whether that blessing was spoken or unspoken, as long as it was there, that was
>
> enough. Why do we have to expect anything else? If our family supports us and
>
> perceives us as ordinary family, what more do we need?

Jauhari's partner, Subroto, holds a similar view. His father could not attend their

blessing ceremony because it was held in the Netherlands; however, in a private

conversation, he accepted Subroto as his gay son and gave him the courage to be who

really is. His father's blessing turned out to be the most important event in empowering

Subroto to live peacefully as an IGCMP. He shares his experience:

> When my family and relatives learned that I was gay… Bang! Suddenly I heard a
>
> lot of noise from them. I didn't realize that they could be so resistant. This

happened in 1999, when I came out publicly. They learned about me from the media, when my story appeared in the newspapers and on TV. Well, you know…. My brother was a pastor. My sister in-law was a pastor. Everyone in the family was a church activist…. Fortunately, my father was still alive at that time, so they didn't frontally attack me. So, finally, I went to Medan to meet my parents and came out to them. My father said, "If you are that way, so be it." *("Ya sudah, kalau sudah demikian.")* I thought my parents must know that I was gay. They had known me since I was born, so they didn't look shocked [when I told them].… For me, my father's acceptance was a very, very decisive moment. I still remember what he said [when I was condemned by people], "The dogs might bark but the caravan will still pass." My father's blessing was enough for me to live my life peacefully.

For Subroto and many other IGCMPs, the parental blessing is required in order for them to live in harmony with themselves and those around them. In a heterosexual dating relationship, strong parental influence and the need to obtain the parents' blessing often limit a young person's autonomy in the marriage process (A. J. Utomo, Reimondos, Utomo, McDonald, & Hull, 2016). Parental influence covers everything, from spouse selection to the preparations for the wedding event. This communal event is usually hosted by the parents because it is seen as more like the joining of two families, rather than the marking of the couple's union (A. Utomo & McDonald, 2016). Even in the Christian marriage rite, particularly in many Indonesian Protestant churches, there is a ceremony where the couple publicly show their respect to their parents. If the couple are Javanese, they will perform *sungkeman,* a ritual where the bride and the groom come

forward to the parents on bended knee, asking permission to marry their chosen one while apologizing for mistakes they made as children. This ceremony is held immediately after the couple receive a blessing from the pastor/celebrant. It indicates the central role of parents in the marriage process although many pastors regard a parental blessing as not necessarily required for the church to marry a couple (Makugoru, 2006).

In contrast to the average heterosexual couple, Indonesian gay couples usually do not involve their parents at all in the process of forming same-sex partnerships. Everything is usually done in secret. Parents do not even know that their sons are gay, not to mention that they have a partner. Coming out to parents is difficult as many gay couples are afraid that telling the truth about themselves will not bring acceptance and support; instead it will break their parents' hearts and shatter their dream of seeing their children marry and have children. This situation causes many gay couples, including IGCMPs, to feel guilt toward their parents as they realize that they cannot fulfill their parents' expectations and cannot fulfill their familial duty and obligations. Consequently, they are more concerned about having their parents' blessing than having a religious blessing. Noel's concern is clearly expressed below:

> When I was in high school, I was quite idealistic. I said to myself, "Some day I have to marry a man who I love." I thought my parents would be egoistic if they forced me to [marry] a woman. However, as the years went by, I thought, "Probably I am the one who is egoistic because am I forcing my will on my parents and on society. Am I wrong if I [try to] force people to understand my point of view?" I still cannot answer that question…. I am the oldest son, and my father has already told me that he wants to have grandchildren…. I love my

parents. I don't want to break their hearts, but by living a lie, basically I have

already hurt them…. Sometimes I think that probably my parents already know

[that I am gay] …. Well, it's complicated…. When I chose a partner, I always

made sure that we had the same mission: we should have a goal to talk [about our

relationship] to both of our parents some day.… I don't want to live in a dream

forever. I don't want my partner to take this issue lightly and say, "Well, let's just

start a relationship and see what happens next…."

Coming out to parents is a big dilemma for many IGCMPs. Some try to ignore the

issue because they think there is nothing they can do. On the other hand, some IGCMPs

make a plan or strategy to come out, as is illustrated in Budiono's account:

I never think about having a blessing ritual although I did have a dream… or

probably it's better to say "imagination" about that. So, if my partner wants to

have a blessing, I am OK with that, as long as the community around us are

tolerant, which is not the case now. What is important now is planning how we

can live together so that we can do things together fully and we can have a dog….

Another important thing is planning to come out to my parents.… I have a plan to

come out, but I keep delaying it because I am worried…. Then I made a strategy.

I started by telling them something that is less shocking, like telling them that in

the last few months, I was not active in church anymore. I wanted to know how

they could handle this discouraging news. If they were not ready to accept this

fact, then I would know that they were not ready to accept the more devastating

news: the fact that I am gay. So, after I told my parents [about my inactivity in

church], my mom felt sad and disappointed. I think it will take time for them to

accept this news and they need to learn through this disappointment so that some day they will be ready if I come out to them.

The IGCMPs' concern about breaking their parents' hearts does not only hinder their coming out to parents, but it also prevents them from being open about their sexuality in their community, fearing that their parents will be ridiculed if people know that they have gay children. For many Christian parents, finding out their son is gay makes them feel ashamed and embarrassed. They have been taught that the reason their son is gay is because he does not live according to Christian values. Consequently, the fact that their son is gay represents their failure to raise and educate him properly, in accordance with church teaching and the cultural value system. It is no wonder that Noel faces a big dilemma in making a decision about whether to come out to his parents. His mother works in the Catholic section of the government's department of religion and his father is a devout Catholic. Noel does not want his parents to be mocked or ridiculed by people. He says:

> Both of us are facing a big dilemma now. My partner has to come out to his father very soon, or his father will find him a wife. But if he comes out, he will break his parents' hearts. How can we communicate about these things with our parents? I also don't want to see my parents being mocked and ridiculed by their relatives and neighbors when people learn that their son is gay. I don't care when people ridicule me. I can stand that. But I can't stand to see my parents being ridiculed or people talking about them behind their backs.…

The fear that his parents would be mocked or ridiculed also hindered Barry's talking about his sexuality in church. He cannot even trust his parish priest. Barry says,

"I never talk about my sexuality to the priest or anyone in my parish. I don't dare to do it, because I worry about my mom. Our family is not 'a good family' and people have been gossiping about us. My mom is troubled by the gossip, so I don't want to make things worse. If I need to talk about my sexuality, I will go to a priest [who ministers in another city and] who does not know anything about my family.

For many IGCMPs, the journey to acquire their parents' blessing is long and difficult, but it is absolutely needed in order for them to have a harmonious life in their partnership. As a result, they do not perceive a real need to have their partnership blessed before they obtain their parents' blessing. Once a couple receives that blessing, they realize the real need of having their relationship blessed. Andre illustrated this point beautifully:

I always hope that some day we will receive the blessing ritual. Yes, I really want it…. Even if the church cannot do it, I don't mind if it is done somewhere outside the church; at least there is a pastor who is willing to give the blessing…. Every time I go to a church wedding, I hear the pastor say to the couple, "What God has joined together, let not man put asunder." I want to hear that Bible verse spoken to us personally. I am sure that a blessing will make us more committed to each other because it somehow represents God's blessing upon our relationship. It symbolizes God's approval, so, yes, with God's blessing, I will be motivated more to try as hard as I can to make my relationship last. Of course, I am already committed to my partner; we made the commitment just between me and him. By

our having the blessing ritual, our family and friends will also know our

commitment.

Looking toward the Future

The interviews for this study were conducted from November 2015 to March

2016, a period in which a tide of anti-LGBT sentiment had just swept through

conservative media outlets in the country. The situation has become worse since then,

with an Islamic pro-family group attempting to submit a judicial review to the

Constitutional Court requesting that it revise the penal code so that the law criminalizes

gay sex. Although the request was denied in December 2017, at the time of the writing of

this dissertation, Indonesian lawmakers are successfully pushing through an anti-LGBT

draft law. During the interviews, the participants expressed a realization that the future of

LGBT rights in Indonesia is bleak. Ten out of thirteen participants brought up the issue of

anti-LGBT sentiment during the interview. Two participants (Patrick and Verdi)

considered the possibility of leaving the country because they felt frustrated with the

homophobic atmosphere in society. The strongest reaction came from Patrick, who said:

> Enough is enough. I am done with this country. This nation is full of people who
>
> are not only intolerant, but also foolish! Even those who have master's or doctoral
>
> degrees from Western countries are quite narrow-minded (on LGBT issues). So, if
>
> I have an opportunity to work outside this country, I will leave this country, even
>
> if one of us has to leave first and we have to be separated temporarily to open a
>
> way.

The frustration of Patrick and Verdi is not exclusively related to the stigmatization

of their sexuality. Both of them come from Indonesian families of Chinese descent who

grew up in Jakarta and were targeted in the anti-Chinese riots in 1998. Moreover, the interviews were conducted during the trial of Ahok, the Indonesian-Chinese governor of Jakarta who had been accused by Islamic hardliners of conducting a criminal act of blasphemy against Islam. Patrick and Verdi suffer triple marginalization as Chinese, as Christians, and as gay men. The current situation has made this marginalization too much for them to bear.

Other participants did not express an intention to leave the country. Five of them realize that the current situation has forced them to be more careful in coming out to their friends. Some have even withdrawn from being openly gay among their friends. Jauhari, who used to be quite active in sharing his story as an openly gay man in his Facebook posts, has now decided to no longer share his story in that social media. He found that after the anti-LGBT sentiments erupted, many of his friends on Facebook unfriended or unfollowed him because they were afraid that people would accuse them of being LGBT supporters. Subroto also decided to withdraw from his previous role as an LGBT speaker who was regularly invited by the government or the media to talk about LGBT issues. Considering the growing conservatism in the country, he thought it was useless to campaign for LGBT rights anymore. Other participants who are not involved in any type of LGBT activism, like Tanto, Budiono, and Theo, are also concerned about the anti-LGBT sentiment, but they believe that they will not face any problem as long as they live decently and faithfully as Christians.

Despite the negative reactions to the current wave of anti-LGBT sentiment, three participants are still optimistic about the future. Noel said:

I know that the current situation makes the discussion of LGBT issues more of a

taboo, but I believe that people become homophobic because they don't know

anything about the LGBT community and they don't have any LGBT friends.

They hate us because they don't know us. Therefore, I still have a passion to

educate people about LGBT issues.

Noel's passion is shared by Barry. Instead of withdrawing from the LGBT

organization with which he is involved, he is still actively campaigning for LGBT rights

and even joins in street demonstration carried out to express rejection of any attempt by

the government and/or conservative religious groups to stigmatize or criminalize LGBT

people. He said:

This is my ministry, my way to show gratitude to God who has been so good to

me. God has given me a good life. I owe God good works; that's why I will

continue to do advocacy work for my LGBT friends.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This research attempted to answer the question "How do Indonesian gay male Christians in partnership (IGMCPs) make sense of their spiritual lives and develop their lived religion when they try to form and maintain a committed same-sex relationship in a church and a society that disapprove of that relationship?" Particularly, what is it like for IGMCPs to be in a church where people disapprove of their partnership? How will their experience of marginalization by the church affect their relationship? What kind of lived religion do they experience? Do they perceive a real need to receive a relationship blessing ritual?

The research findings show that having a partnership is not a hindrance for IGCMPs in continuing to belong to a church that does not support their relationship. By constructing a personalized theology based on their spiritual experience and their positive experiences in maintaining the partnership, they seem to be able to integrate their religiosity and their sexuality. Their positive personalized theology gives them spiritual self-worth as gay Christian couples and empowers them to reject the church's negative teaching on homosexuality and same-sex relationship. As a result, they resolutely participate in sacred rituals such as holy Communion without any guilt feelings, even when faced with the forewarning that people who are "living in sin" (like them) should not receive Communion. At a glance, the religious practices of IGCMPs do not look different from those of Christians in general. However, their religious beliefs are different, so they observe common religious practices with a different interpretation or understanding in order to make them relevant to their own beliefs.

Neither the participants' spirituality nor their commitment to their partners is weakened by the church's disapproval of their partnership. However, the experience of marginalization by the church has made them aware that the church is the least safe space for them. Consequently, most of the participants have distanced themselves from participating in church ministry. Instead of getting involved in church ministry, they prefer to engage in social ministries outside the church. Moreover, in the absence of church guidance on same-sex relationships, the participants have had to construct their own moral guidance for discerning what they ought to do as Christians who are living in same-sex partnerships, drawing from the church's teachings on heterosexual marriage ethics such as the principle of monogamy. The result is a mixture of orthodox and unorthodox sexual ethics and beliefs.

Considering the participants' positive personalized theology and their spiritual experience as couples, their lack of enthusiasm for having their relationship blessed by a kind of religious ritual was quite unexpected. Their indifferent attitude was not caused by a perception that such ritual is unimportant, instead it is driven by a belief that having a relationship blessing ritual would be meaningless without parents' presence and support. The ingrained belief that a person will not achieve a harmonious life without parents' blessing (*restu*) made them prioritize parental blessing over religious blessing. To the participants in this study, parental blessing is indispensable for living in harmony as Christian gay couples in Indonesian society.

In the following section, I will compare the experience of the IGCMPs in this research with existing research. I will describe how the research findings presented in the previous chapter confirm, refute, or extend knowledge in the discipline by comparing

them to the literature. Subsequently, some limitations that arose from execution of the study will be described; the description will be followed by some recommendations for further research. I will conclude this chapter by identifying a potential direction for further research.

Discussion

In general, this research confirms studies by J.L. Empereur (1999), Burr (2009), and Tan (2005) showing that gay people pursue a spiritual life and espouse a high level of spiritual well-being. It also confirms the findings of Rostosky, Ridge, et al. (2008) that gay Christian couples hold a spiritual worldview and that this worldview deeply influences their values and choices. The IGCMPs in this study clearly have a religious/spiritual view of themselves and acknowledge that spirituality is an important and indispensable factor in their partnership. They also use the framework of their Christian faith to reflect upon their relationships; therefore, they believe that their partnership is sacred. This finding resonates with Johnson's (2011) claim that the proximal religious construct in gay Christian couples, such as belief in the presence of God and in the sacredness of their relationship has a positive impact on their relationship satisfaction and personal commitment. In contrast, the distal variable, such as having a partner with the same religion, did not affect relationship satisfaction and commitment. Johnson's claim explains why the IGCMPs' in this study experience spiritual growth and contentment in their partnership, even though fifty percent of them are interfaith couples.

This research validates the report by Howard (1996) on his anthropological fieldwork in Jakarta that Indonesian Christian and Muslim gay males somehow were able to integrate religious life with their sexual life. However, his argument that this

integration was achieved through compartmentalization (by constantly moving between living in the "gay world" and living in the "normal world") is not substantiated in this study. Ten of the thirteen participants (76%) in the current study are openly gay men who are not living in compartmentalization. They did not yield to public pressure to get married (living in "the normal world") and then continue their same-sex relationships (living in "the gay world"). In contrast, they built a committed partnership while still holding to their Christian beliefs, attempting to integrate their spirituality and their sexuality. The fact that some of them have not yet come out to their parents does not indicate that they compartmentalize their life; rather they are in the process of finding the most appropriate strategy for telling the truth about their sexuality and their partnership without destroying their relationships with their parents.

This study also does not support the argument of Rostosky, Otis, et al. (2008) that gay couples tend to shift their religious expression from public forms to more private forms. Most participants in this study remain involved in public religious observance although they did shift their involvement in church ministry to social ministries outside the church. The IGCMPs in this study found their self-worth and self-confidence as gay Christians from their personalized theology, which enabled them to overcome the church's negative teaching on the issue of homosexuality. The construction of their personalized theology is closely related to the reframing of their religious discourse as mentioned in Ganzevoort and Roeland's (2014) narrative research. The IGCMPs' stories showed how they had reframed their religious discourse from holiness-victory discourse or obedience discourse, which rely on strong external authority, to subjectivity discourse or responsibility discourse, which have a weaker reliance on external authority.

It is interesting to compare the research findings in this study with those of a sociological study by Yip (1995; 1997a, 1999) among English gay Christian couples in an era where there was limited social and religious support, similar to the situation in contemporary Indonesia. While the English church still regarded same-sex physical expression as sinful, the participants generally had a positive self-image and were able to be well-adjusted. Through the individual theologizing process, the participants in Yip's study achieved an identity negotiation which allowed them to maintain self-respect in perceiving themselves as gay Christians in the midst of the negative teaching of the church. This theologizing process can also be seen in the current study of IGCMPs. However, there are two striking differences between Yip's (1995) study and the research findings of this study. The first difference is to be found in sexual exclusivity. In Yip's study, only 30% of the gay Christian couples were sexually exclusive. The majority (70%) were sexually non-exclusive, the non-exclusivity being either expected or unexpected. Compared to the IGCMPs in the current study, the English gay Christian couples in Yip's study were more flexible in terms of renegotiating their commitment to sexual exclusivity. In Yip's study, the participants differentiated between "making love" with their partners and "having sex" with casual sex partners. This argument was not acceptable to the IGCMPs in my study. Applying the heterosexual marriage principle of monogamy to their same-sex partnership, they perceived an open relationship or having sex with other men as unfaithful and sinful. The importance of sexual exclusivity agreement among IGCMPs is similar to that found in the more recent study conducted in the West by Gotta et al. (2011), which found a significant decrease in the percentage of non-exclusive sexual agreement among gay men after they became a couple, especially

among the younger cohort of gay men who desired longer-term monogamous, committed relationships.

The second difference between Yip's (1995) study and the findings of this research is in the influence of parents on gay partnerships. In Yip's study, only 13% of the participants reported that they had to exercise discretion with their parents (p. 85). Moreover, 16 out of 30 couples supported and were interested in having a blessing ceremony. Those who did not support such a ritual gave personal reasons that were not related to family issues, such as the ceremony would resemble a heterosexual marriage, it would make no difference to the partnership, or it would be seen only as a political statement. In the IGCMP study, the role of the parents was paramount and clearly influenced the low enthusiasm of the IGCMPs for having a blessing ceremony. The reasons that they gave for not supporting such a ceremony are mostly related to family issues. It is difficult for IGCMPs to be themselves or to have a blessing ritual without considering how it will affect their parents, their families, and community.

The problem of parental acceptance is also revealed in the recent study by Ganzevoort and Marbun (2016) concerning the tension between faith and sexualities among Indonesian Christian sexual minorities. Among 15 persons who were interviewed (8 gay males, 2 bisexuals, 3 lesbians, and 2 transgendered persons), four of them are IGCMPs. 83 % of the participants believed that there was nothing wrong with or sinful about their sexuality. Four out of five gay men and lesbians in partnerships believed that their committed relationships were not sinful, with some even claiming that God worked in and through their relationship. However, the study confirms that parents' acceptance is a crucial issue that troubles the relationships of many sexual minorities. Many of the gay

male participants were being or had been urged to get married. Most had not come out to their parents because they did not want to hurt them. Even those who did come out found that their parents' acceptance of their sexuality was not necessarily followed by acceptance of their partnerships. Some participants mentioned the importance of parental acceptance in building a stable partnership as it released them to live their lives and no longer worry the about negative opinions of the people around them (p. 111). The findings of Ganzevoort and Marbun resonate with the themes and subthemes presented in the current study.

Rejection by parents is not unique to IGCMPs. In a study by Barton (2012) of 59 gay Christians in the U.S. Bible Belt, the participants shared similar experiences of parental rejection when they came out. The main factor that caused the rejection was religion. The constant homophobic messages from conservative Christian institutions that frame homosexuality as sinful behavior and as the culprit behind the degradation of traditional family values have made parents believe that being gay is "the worst thing one could be or 'do'" (p. 55). As a result, the parents of only two participants responded positively to their coming out. Quoting Erving Goffman, Barton (2012) called homosexuality a "sticky stigma" that stigmatizes not only a gay person, but everyone associated with him by blood, marriage, or friendship. Moreover, this stigma is also a "discreditable stigma" because people believe that it is a logical consequence of bad, shameful choices that one has made or actions that one has carried out (p. 57).

In Indonesia, churches rarely discuss the topic of homosexuality from the pulpit. All of the IGCMPs in this study, with the exception of one participant from the Charismatic church, reported that they never hear a Sunday sermon that refers to the

church's stand on homosexuality. Discussions – and even entire seminars – on homosexuality within the Christian community do occasionally take place as a reaction to certain events that happen in society. However, these discussions usually die down rather quickly. There are no constant homophobic messages from conservative Christian institutions such as happen in the U.S. Bible Belt. Consequently, although Indonesian Christian parents in general know that the church considers homosexuality a sin, religion may not the only factor that caused their rejection. The findings of this research, along with those of Ganzevoort and Marbun (2016) reveal a strong sociocultural factor that makes it difficult for parents to accept their children's homosexuality. Besides the shame and guilt feelings that arise from the thought that they have failed to guide their children to enter into heterosexual marriage, parents feel quite disappointed to realize that they will not have a descendant from their gay/lesbian child. In some tribes, a father who does not have a married son will be ostracized in social events, and this factor will affect his self-worth.

The difficulties parents face in accepting their gay children and the challenges for gay couples in being open about who they really are indicate that collectivism is deeply influential in the social interaction in Indonesian society. Collectivism also deeply influences Indonesian parenting (Riany et al., 2017). In a collectivist society, the individual perceives himself or herself as a part of a community and develops deep interconnections within the community; therefore, personal goals sometimes have to be given up because community and collective goals are considered to be more important (Triandis, 1995). I argue that this collectivism and the religious upbringing that upholds the importance of the parental blessing have significantly affected the life choices of the

IGCMPs, as individuals and/or as couples. In this light, we can understand why many of them do not want to have their relationship blessed, presuming that a pastor or a priest were able to conduct such a ritual for them.

The blessing ritual for gay couples is categorized as pastoral liturgy. As a rite of passage, it uses what John L. Austin called "performative language," where words are used to produce a result or to cause something to happen (as cited in Earey, 2012). In the blessing ritual for the same-sex couple, the performative use of words should create a new realization of the sacredness of the same-sex relationship. It should affirm God's blessing, and it also marks the affirmation and support of significant persons who are present at that ritual, particularly the couple's parents. Nevertheless, the words alone do not automatically cause things to happen. According to Austin, certain conditions should be met for this performative language to work in the ritual: it must be spoken in the right context, by the right person, and with the right intention, and it must be accompanied by the right conditions. This explanation makes it clear why not all IGCMPs in this study want to have the blessing ritual. Neither the context nor the conditions are right because their parents will not be present in the ritual and will not give their blessing. Some others, whose parents have given them their blessing, have met the right conditions. Thus, a blessing ritual is really meaningful and performative for them.

Limitations

Given the ideographic nature of IPA, thirteen participants are sufficient to provide a detailed exploration and analysis of the lived religion of IGCMPs. In responding to open questions, the participants have given a thick description of their lives that allows us

to attain a deeper understanding of their situation. Nevertheless, there is a need to complement this detailed observation with quantitative research that can provide an overview or a generalized survey of the attitudes, opinions, or behaviors of IGCMPs. A larger sample population is needed for this purpose. While conducting this research, however, I found that there exist very few quantitative studies of Indonesian Gay Christian males.

The sample used for this study is also limited to IGCMPs who live in urban areas of the island of Java. Statistically, of the more than 237 million Indonesians, over half (50.21%) live in villages (BPS, 2010). The life experience of IGCMPs in villages is likely to be much different from that of their counterparts who live in large urban centers. Furthermore, the IGCMPs who participated in this study came from only four different ethnic compositions: Chinese Indonesian, Javanese, Sundanese, and Batakise. Although these four ethnicities represent more than 60% of the Indonesian population, there are in fact 633 ethnicities in the country (BPS, 2016), representing diverse cultures and sub-cultures. It would be interesting to explore the lived religion of IGCMPs who live outside Java and who belong to other ethnic compositions, especially of those who live in the eastern part of the country where much of the ethnic population is Christian.

Another limitation of this study is related to the hidden nature of Indonesian gay Christians. IGCMPs have much to lose from disclosing their relationship; therefore, it is not easy to find individuals who are willing to disclose or share their life experience with researchers. The participants in this study were recruited from nonprobability sampling or convenience samples and there is always a possibility of having a biased result because some people may not be included and others may be overrepresented in the sample.

Nevertheless, Meyer and Wilson (2009) point out that other sampling methods have their own disadvantages, possibility leading to biased results, due to the unique challenge of researching sexual minority groups. To prevent such bias, I attempted to use varied sources of recruitment. Regardless, it will be useful to complement this study with further research using a different sampling method, such as web-based sampling, which can reach IGCMPs who are too afraid to come out or those who are living in rural areas across Indonesia.

Implications

In recent years, seminars on homosexuality have taken place in many Indonesian churches, seminaries, and denominational offices. Conversations in those meetings mainly revolved around biblical interpretations and the church's doctrinal stand on gay issues. While some churches held these meetings to affirm their anti-gay position, some progressive churches have tried to broaden their understanding of gay issues by inviting medical doctors, psychologists, and psychiatrists who are qualified to offer more scientific explanations. Some LGBT organizations have also been invited to share their views, and the representatives of these organizations often talk about the discrimination and stigmatization they experience in the church and in society. These conversations usually end with an abstract statement about how the church should perceive gay people and/or gay couples. Although these meetings can be insightful, they are not particularly helpful for IGCMP persons in church and their families, who need pastoral care and guidance. For them, same-sex orientation and same-sex relationship are not only issues; rather they are a reality of life they have to live with.

This study indicates that what IGCMPs need from the church is not same-sex marriage. The participants also did not expect that the church would drastically change its teaching on homosexuality, realizing that they live in a country where the level of social acceptability of gay people remains very low. Regardless of the church's position on homosexuality, however, IGCMPs will maintain their partnerships. This study shows that their personalized theology has shaped them into determined gay Christians who can stand firm in the face of the negative teaching of the church. What they need from the church is pastoral care from pastors or counselors that can guide them toward obtaining acceptance in their family.

This study illustrates that the most challenging problem faced by IGCMPs is not a problem with the church; rather it is a problem with family, particularly parents, when a gay person discloses their sexual identity to them. To be fair, the family may also experience stigmatization and marginalization from society by having a gay person, not to mention an IGCMP, in their family. Consequently, doing pastoral care with IGCMPs should also take into consideration the IGCMP's family. Mallon (2008) has written an insightful guide book for social workers demonstrating how they can help a gay person and his family in a critical period after the gay person comes out to the family. He recommends the use of an "ecological perspective," which can help a gay person without neglecting his environment (family context). Mallon's recommendations are applicable to the work of all pastors and Christian counselors. On the one hand, the gay person or IGCMP should be prepared for the possibility of experiencing rejection from parents and family after his initial disclosure; on the other hand, his parents and siblings also need to be guided so that they can manage the crisis and eventually be influenced to move in the

direction of acceptance. Mallon is opposed to the idea of helping a gay person without considering his family because family is a place where a gay person needs to feel accepted most (p. 241). He also realizes that the initial disclosure of a gay person's sexual identity is a painful and devastating experience for his parents, particularly those who have strong religious convictions (p. 248). Personal bias and cultural and religious biases against gay identity usually trigger negative feelings such as shame, guilt, embarrassment, and even complete disassociation (p. 250). These biases cause many families to panic when they learn that their child or sibling is gay because due to the lack of accurate information about gay identity and relationship, they do not know how to manage this life-changing disclosure. By gradually educating the family about gay sexuality and relationship, we can create an opportunity for them to eventually become more supportive and understanding.

Regarding pastoral liturgy, this study indicates that the same-sex marriage liturgy or a blessing of the relationship is not greatly needed in the current situation in Indonesia. It is more useful and meaningful to create a kind of ritual that helps IGCMPs to be reconciled with their families. A ritual to bless the relationship can be performed at the end of the coming-out process, when the family has finally overcome the crisis and is ready to accept their gay family member and his partner. This "ritual of reconciliation" can mark a new stage in the life of the IGCMP and of his family. To date, this kind of ritual is unavailable. Some liturgical resources for LGBT persons from the U.S. have included coming-out rituals (Cherry & Sherwood, 1995; Glaser, 1998; Haldeman, 2012), but these are intended to encourage and strengthen a gay person in coming out publicly in front of a community that supports him. Such liturgies focus on the gay person and do not

give voice to his parents and family; therefore, they are more about celebrating gay pride than about guiding both parties into reconciliation before God.

I realize the difficulty of implementing the ecological perspective of pastoral care, not to say of conducting a ritual of reconciliation between an IGCMP and his family. Pastors must equip themselves with an accurate understanding of gay issues, and they need to open their minds to thinking beyond their doctrinal framework in order to listen to the struggle of IGCMPs and their families. On the other side, it is also not easy for the IGCMP and his family to build trust with pastors, knowing that the church's doctrinal stand on gay people remains negative. Nevertheless, it is not impossible for pastors to start building a bridge between the church and its gay members. They do not have to wait until the institutional church changes its doctrinal position. J. Martin (2017), a Jesuit priest and writer, has written an insightful and practical book about how this bridge can be built. His writing is based on his reflection of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2000), which calls on all Catholics to treat gays and lesbians with "respect, compassion, and sensitivity" (para. 2358) (while labeling homosexual practices as "the sins gravely contrary to chastity" para. 2396). He urges Catholics to practice these virtues by creating a safe space where LGBT persons feel that they are welcomed and loved, by acknowledging the unique gifts they bring to the church, by listening instead of judging, and by getting to know them on a personal level. Martin's advice is also relevant for Indonesian priests and pastors. If church leaders can successfully build the bridge of love and understanding between gay individuals or IGCMPs and the church, they can eventually help IGCMPs to build a bridge of reconciliation between them and their families.

Suggestion for Future Research

The following are some suggestion for further research. Due to the need in IPA of having a homogenous sample, this study only focuses on the lived religion of self-identified gay Christian men. Future research that focuses on gay Christian lesbians and/or transgender Christians will further our understanding of the lived religion of sexual minorities in Indonesian churches. There is also a need to conduct quantitative research on IGCMPs that uses a large sample population from all over Indonesia. Such research will help us to discover the general attitudes, opinions, or behaviors of IGCMPs.

As this study shows that the role of parents is crucial in the lives of IGCMPs, it would also be interesting to conduct research on the experience of parents after the initial disclosure of their children's sexual identity. What are the concerns for parents when their son or daughter is coming out? Also important is research that examines the experience of coming out as perceived by IGCMPs themselves. How do they prepare themselves for coming out to their parents? What will happen to IGCMPs if their parents react negatively to their initial disclosure? Further research that can be conducted is a comparative study between the lived religion of IGCMPs and the lived religion of Indonesian gay males in partnership from other religions. Do different religious teachings bring about a different spiritual experience for Indonesian gay men in relationship?

Another study, which will be more difficult to conduct, is an exploration of the lived religion of IGCMPs who are clergy (pastors, priests, elders, and deacons). Those in the church who are not lay persons face even more complex challenges, either in integrating their sexuality and their spirituality or in maintaining their partnerships. The challenge in carrying out such a study comes from the fact that the participants will be

very discreet about their sexuality and their partnerships. The obstacles will be similar for research on IGCMPs who are in a heterosexual marriage. According to Boellstorff (1999), most gay Indonesians enter heterosexual marriage and have children although his claim cannot be validated and his research in Indonesia was mainly among gay Muslims. I heard some stories about IGCMPs who enter heterosexual marriage from people I contacted in the process of recruiting participants for this study. Gaining access to participants for this research will be a challenge, but once researchers can find a way to reach this hidden population, information from this group can give us valuable insights into their struggle.

Conclusions

At the end of my interview with Subroto, a medical doctor who possesses years of experience in speaking on behalf of the Indonesian gay community, he said:

I heard that some progressive gays want to start a gay church. I worry about that. We don't need that. For me it is like we discriminate against ourselves. We should not become an exclusive group of gay Christians…. I also feel uneasy when some LGBT activists emotionally fight for gay rights with their academic arrogance. Well, I acknowledge their ability to argue about gay issues with convincing arguments in the public debate. They may triumph from an academic perspective, but their view cannot be accepted by people. We are not living in the West. We live in a traditional Islamic Indonesian society. In dealing with gay issues, we need a softer approach, one that is sensitive to the culture. We need to use an "Indonesian style."

Subroto's comment reminds me that although same-sex relationships among gay Christians are a universal phenomenon, the strategies they employ in order to live their lives vary from place to place as they have to take into consideration the cultural context in which they are living. This research has examined the lived religion of IGCMPs. Some of the findings reveal universal phenomena. IGCMPs, like other gay Christians around the world, are able to construct their own positive personalized theology, which empowers them to reject the Church's negative teaching on homosexuality and same-sex relationship, to maintain their spirituality, and to thrive in their partnerships. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal specific phenomena. IGMCPs' cannot run away from the ingrained belief that they need their parents' blessing (*restu*) or acceptance in order to be able to live in harmony. Nor can they escape the collectivist nature of the Indonesian social structure. For this reason, any attempt to support IGCMPs should not neglect their family and social context. Accordingly, conducting a reconciliation ritual held in a private space is more constructive and meaningful for IGCMPs than performing a relationship blessing ritual or even a gay marriage ritual in public. Many Christians and churches in the West would prefer the latter as they have found it effective for gay couples and as it represents equal rights and social justice. Nevertheless, ritual that is effective in one culture can be counterproductive in another culture. In short, as Subroto said, "… we need a softer approach that is sensitive to the culture. We need to use an 'Indonesian style.'"

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Appendix A:

Informed Consent Form (Indonesian Language)

FORMULIR
PERSETUJUAN KEIKUTSERTAAN

Judul Riset:

"Pengalaman Beragama Sesehari
Pasangan Gay Kristen Indonesia"

Riset ini, beserta data-data yang dikumpulkan dari para partisipan, akan digunakan untuk penulisan disertasi saya sebagai syarat menyelesaikan program Doctor of Ministry di St.Stephen's College, Edmonton, Canada. Tujuan riset kualitatif ini adalah untuk mengungkap kompleksitas dari situasi dan tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para gay Kristen di Indonesia, terutama mereka yang telah berkomitmen untuk menjalani hidup bersama pasangannya. Sementara gereja dan masyarakat terus bersikap menolak relasi pasangan gay, para gay Kristen harus menempuh jalan yang tidak mudah untuk memaknai kehidupan rohaninya, serta membentuk konsep religius yang diimaninya dalam menjalani hidup sehari-hari (*lived religion*). Studi ini ditujukan untuk memahami bagaimana gay Kristen yang berkomitmen untuk hidup bersama pasangannya dapat mengalami hadirnya Tuhan dan mewujudkan kehidupan yang rohani. Harapan saya, studi ini dapat memberikan pemahaman yang lebih baik bagi para Pendeta dan konselor, untuk bisa melihat kehidupan rohani dari para pasangan gay Kristen. Dengan mendengarkan kisah dan pengalaman dari para pasangan gay Kristen, diharapkan muncul kesadaran di kalangan para pemimpin Kristen untuk meninjau ulang sikap doktrinal gereja yang selama ini cenderung menghakimi anggota jemaat yang gay sebagai pendosa. Bagi mereka yang berniat untuk berpartisipasi, saya berharap proses membagikan pengalaman anda akan menjadi momen bermakna dalam perjalanan hidup anda.

Jika anda adalah seorang gay Kristen, anggota dari salah satu gereja di Indonesia, telah berkomitmen untuk membina relasi dengan pasangan anda dan relasi itu telah berjalan minimal satu tahun, serta memandang iman atau kehidupan rohani sebagai aspek penting dalam kehdupan anda, saya tertarik untuk mendengarkan kisah anda dan menggali pengalaman anda untuk memahami bagaimana anda dapat menjalani kehidupan beriman sebagai seorang gay yang memiliki pasangan.

Metode dan Verifikasi

Pada saat anda berpartisipasi dalam studi ini, saya akan memberikan anda daftar pertanyaan yang harus diisi. Daftar tersebut berisi pertanyaan umum seperti usia, suku/etnis, latar belakang pendidikan, pekerjaan, denominasi gereja, dan keterlibatan dalam pelayanan gereja maupun institusi lain. Kemudian saya akan meminta anda berpartisipasi dalam wawancara yang memakan waktu kurang lebih 60-90 menit. Kita dapat menentukan bersama dimana wawancara akan diadakan, dengan mempertimbangkan pentingnya menemukan tempat aman dimana privasi dan kerahasiaan bisa terjaga. Saya akan meminta ijin anda untuk merekam wawancara tersebut. Dalam wawancara, saya akan menanyakan beberapa pertanyaan umum, dilanjutkan dengan beberapa pertanyaan yang lebih khusus untuk membantu saya memahami pengalaman anda lebih dalam. Selama wawancara, anda boleh menolak untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tertentu. Hasil wawancara kemudian akan dicatat secara lengkap, menggunakan nama samaran yang anda pilih. Dalam waktu sebulan setelah wawancara, saya akan mengirimkan kepada anda dokumen berisi ringkasan dari apa yang telah anda ungkapkan saat wawancara. Saya akan memita anda mengoreksi, menambahkan, atau memberi informasi tambahan jika diperlukan, lalu mengirim dokumen itu kembali kepada saya. Jika dua minggu sesudahnya saya tidak juga menerima tanggapan dari anda, saya menganggap informasi yang saya dapatkan dari anda sudah benar, dan saya akan memakai hasil wawancara itu, bersama dengan hasil wawancara dari para partisipan lain, untuk meneliti esensi dari pengalaman memaknai kehidupan rohani anda sebagai gay Kristen yang memiliki pasangan.

Lama studi ini enam bulan. Selama studi, semua dokumen yang anda terima serta wawancana akan memakai bahasa Indonesia, namun hasil studi akan ditulis dalam bahasa Inggris. Setelah proses penulisan selesai, saya akan mengirimkan kepada anda ringkasan dari hasil penelitian dalam bahasa Indonesia.

Kerahasiaan dan Hak Anda

Saya menyadari bahwa mengungkapkan kisah anda sebagai seorang gay di Indonesia dapat menempatkan anda dalam posisi rentan bahkan berbahaya. Oleh sebab itu saya akan sangat berhati-hati dalam memakai informasi yang sensitif.

- Untuk menjamin kerahasiaan identitas anda, nama asli anda tidak akan dipakai, baik dalam salinan wawancara atau dalam laporan apapun. Saya hanya akan menggunakan nama samaran yang anda pilih.

- Saya akan menghindari penggunaan e-mail dalam berkirim infromasi yang sensitif. Jika saya menerima e-mail dari anda yang berhubungan dengan studi ini, saya akan segera menghapusnya segera setelah membacanya, untuk memastikan bahwa email itu tidak dapat dilacak. Saya mohon anda juga melakukan hal yang sama.

- Saya akan menggunakan dua tempat terpisah untuk menyimpan seluruh data anda. Nama beserta seluruh data yang berkaitan dengan identitas anda akan disimpan dalam laci terkunci di rumah saya. Trankrip wawancara yang menggunakan nama samaran anda akan disimpan di USB drive, dalam file yang terkunci dengan password. Hanya USB drive tanpa identitas anda inilah yang akan saya pakai untuk menganalisa data. Semua data akan disimpan selama dua tahun setelah penerbitan akhir dari penelitian ini. Setelah itu semua data tertulis akan dihancurkan dan semua data digital akan dihapus secara permanen sehingga tidak dapat ditemukan kembali.

- Jika ada informasi yang secara tidak langsung bisa membuat orang menebak identitas anda, saya akan mendiskusikan hal itu kepada anda. Saya tidak akan menggunakan informasi itu tanpa seijin anda. Sekalipun kita akhirnya sepakat untuk memakai informasi itu, saya akan menyamarkannya sehingga menjadi tanpa nama (anonim).

- Jika anda memutuskan untuk menarik diri (tidak jadi) mengikuti penelitian ini, anda bebas untuk menarik kembali persetujuan keikutsertaan anda. Pada saat anda menarik diri, anda tidak akan dikenai sangsi apapun. Semua data yang telah dikumpulkan akan dihancurkan dan tidak akan dimasukkan ke dalam penelitian ini.

- Semua data yang dikumpulkan dari anda akan digunakan hanya untuk kepentingan proyek disertasi saya. Perkataan anda bisa saja dikutip juga dalam publikasi, laporan, atau riset sekunder, tetapi data-data pribadi anda, termasuk nama anda, tidak akan diungkapkan kepada siapapun di luar dari studi ini. Untuk menggunakan data riset bagi kepentingan riset lain yang terkait, peneliti untuk riset itu harus mendapatkan ijin dari St. Stephen's College dan setuju untuk menjaga kerahasiaan infromasi, sesuai dengan ketentuan yang ditetapkan dalam formulir ini.

Permohonan Informasi Lebih Lanjut

Anda dapat menanyakan hal-hal lainnya yang berhubungan dengan studi ini. Silakan menghubungi saya, Juswantori Ichwan dengan nomor telepon xxx atau e-mail xxx. Anda juga dapat menghubungi supervisor saya di Canada: John C. Carr, Pengajar di St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, dengan mengirimkan email ke xxx (hanya dalam bahasa Inggris).

Persetujuan Tertulis

Dengan menandatangani formulir ini, anda menyatakan telah memahami informasi yang disampaikan kepada anda tentang partisipasi anda dalam studi ini, dan anda menyatakan setuju untuk ikut berpartisipasi dalam studi ini.

_____   _____

Tandatangan Pemberi Persetujuan   **Tanggal**

Appendix B:

Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Project:
**"The Lived Religion of Indonesian Gay male Christians
in Partnership"**

This research, including the data collected from participants, will be used for my writing a dissertation in fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton, Canada. The purpose of this qualitative study is to shed light on the complexity of the situations and challenges faced by Indonesian gay Christians, particularly those who are in a committed same-sex relationship. While the church and society continue to disapprove of same-sex relationships, Indonesian Christian gay males are forced to take the difficult road toward making sense of their spiritual lives and developing their lived religion. The aim of this study is to understand how gay Christians who are in a committed same-sex relationship experience God and express their spirituality in their lives. My hope is that this study will give pastors and counselors a better understanding of the spiritual lives of gay Christian partners and will raise awareness among Indonesian Christian leaders as they listen to the stories of gay male partners' experience, leading them to reconsider the church's doctrinal prejudice toward its gay members. For those who choose to participate, I do hope the process of sharing your experience will become a meaningful moment in your life journey.

If you are a Christian gay man who has been in a committed same-sex relationship for at least one year and you are a member of any Indonesian Church who considers that spirituality and religion are important aspects of your life, I am interested in listening to your story and in exploring your experience of how you make sense of your faith as a gay man.

Method and Verification

When you participate in this study, I will give you a questionnaire to complete. That questionnaire consists of basic questions about age, ethnicity, educational background, occupation, religious denomination, involvement in church or other religious institution, etc. Then you will be asked to participate in an interview which may take up to 60-90 minutes. We can arrange together where the interview will be conducted, taking into consideration the need for privacy and confidentiality. I will ask your permission to digitally record the interview. I will ask some general questions and then continue with some specific questions to help me understand more about your experience. During the interviews you may choose not to answer certain questions. The interview will subsequently be transcribed using a pseudonym that you choose. Within a month after the interview, I will send you a copy of a document which contains my summary of what you have shared. I will ask you to correct any errors or add any further comments if needed and send the document back to me. If I do not receive a response from you within two weeks of your receipt of the document, I will assume that the information I already have from you is correct, and I will use your interview transcript together with interview materials from other participants to analyze the essence of your experience of making sense of your spiritual life as you maintain a committed same-sex relationship.

The duration of this study is six months. During the survey, Bahasa Indonesia (Indonesian language) will be used in all documents that you will receive and in the interview that will be conducted; however, the research report will be written in English. After the writing process is finished, I will send you a summary, in Bahasa Indonesia, of what has been discovered.

Confidentiality and Rights

I know that revealing your story as a gay person in Indonesia can put you in a vulnerable position and can even be dangerous; therefore, I will take extra precautions when using sensitive information.

- To insure the confidentiality of your identity, your real name will not be used either in the interview transcript or in any research report. I will instead use a pseudonym of your choice.

- I will avoid sensitive references in any e-mail message. If I receive e-mails from you regarding the study, I will delete those e-mails as soon as I have read them to make sure that they are not traceable. I encourage you to do the same.

- I will use two separate places to store all your data. Your name and all your demographic data will be put in a locked drawer in my home. A USB drive will be used to store the interview transcript that uses your pseudonym, and all files will be

password protected. When I need to analyze the data, only the USB drive with your pseudonymn will be used.

- All original data will be securely kept for two years following the final publication of the research findings and then they will be physically shredded or will be digitally wiped/destroyed permanently so that they cannot be recovered.

- If any information used could unintentionally give clues to your identity, I will discuss the matter with you. I will not use that information before I get your permission. If we agree to use the information, I will make it anonymous as possible.

- Should you decide to withdraw from this research at any point, you are free to withdraw your consent. When you withdraw, no penalty will be imposed. All data that has been collected will be destroyed and will not be included in the study.

- All data collected from you will be used only for my dissertation project. Your words may be quoted in publications, reports, and for secondary research use, but your personal details, including your name, will not be revealed to anyone. For the data to be used in any other research, such research must be authenticated and authorized by St. Stephen's College and the researcher(s) will have agreed to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.

Request for More Information

You may ask questions about the study at any time. Please feel free to contact me, Juswantori Ichwan, at xxx or by e-mail at xxx. You may also contact my supervisor, John C. Carr, ThM, Ph.D, R.Psych (AB # 1035), Associate Faculty of St. Stephen's College, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, by sending an e-mail to xxx.

Written Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you understand the information provided to you about your participation in this study and that you agree to participate in this study.

_____ _____

Signature of Person Giving Consent   **Date**

Appendix C:

Participant Information Sheet (Indonesian Language)

LEMBAR INFORMASI PESERTA

- R A H A S I A -

Isilah pertanyaan dibawah ini dengan huruf cetak.

Informasi Tentang Anda:

Nama Lengkap : _____

Alamat : _____

Kota _____ Kode Pos_____

No.telepon : _____

Alamat e-mail : _____

Usia : _____ Suku/Etnis: _____

Pendidikan : _____

Pekerjaan : _____

Apa nama samaran yang ingin anda gunakan dalam penelitian ini?

_____

Informasi Tentang Relasi Anda:

Usia partner anda: _____

Berapa lama anda telah menjalin relasi dengan partner: _____

Apakah partner anda seorang Kristen? _____

Jika "Ya", apa nama gerejanya dan denominasinya ? _____

_____

Informasi Tentang Keterlibatan Anda di Gereja:

Nama Gereja : _____

Denominasi : _____

Dibaptis di : (nama gereja) _____

                   Pada usia berapa? _____

Disidi di : (nama gereja) _____

                   Pada usia berapa? _____

Dalam dua tahun terakhir, berapa sering anda menghadiri atau berpartisipasi dalam Kebaktian Minggu di gereja anda? _____

Dalam dua tahun terakhir, apakah anda juga hadir atau terlibat dalam kegiatan gerejawi lainnya di gereja anda dan berapa sering?

Nama Kegiatan Gerejawi	Seberapa sering*
	Jarang / kadang-kadang / sangat sering
	Jarang / kadang-kadang / sangat sering
	Jarang / kadang-kadang / sangat sering
	Jarang / kadang-kadang / sangat sering

* Silakan lingkari jawaban yang paling sesuai

Terimakasih anda telah memberikan informasi ini. Data pribadi anda ini akan disimpan secara rahasia dan hanya bisa dilihat oleh peneliti.

Appendix D:

Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

- CONFIDENTIAL -

Please print the following information.

Information about yourself:

Full name   :   _____

Address   :   _____

      City _____ Postal Code _____

Phone Number :   _____

E-mail address :   _____

Age   :   _____   Ethnicity: _____

Education   :   _____

Occupation   :   _____

What name would you like to choose to use as a pseudonym in this research?

      _____

Information about your relationship:

Your partner's age: _____

How long have you been in relationship with your partner? _____

Is your partner a Christian? _____

If "Yes," what is the name of his church and church denomination? _____
_____

Information about your involvement in church:

Name of church: _____

Denomination : _____

Baptized : (name of church) _____

At what age?_____

Confirmed : (name of church) _____

At what age?_____

Over the past two years, how often have you attended or participated in Sunday services in your church? _____

Over the past two years, have you attended or been involved in other religious activities in your church? If so, how often?

Church program/activity	Frequency*

	rarely / sometimes/ quite often
	rarely / sometimes/ quite often
	rarely / sometimes/ quite often
	rarely / sometimes/ quite often

* Please circle the answer that best applies to you

Thank you for providing this information. Your personal identifying information will be kept confidentially stored and accessible only to the researcher.

Appendix E:

Interview Question List

_____

1. Please tell me about your journey of self-discovery that led you to identify yourself as a gay person?

   Biskah anda ceritakan pengalaman hidup anda dalam menemukan diri, sampai akhirnya anda menyadari bahwa anda adalah seorang gay?

2. What is it like to find yourself as a gay man and also a Christian?

   Seperti apa rasanya menemukan bahwa anda adalah seorang gay, dan juga seorang Kristen? Apa yang anda alami dan yang anda rasakan?

3. Did you experience internal conflict in your life as a gay Christian? If "yes," what kind of conflict did you experience and how have you been able to cope with this conflict? If "no," what factors have enabled you to feel comfortable in living your life as a gay Christian (integrating your sexuality with your spirituality), knowing that the church and society often condemn gay people as sinners?

   Apakah anda mengalami konflik batin ketika menjalani hidup sebagai seoang gay Kristen? Jika "ya", konflik seperti apa yang anda almi dan bagaimana anda dapat mengatasi atau menghadapinya? Jika "tidak", hal-hal apa yang membuat anda bisa tetap merasa nyaman hidup sebagai seorang gay Kristen (mengintegrasikan seksualitas dan spiritualitas), di tengah masyarakat dan gereja yang kerap menghakimi gay sebagai pendosa?

4. Please share your life experience that led you to decide to build a committed same-sex relationship, even though that decision is against the teaching of the church? What factors encouraged you to make that decision? What is your purpose and your hope in having a committed relationship?

   Bisakah anda bagikan bagaimana pengalaman hidup anda, sapai akhirnya memutuskan untuk berkomitmen memiliki pasangan hidup, sekalipun keputusan itu bertentangan dengan ajaran gereja? Hal-hal apa

yang mendorong/memberanikan anda mengambil keputusan itu? Apakah tujuan dan harapan anda dalam memiliki pasangan?

5. When choosing someone as your partner, what criteria are important to you? What qualities do you expect your partner to possess? How important is the spirituality of your partner to you? Did you try to find God's will before you decided to choose your partner? If "yes," how did you do that?

> *Ketika memilih seseorang sebagai pasangan, kriteria/hal-hal penting apa saja yang anda harapkan ada di dalam diri orang itu? Seberapa pentingkah faktor spiritualitas/kerohanian pasangan bagi anda? Apakah anda lebih dulu mencari kehendak Tuhan sebelum memutuskan untuk memilih pasangan? Jika "ya", bagaimana caranya atau apa yang anda lakukan?*

6. How did you deal with your family knowing that you have a same-sex partner?

> *Bagaimana anda menghadapi keluarga anda, ketika anda memiliki pasangan sejenis?*

7. What was your experience after you decided to build a committed same-sex relationship with your partner? How did it change your private life (the way you think and the way you feel)? How did it change your social life, particularly in church (your relationship with friends in the church, your attendance at church services, your involvement in church activities)?

> *Apa yang anda aami setelah memutuskan untuk menjalin relasi serius dengan pasangan anda? Apa yang terjadi atau bagaimana hal ini membawa dampak/perubahan dalam hidup pribadi anda (cara anda berpikir dan merasa), dan bagaimana hal itu mengubah kehidupan sosial anda, terutama di dalam gereja (relasi anda dengan teman-teman di gereja: kehadiran dalam ibadah, dan keterlibatan anda dalam pelayanan gerejawi?*

8. Do you keep your relationship secret, or have you adopted a "don't ask, don't tell" policy, or you are open about your relationship with certain friends or pastors? Why?

> *Apakah selama ini anda merahasiakan sama sekali relasi anda dengan pasangan, atau bersikap "tahu sama tahu", ataukah anda terbuka tentang relasi anda pada teman-teman atau pendeta tertentu? Mengapa anda*

memilih bersikap demikian?

9. What do "faithful life" and/or "spiritual life" mean for you? What is your image of God when God looks at you as a gay Christian? In your opinion, what does God expect of you and how do you live your life as a gay Christian who pleases God?

> *Apakah makna dari "hidup beriman" atau "kehidupan rohani" bagi anda? Menurut anda, bagaimana Tuhan memandang anda sebagai gay Kristen? Apa yang Allah harapkan dari anda dan bagaimanakah cara hidup gay Kristen yang berkenan kepadaNya?*

10. How do you understand or interpret the Bible, particularly verses in the Bible that are often used to support a claim that homosexuality is sin?

> *Bagaimanakah anda memahami atau menafsirkan Alkitab, khususnya menyangkut ayat-ayat yang seringkali dikutip/dipakai untuk menyatakan bahwa homoseksualitas adalah dosa?*

11. What things do you do, if any, to maintain your spiritual life, either personally or together as a couple?

> *Hal-hal apa saja yang anda lakukan, sekiranya ada, untuk memelihara hidup rohani anda, baik sebagai pribadi maupun bersama-sama sebagai pasangan?*

12. Do you and your partner have gay friends or belong to gay groups with whom you can share your life experience? If you do, what sort of conversations have you had with them? Do you often talk about your spiritual/religious concerns? What has it been like for you? To what extent have your gay friendships or your participation in gay groups influenced or enriched your life as a person and as a couple?

> Apakah anda dan pasangan memiliki sahabat-sahabat gay atau kelompok gay yang kepadanya anda bisa berbagi pengalaman hidup? Jika ada, pembicaraan seperti apa saja yang biasanya anda percakapkan dengan mereka? Apakah anda sering berbicara menyangkut juga hal-hal gereja atau kerohanian? Apa yang anda rasakan ketika berbicara soal itu? Seberapa besar dampak pershabatan anda dengan mereka mempengaruhi atau memperkaya kehidupan anda sebagai pribadi maupun pasangan?

13. Looking forward to the future, what do you have in mind about your relationship with your partner:

a. What issues are important to be addressed or maintained in order to keep your relationship in harmony?

b. To what extent do you think your relationship needs to be acknowledged or even sanctified by the church's blessing, and why is such acknowledgement or sanctification important/not important to you?

c. Is there any possibility that in the future you or your partner will have to marry heterosexually because of social or cultural pressure? If such an event is to occur, will you maintain the relationship?

Bagaimanakah pemikiran anda tentang masa depan relasi anda bersama pasangan:

a. *Hal-hal apa yang menurut anda sangat penting untuk diperhatikan atau dijaga, supaya relasi anda dapat terus terjalin dengan harmonis?*

b. *Seberapa jauh anda membutuhkan relasi anda dengan pasangan diakui dan bahkan diberkati dalam ritual gerejawi, dan mengapa itu penting/tidak penting bagi anda?*

c. *Apakah ada kemungkinan nantinya anda atau pasangan anda akhirnya harus menikah dengan lawan jenis karena tekanan sosial? Apa yang akan anda lakukan seandainya itu terjadi?*

14. Is there is anything we have talked about that you would like to discuss some more?

Adakah lagi hal-hal lain yang ingin anda diskusikan lebih lanjut?