

Processes of Navigating Value Conflicts: A Grounded Theory Study of Muslim Counsellors in Counselling LGBT Clients

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Abstract: *In Muslim societies, practitioners often find that standard ethical codes and LGBT-inclusive guidelines stand in direct opposition to their religious doctrines. This divergence between professional mandates and personal faith inevitably triggers significant value conflicts for Muslim counsellors. The purpose of this grounded theory study is to develop a theory that explains how Muslim counsellors experience value conflicts in counselling Muslim LGBT clients and how they resolve the conflicts. In-depth interviews were conducted with six Muslim counsellors at Public Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE) in Peninsular Malaysia using the grounded theory approach of Theoretical Sampling. The grounded theory process of data analysis was employed, starting with open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 2008). The findings revealed that the Muslim counsellors wanted to achieve two therapeutic goals in counselling Muslim LGBT clients: giving insights and bringing about positive changes. To achieve those two goals, they go through four processes namely, building rapport, integrating religious values, facing conflicts and challenges and overcoming them.*

Keywords: value conflicts, grounded theory, Muslim counsellors, LGBT clients

1. Introduction

Currently, the counselling profession in Malaysia closely follows counselling approaches and ethics prescribed by the American Counselling Association (ACA). For instance, the Malaysian Board of Counsellors designed a code of ethics for Malaysian counsellors by referring to the ACA Code of Ethics 2005. It is stated clearly in the Counsellors' Code of Ethics, "...This Code of Ethics has been formed, drafted and modified based on the American Counselling Association Code of Ethics 2005..." (Lembaga Kaunselor, 2011, p. 2). Furthermore, the pioneers who established counsellor education programs in Malaysia received their professional training in the United States. Thus, they adopted training models, curricula, textbooks and counselling theories from the United States (Lloyd, 1987).

In counselling LGBT clients, the ACA promotes an affirmative stance towards them (Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counselling [ALGBTIC], 2013; American Counseling Association, n.d.; SAIGE, 2024). To affirm LGBT clients means a counsellor must accept, understand and support the LGBT clients for who they are. Thus, counsellors are prohibited from changing the clients' gender identity and sexual orientation. However, affirming LGBT clients are against religious values held by Muslims who have

negative attitudes towards LGBT individuals (Al-Qaradawi, 2001; Bouhdiba, 2008; Muhammad Abdul-Rauf, 1997). Therefore, Muslim counsellors who have these attitudes experience conflicts between their religious values (non-affirming LGBT clients) and the profession's collective values (affirming). In the field of counselling and psychology, most literature on value conflicts consist of theoretical writings (Stoll et al., 2020; White, 2024; Yue, 2025); SAIGE, 2024. Some of them provide an overview on the nature of value conflicts and legal cases related to value conflicts (Ferrell et al., 2025; Kazyak et al., 2024; Minow, 2023; SAIGE, 2024. As for some writings, they recommended strategies and models to overcome value conflicts (Dobson, 2024; McAuliffe & Greenslade, 2025; Randall, 2024; Sheperis et al., 2020); SAIGE, 2024).

There are only a few empirical writings available on the issue of value conflicts (Decena & Singson, 2022; Dobson, 2024; McAuliffe & Greenslade, 2025; Randall, 2024). This indicates the lack of empirical studies conducted on the issue. All the empirical studies employed qualitative research design except a few that employed quantitative design (Bayne et al., 2021). Three studies used the grounded theory approach (Dendy, 2010; Smith, 2009; Brooks et al., 2023), one used phenomenology (Borgman, 2009), and two did not mention the approach used in their study (Garrot, 2008; Wilde, 2008).

Most participants involved in all value conflicts studies are psychologists, counsellors, counsellor educators, counselling supervisors and trainees practicing in the United States (Bayne et al., 2021; Borgman, 2009; Dendy, 2010; Garrot, 2008; Smith, 2009; Wilde, 2008; Brooks et al., 2023). Most study participants are Christians (Borgman, 2009; Dendy, 2010; Smith, 2009; Wilde, 2008) and only a small number are Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, and atheists (Dendy, 2010; Wilde, 2008; Mahmood & Abdallah, 2020). However, some studies did not mention participants' religious background (Bayne et al., 2021; Garrot, 2008; Brooks et al. 2023). As there is lack of study related to value conflicts conducted on Muslim participants practicing in Malaysian setting, it is important to conduct such study.

Some of the studies focus on internal value conflicts that can be divided into two. First, conflicts between personal and professional values (Borgman, 2009; Smith, 2009; Mahmood & Abdallah, 2020) and second, conflicts between two professional values (Garrot, 2008). The professional values are value-neutrality and prevention of harm. Some studies also focus on conflicts with others' values such as the values of the graduate programs, supervisors, clients and peers (Dendy, 2010; Smith, 2009; Wilde, 2008; Brooks et al., 2023). From all the studies, little studies highlight on the value conflicts that happen during counselling sessions with lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) clients or dealing with LGB issues. (Borgman, 2009; Dendy, 2010; Smith, 2009; Wilde, 2008). Other studies highlight conflicts that occur when counselling clients who practise consensual sexual sadomasochism (BDSM), irresponsible and orthodox (Garrot, 2008; Smith, 2009; Brooks et al., 2023). Hence, this study focused on generating a "grounded theory" that provides explanation on how Muslim counsellors experienced and resolved value conflicts.

2. Literature Review

This section presents a review of related literature on value conflicts in counseling and psychotherapy. Then, it provides strategies on how to overcome value conflicts.

2.1 Value Conflicts in Counseling and Psychotherapy

Value conflicts might happen when working with certain types of clients. Most of the literature drew attention to the value conflicts when counselling Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) clients (Bayne et al., 2021; Borgman, 2009; Dendy, 2010; Smith, 2009; Wilde, 2008). Some literature emphasizes conflicts with clients who are orthodox (Brooks et al., 2023) and irresponsible (Smith, 2009). Only one single literature highlights conflicts with clients who practice consensual sexual sadomasochism or BDSM (Garrot, 2008). Certain types of issues also bring value conflicts. Among the hot-button issues are sexual, politics and treatment goals (Smith, 2009, Brooks et al., 2023).

Value conflicts can be categorized into two types. The first type of conflicts occurs between a professional helper's values and other people's values. The most frequently occurring conflict is value conflicts with clients (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2007; Wilde, 2008; Brooks et al., 2023). Sometimes value conflicts also occur between trainees and their professors or training programs (Dendy, 2010; Smith, 2009).

The second type is related to conflicts between two values upheld by a professional helper. Contemporary literature most frequently discusses conflict between a helper's personally held values and the profession's ethical values, particularly when the helper feels pulled toward protecting personal convictions in practice (Mitchell, 2022; Randall & Levitt, 2022). In some contexts, this also appears as conflict between cultural or religious commitments and the expectations of affirmative, non-imposing practice when working with LGBTQ+ clients (Bayne, 2022; Willis & Bayne, 2024). In Malaysia, Muslim counsellors have similarly reported value conflicts when counselling LGBT clients, describing tension between religious beliefs and perceived professional responsibilities, and the need for deliberate strategies to maintain ethical practice (Mahmood & Abdallah, 2020; Ling & Tan, 2023). The religious values are negative and non-affirmative towards LGB clients, but the professional values are positive and affirmative (Bayne et al., 2021). Other than experiencing conflicts between personal and professional values when counselling LGB clients, a minority experienced conflicts between two professional values when counselling clients who practice consensual sexual sadomasochism (Garrot, 2008). Those conflicting values are value-neutrality and prevention of harm.

Those who experienced conflicts between religious and professional values when counselling LGB clients often hold orthodox religious beliefs (Corey & Corey, 2011). Some helping professionals including some counsellors continue to hold negative attitudes and prejudicial beliefs toward clients involved in same-sex relationships, which can reduce perceived safety and willingness to seek care among LGBTQ+ clients (Cruciani et al., 2024; Westwood, 2022).

Some counsellors particularly when operating from non-affirming, religiously conservative frameworks may endorse or attempt sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) (often labelled "conversion" or "reparative" approaches) when working with LGB clients. However, major professional bodies state that such practices are not supported by evidence, are unlikely to produce the intended change, and may be associated with risk of harm (American Psychiatric Association, 2024; American Psychological Association, 2025; Przeworski et al., 2020). Accordingly, attempting to steer clients toward changing their sexual orientation (i.e., from same-sex to opposite-sex attraction/identity) conflicts with mainstream professional guidance on competent, non-discriminatory practice (American Psychological Association, 2021) and can contradict core counseling ethics related to nonmaleficence and avoiding the imposition of counselors' personal values (American Counseling Association, 2014).

Negative attitudes and prejudicial views toward LGBTQ+ clients are also shaped by personal and social exposure, including the extent of meaningful contact with LGBTQ+ individuals. Recent evidence across helping professions indicates that lower social exposure/contact tends to be associated with less affirming attitudes and greater discomfort, whereas greater exposure is associated with more positive attitudes (Cruciani et al., 2024; Wiwattarangkul et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the importance of structured LGBTQ+ education and reflective training to improve clinical preparedness and reduce bias in practice (Cruciani et al., 2024). On the contrary, counsellors who have frequent socialization with LGBT individuals often have positive attitude towards them and are less prejudice (Vasic et al., 2025).

Value conflicts can occur when a counsellor recognizes that a client's worldview or moral commitments differ significantly from their own. In such situations, counsellors may experience heightened internal discomfort and become more conscious of their own values, which can increase the risk of defensive responding and value imposition if not managed intentionally (Mitchell, 2022). Therefore, contemporary ethics-focused supervision emphasises structured values exploration and integration, where counsellors actively examine their value positions, identify the nature of the conflict, and use supervision/consultation processes to maintain client-centred practice rather than steering clients toward value convergence (Randall & Levitt, 2022). In line with this, counsellors continue to view value-based referral and value-driven decision-making as ethically sensitive areas, reinforcing the need for deliberate reflection and professional safeguards when values-based tension arises in practice (Carlisle et al., 2022).

2.2 Overcoming Value Conflicts

Different scholars have different views on how value conflicts are resolved. For Rokeach (1973), conflicts among different values often occur in most situations. The conflicts are resolved by identifying priorities among the conflicting values. Therefore, an individual prioritizes some important values over others which are less important. Rokeach (1973) also did research in which he asked participants to rank-order a set of value items. His aim is to disclose the participants' value priorities and find that each participant had relatively consistent value priorities.

On the other hand, Schwartz (1992) has different perspectives on how value conflicts can be resolved. There are constant conflicts between different types of values, and these are resolved by using different ways in different situations. Furthermore, there is no set hierarchy of values, but different individuals have different value conflicts which are central to them. Festinger (1957) proposed a term called "cognitive dissonance". It occurs when there are non-fitting relations among cognitive elements. The cognitive elements are knowledge, opinion, belief and value. Thus, "cognitive dissonance" occurs when there are non-fitting relations or conflicts among values. The dissonance motivates an individual to perform an action in reducing it. There are three ways of reducing dissonance: changing a behavioral cognitive element, changing an environmental cognitive element and adding a new cognitive element.

In overcoming value conflicts when counselling certain groups of clients, counsellors may use several strategies. The first strategy is seeking knowledge related to the group. In counselling lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender clients (LGBT), counsellors increase their knowledge by referring to reading materials such as textbooks, autobiographies, and journal articles. Other than reading materials, they can also watch documentaries and attend professional lectures related to LGBT issues to provide effective counselling services to LGBT clients (American Psychological Association [APA], 2021; Pope et al., 2024).

Counsellors who counsel BDSM clients also read books and articles about BDSM (Garrot, 2008). The purpose is to better understand their clients' experiences and therefore, it is crucial to find and identify good and helpful reading materials. Among the books that they read are psychodynamic theories, such as Jessica Benjamin's "The Bonds of Love," Kaplan's Female Perversions, the Psychoanalytic Diagnostic Manual, and Freud. It is crucial to find and identify good and helpful reading materials.

Seeking consultation is among the effective strategies in overcoming value conflicts (Burkholder, Burkholder & Gavin, (2020); Corey & Corey, 2011). Several studies show that counsellors frequently consult supervisors, colleagues, and friends to overcome value conflicts (Carlisle et al. (2022); Garrot, 2008; Wilde, 2008). There are two benefits of consultation (Garrot, 2008). The first is to gain more information on things that counsellors do not understand or have lack of knowledge about it. Other than that, specific questions can be addressed during consultation, especially in an area which is not discussed in the literature. As for the second benefit of consultation, it neutralizes feelings of confusion, curiosity, anxiety and revulsion when experiencing value conflicts. An empathic consultant can help counsellors to acknowledge and neutralize these feelings. Furthermore, a consultant can also assist counsellors in sorting out values which are in conflict and thus, it is vital to choose the right consultant.

3. Method

The goal of conducting this study was to explore how Muslim counsellors go through processes in experiencing and overcoming value conflicts. Another goal was to identify sequence of the processes. Thus, grounded theory is relevant for this kind of study as the approach focuses on understanding how people experience a process and identify steps in the process (Creswell, 2007). A "theory" in grounded theory research is a general explanation of a process, an action, or an interaction originated from participants' views on a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012, Strauss & Corbin, 1998). However, it is not a "grand" theory such as a theory of human motivation which is applicable to many people and situations (Creswell, 2012). It is also not a "minor working hypothesis" (Glaser & Strauss, 1999, p. 33) such as a description for students in a school or classroom. Instead, it is a "middle range" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7) theory rooted from numbers of participants which provides a general explanation on a specific phenomenon.

Theoretical sampling was used to select participants for this study. The selection was based on their potential contribution in giving in-depth information to form categories and develop a theory (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). An initial sample of three female Muslim counsellors were selected, and they were interviewed for several times. Then, the interview data were analyzed, and categories emerged. Then, another sample of two male Muslim counsellors were selected, and they were interviewed to refine the emerging categories. Finally, a female Muslim counsellor was selected, and she was interviewed twice. As the process is iterative, both data collection and data analysis were conducted until there were no new discoveries obtained from expanding the sample size. When there are no new discoveries obtained, it means the data has reached saturation point.

Participants for this study comprised of six Muslim counsellors who are working at four Public Institutions of Higher Education (PIHE) in Peninsular Malaysia. They were purposefully selected based on six inclusion criteria, which are: (a) self-identification as a Muslim (b) employed as a counsellor or psychology officer in a professional role (c) possess knowledge of counselling ethics (d) have experiences in counseling LGBT clients (e) working at Public

Institution of Higher Education (PIHE) in Peninsular Malaysia (f) agree to participate in the study.

Snowball sampling technique was used in obtaining participants for this study. Muslim counsellors known to have experiences in counselling Muslim LGBT clients were invited to recommend other Muslim counsellors who have the same experiences. People recommended were contacted to know whether they are interested in the study. They were also requested to recommend other counsellors who have the same criteria. Then, counsellors who agreed to be involved in the study were contacted via phone to set the date, time and venue for the interviews.

Among six participants of study, there were four female participants: Madam Diana, Madam Rahmah, Madam Ina and Madam Karimah (pseudonyms) and two male participants: Mr. Nabil and Mr. Shah (pseudonyms). Pseudonyms were used for confidentiality purposes. Their background information was provided to provide readers with some ideas and perspectives about them. Two of the participants are currently working at a Counselling Services Centre of a Public Institution of Higher Education (PIHE) in the northern region. In addition, three participants are working in the central region. Only one of them is working in the east coast region. Table 3.1 indicates participants' demographic.

Table 3.1: Participants' Demographic

Participants	Gender	Age	Region	Educational Background	Years of Experiences	Number of LGBT Clients	Number of Interviews
Madam Diana (Pseudonym)	Female	33	Central	Bachelor's: Psychology Master's: Counselling	10	2	1
Madam Rahmah (Pseudonym)	Female	32	East Coast	Bachelor's: Psychology Master's: Counselling	7	2	3
Madam Ina (Pseudonym)	Female	32	Central	Bachelor's: Counselling	7	3	4
Mr. Shah (Pseudonym)	Male	55	Northern	Bachelor's: Counselling Master's: Counselling	25	5 or 6	2
Mr. Nabil (Pseudonym)	Male	27	Northern	Bachelor's: Counselling	4	3	3
Madam Karimah (Pseudonym)	Female	31	Central	Bachelor's: Counselling	5	2	2

Data collection and data analysis were conducted concurrently as recommended by Creswell (2007). After completing first interview with the first participant, the verbal recorded interview was transcribed. To be familiar with the data and to observe confidentiality, researchers did not hire others to do it. After conducting the initial analysis, researchers found that the data is not "rich" and "thick". Thus, the participants were reinterviewed to gather more data. In addition, new participants were also selected and interviewed. The process of collecting data and conducting analysis ended when the data reached saturated point. In the analysis process, there were three steps of coding namely, open coding, axial coding and selective coding. By conducting open coding, big number of codes were established. These codes were categorized

into several main categories. Next, the researchers established relationships between categories and produced Reflective Coding Matrix. In the end, a storyline was created based on the matrix.

4. Findings

Participants of study went through four processes in giving insights and bringing positive changes to Muslim LGBT clients. The four processes are building rapport, integrating religious values, facing conflicts and challenges and overcoming conflicts and challenges.

4.1 Building Rapport

It is very important for study participants to build rapport so that their clients will not break relationships with them. Mr. Nabil mentioned:

So, first of all I just build rapport so that the relationship will not be broken.

Participants defined rapport building as building strong emotional connection with LGBT clients. Building strong emotional connection is a way to be close to the clients. Madam Rahmah said:

So, what I did to help him is build connection. It means emotional connection. It is like putting myself close to the client. We build rapport with him. When we have the connection, the most important thing is rapport. It means I try to establish connection with him. When the connection is strong, connection means rapport.

Participants built rapport with LGBT clients by using Person-Centred Therapy or Rogerian Theory. As it is a basic theory, they felt that it is very important to use it. Madam Ina said:

For example, to counsel a client and aaa... in terms of reading such as theories that we learnt, indeed I feel like aaa... people... each person has a theory that they hold onto such as Gestalt, REBT but the most fundamental that we depend on is the Rogerian concept.

4.2 Integrating Religious Values

As Muslims, the participants felt that there are no excuse and escapism for them to infuse religious values in their counselling sessions with LGBT clients. This is because they were dealing with Muslim clients. They infused religious values no matter what issues brought up by clients to counselling sessions. Madam Ina said:

As aaa... a Muslim counsellor, we cannot escape from integrating religious values. That is why we instill religious values. So, either we want it or not aaa... it is a must to infuse religious values in counselling clients. Especially those who are Muslims.

There are two reasons why participants infused religious values in counselling Muslim LGBT clients. First, it was to give insights to clients. Second, it was to bring positive changes to clients so that they fulfil their religious duties as a Muslim. Mr. Nabil mentioned:

I will try to instill religious values on the basis of giving him awareness so that he will fulfil his responsibility as a Muslim.

Some Muslim clients lack religious awareness and did not perform religious obligations such as prayers regularly. Thus, participants felt it is their responsibility as a Muslim to give them

insights so that they perform prayers regularly. This was done by integrating religious values into counselling sessions. Mr. Nabil stated:

When we know he lacks the religious awareness, religious thinking, we will help him. Because I consider religious factor when... at the beginning he said he seldom pray. So, as a Muslim counsellor we have a responsibility to emphasize on it as he is a Muslim client. When I observed that he lacks that side, I felt it is necessary.

Some LGBT Muslim clients are also involved in activities which are against religious teachings such as cross-dressing, transgenderism, prostitution and homosexual relationship. Therefore, participants fulfilled their religious responsibility by giving them awareness. They did this by informing them of religious prohibitions on their immoral activities. Madam Ina and Mr. Shah said:

But in terms of relationships, if we know that the relationships are prohibited, it is our responsibility to inform the clients about it. (Madam Ina)

It means if a counsellor is a Muslim, it is necessary for him to talk about religious jurisprudence if something was done against it. (Mr. Shah)

4.3 Facing Conflicts and Challenges

In giving insights and bringing about positive changes to LGBT clients, the participants were in conflicting and challenging situations. There were three conflicting situations. The first situation happened when there were clashes between participants' goals and clients' goals. This conflict is called conflicting goals. For example, a male to female transgender wanted to hide his feminine characteristics, but participant wanted him to change them. Another example is when a gay client wanted to improve his homosexual relationship, but the participant wanted him to discontinue the relationship. Mr. Nabil and Madam Karimah said:

The first thing that he said was to hide his activities... My counselling goal is as usual. I want to bring about changes. The first change that I want is physical changes. (Mr. Nabil)

It means he wants to improve the relationship... I have to say that the truth is... do not improve it. The best thing is to discontinue it. (Madam Karimah)

Being in the first conflicting situation leads some participants to experience second conflicting conditions which are called conflicting roles. It happened when there were clashes between role as a counsellor and role as a Muslim. As a counsellor, the participants needed to help clients to resolve their issue which is to improve the homosexual relationship. However, as a Muslim, the participants had to fulfil religious responsibility by explaining religious view on the relationship. The aim was to influence clients to change their goal from improving the relationship to discontinuing it. Madam Karimah explained:

Conflict... For me, my conflict aaa... roles. Conflicting roles as a counsellor that needs to follow exactly the counsellor's role. I may not understand it much. Another role is I must be firm in religious matters.

From my point of view, aaa... maybe as a counsellor... because the client came with a problem, maybe I need to help him in resolving the problem. But on the contrary, I aaa... observed aaa...

I think that was not his problem. His problem... we need to find his real problem. His problem is his wrongdoing.

Conflicting interests is the third conflicting condition. The participants experienced this type of conflict when there were clashes between personal interest and professional interest. They were interested in exploring clients' immoral activities such as prostitution and homosexual relationships. Thus, they asked many questions to satisfy their curiosity need which is for their personal interests. However, participants realized that they are not supposed to ask questions due to curiosity. This is to observe professional interest, which is the clients' interest. Mr. Shah and Mr. Nabil mentioned:

As a professional counsellor, sometimes we become unprofessional... Because as professionals, we are not supposed to ask questions. We should not ask questions due to curiosity. Just let him tell us what he wants to say. Then, we just listen and find alternatives. (Mr. Shah)

But we have not seen and done what he did. So, we are curious to know about it. When we have the intention... What had he done actually? What have customers done to him? How? When we asked the questions, we wanted to fulfil our curiosity. (Mr. Shah)

At the beginning of the session, the interesting part was what he wanted to share about what he did. Just wanted him to share anything that he did. That was what we found interesting. (Mr. Nabil)

4.4 Overcoming Conflicts and Challenges

To overcome conflicts and challenges in counselling LGBT clients, the participants tried to get information from various resources. One way of getting information in overcoming challenges is by doing self-study. After seeing clients' feminine appearance for the first time, they started to do it. They referred to Western resources and adjusted approaches suggested by the resources. This was done so that the approaches are in line with religious and cultural values in Malaysia. As what they did was just trial and error, there is no mechanism to evaluate the effectiveness of their counselling sessions with LGBT, Madam Rahmah described:

What I did, I just conducted self-study. It means I read lots of research before handling the case. Before the client came... During registration, when I saw his appearance... So, I started to do it.

Of course, I refer to Western resources, but I do not rely too much on it. For Western society, they accept... They accept a man who wants to be a woman. We just... Okay... The first thing I do when I read the resources is to evaluate if it is suitable or not? Can I conduct this? So, I adjusted the resources to suit my client. Aha... To suit us here.

Another way of getting information is by consulting others. Thus, some participants maintain friendship with their LGBT friends. They started to socialize with them when they were studying in higher educational institutions. The participants asked for their suggestions on how to handle new transgender clients. They also get additional information on clients from them such as hand signals that they use, payment that they get and activities that they do. Mr. Nabil said:

Sometimes when I was blurred, I asked him. I sent message via Facebook. “Nyah! How are you doing there? If a client has these characteristics, how to handle him?” “Ooo... He is still new. He...” I have a transgender friend. I have been socializing with him for a long time. He gave me information, but I have to call him nyah.

Additional knowledge consists of many things... Hand signals... Payment, maybe... His activities need to be explored. It does not mean that we must experience it. No... Knowing about it is sufficient.

Other than consulting LGBT friends, participants also consulted their Head of Department (HOD) which has many experiences in providing counselling services. For example, a participant shared a case in which she experienced conflicting roles. She asked for opinions on appropriateness of telling religious prohibition to client. She also asked on strategies in handling the client. HOD emphasized that it is necessary to be firm and have strong stance in cases involved religious issues. Thus, she needed to tell the truth on religious prohibition to the client. Madam Karimah explained:

So, I could not do anything as I thought I needed to consult others. I needed to consult my Head. I told my Head about this. So, we wanted to ask a person who has experience. If I have a case like this, what should I do?

After the session, I met my Head who has more experiences. I asked him, “If there is a client like this, what to do?” His view... I asked for his opinion. “Do I need to tell the truth?”, I asked. At that time, my Head gave his opinion. “We should have our own stance.” he said. “Because this is religious issue.”, he said. “If it is related to other things, maybe we can aaa... agree with what he choose. But this thing...”, he said aaa... “We have to inform.” Aaa... So, when a person who has experiences said like that although he has no session with LGBT clients.

5. Discussion

In giving insights and bringing about positive changes to LGBT clients, the participants went through four processes. First, they built rapport with LGBT clients at initial stages of counselling sessions. Second, they infused religious values in their counselling sessions with the clients. Third, they faced conflicts and challenges in their attempts to infuse religious values. Finally, they overcome conflicts and challenges by seeking information from several sources.

Attitudes towards homosexuality are also influenced by value priorities (Dotti Sani, 2022; Lee, 2023). Individuals who prioritize conservation goals disapprove of homosexuality. They obey social norms and expectations (conformity), preserve customs and religious practices (tradition), and avoid interruption of the existing social order (security). They reject homosexuality as it threatens the realization of the three values: conformity, tradition and security. Whereas people who opt for openness to change goals approve homosexuality. They approve and affirm lifestyles that are against conventional mores. Openness to change goals consists of self-direction, stimulation and hedonism values. The participants of the present study are individuals who prioritize conservation goals. That was why they disapprove and have negative attitudes towards homosexuality.

Due to societal norms, LGBT issues are not emphasized by counsellor education programs in Malaysia. Thus, all participants in the present study were not exposed to LGBT issues when

they were studying in higher educational institutions. However, in the United States, LGBT issues are infused across counsellor education curriculum, research, and clinical training (Luke et al., 2022). LGBT workshops, trainings, and full-credit courses are frequently organized. The aim is to enhance students' ability in providing competent counselling services to LGBT clients Pope et al. (2024), Thacker Darrow and Strunk (2025), and Cruciani (2024).

The counsellor education in Malaysia also does not promote LGB affirmative practice. This was why participants of the present study do not use affirmative approach in counselling effeminate clients who are homosexual and transgender people. On the contrary, counsellor education in the United States promotes LGB-affirmative practice. It adopts a science-based perspective of LGB sexual orientations as normal and healthy expressions of human development, sexuality, relationship, and love (Vasic et al., 2025). Through policies and practices, the affirmative LGB counsellor education works hard to create an LGB-supportive and affirmative environment for prospective and current students, faculties, and staff. The counsellor education also promotes open, direct, and supportive discussion and assists counsellors' and trainees' education and development on LGB-affirmative counselling (Vasic et al., 2025)

Dendy (2010) conducted a study on participants who developed LGB-affirmation and those who did not. The latter group were not doing so as they firmly held religious beliefs that being LGB is a sin. They felt uncomfortable discussing their religious and LGB values with counsellor education faculty due to the fear of negative evaluation. For those who have more affirmative attitudes, they have experienced fewer value conflicts in working with LGB clients. They also felt more competent with the general population of LGB clients than participants with LGB-negative views. The participants with LGB negative views were more likely to discuss limitations of competence with LGB clients on relationship or sexual issues.

Willis and Bayne (2024) discussed values upheld by two groups in the counselling field. The first group involves counselling professionals and counsellor educators with affirmative views towards LGB clients. In contrast, religiously conservative counsellors and counsellors-in-training who are not LGB affirmative belong to the second group. The first group perceive LGB relationships as normal and healthy expressions of love and intimacy. They believe that LGB clients have the right to discuss their relationship issues in counselling sessions. This belief is related to the ethical responsibility of counsellors to avoid imposing values. On the contrary, the second group considers same-sex relationships as morally wrong. Thus, they believe a decline of services to LGB clients on relationship issues is permissible. The participants of the present study aimed at giving insights and bringing about positive changes to the LGBT clients. Thus, they belong to the second group.

6. Conclusion

This study has produced valuable insights on how Muslim counsellors experienced and overcome value conflicts in counselling Muslim LGBT clients. They wanted to achieve two therapeutic goals in counselling such clients: giving insights and bringing about positive changes. In achieving the two goals, they go through four processes namely, building rapport, integrating religious values, facing conflicts and challenges, overcoming conflicts and challenges.

Muslim counsellors experience value conflicts as they counsel LGBT clients who are involved in activities prohibited by the religious teachings. The clients are involved in same-sex

relationships, cross-dressing, and prostitution. Some of the clients also have an intention to undergo sex-change. Thus, the Muslim counsellors experience conflicts as what their clients do and intent to do are contradicting with their religious beliefs.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

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