Revisiting Cass’s Model of Homosexual Identity Development in Context of Bangladesh Society

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Abstract
This is an exploratory study to find out how kotis (a category of homosexual) develop their sexual identity in a developing country like Bangladesh, which is predominantly a Muslim society. To do so, the six-stage model of homosexual identity development by Cass was adopted. Face-to-face unstructured interviews were conducted to collect data from 18 self-identified kotis. The study found that although the first four stages of Cass’s model could be applied to understand the identity development process of the Kotos, the final two stages could not. Goffman’s stigma-management strategies have been used to explain why the final two stages cannot be applied and how the kotis manage stigma at every stage. The study concludes that the kotis in Dhaka cannot develop their sexual identity completely because of stigma attached with their identity and Cass’s model could be more applicable if stigma-management strategies are included.

Keywords
koti, sexual identity, critique to Cass’s model, homosexuality, Dhaka

Almost all the models and theories regarding homosexual identity or identity development so far have been developed and tested in context of the Western world, which is culturally much more tolerant of homosexuality and believes in individual freedom comparatively more than the “traditional” societies such as Bangladesh. However, there exists hardly any empirical work that attempts to test whether any of these models or theories fit in the context of such societies. Bangladesh is predominantly a Muslim country, and social norms are mostly shaped by religion, cultural tradition, and values. Homosexuality or homosexual acts are seen as a crime as well as a sin in Bangladesh. The state prohibits homosexual act there by law. The Section 377 of Bangladesh Penal Code prescribes punishment for what is described as unnatural offenses, and this has been understood by the legal system to include the act of sodomy (Bondyopadhyay & Ahmed, 2011). Here, sodomy means both oral and anal intercourse. Still in this hostile context, homosexuality exists in Bangladesh in different forms although not easy to identify. Kotos are a group of homosexuals who are biologically male but psychologically they think of themselves as females. They also think that they have been trapped in a male body. They act like females, talk like females, and assume the role of a female during sexual intercourse, that is, they only play the receptive role, not the penetrating one (only when they are with their male partners). But things become more complex for some of them because they have to maintain a dual role due to the pressure of the society. For example, a considerable number of them have wives and children and lead a “normal” life or, I would say, are compelled to lead a “normal” life. Usually, they dress and behave like typical males do and do not want to reveal their true sexual identity in front of others. This article deals with the issue of identity development of the kotos in the context of Bangladesh and revisits the six-stage model of homosexual identity by V. C. Cass (1984). However, it has some obvious limitations that must be addressed before I delve further detail into it. This is a qualitative study, and it does not generalize its results on all the kotos in Bangladesh. Selection of respondents by its design (purposive and snowball) is subject to researchers’ subjectivity, and they cannot be thought of representative of the whole Koti community in Bangladesh.

Cass’s six-stage homosexual identity development model that includes identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis has been criticized by different scholars in different contexts. Kaufman and Johnson (2004) argued that all the “Coming Out” models assume that gay and lesbian identity development process is unique and dissimilar from the identity issues of other stigmatized groups. They also

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showed that these models, especially Cass’s model, show no sensitivity to the situational complexity of identity disclosure of a gay or a lesbian. Finally, they identified four specific limitations of these models. First, these models assume a linear and goal-directed process as someone passes from one stage of identity development to another. Second, the importance of social context is understated in these models while only emphasis has been assigned to the relationship between identity and behavior. Third, these stages fail to acknowledge that management of stigma is a lifelong process and is never resolved. And finally, tremendous variations in experiences brought about by context, race, ethnicity, gender, culture, class, and so on are undermined by these models (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Some other scholars such as Rust (1993), Parks (1999), Kaminski (2000), Brady and Busse (1994), Cain (1991), Appleby (2001), McDonald (1982), Eliason (1996), and Horowitz and Newcomb (2001) have offered somewhat similar criticisms of these models. Degges-White, Rice, and Myers (2000) came up with some other weaknesses from a different perspective. According to them, only a limited number of empirical works provide support for this model, and there is a lack of definitive boundaries between Stages 1 and 2 as well as between Stages 5 and 6. They also showed that although Cass said lesbian sexuality begins at puberty, there is evidence that lesbian sex play and attraction may commence in early childhood. Also, it has been shown by their research that two of their respondents did not go through Stages 1 to 2, rather they passed directly to Stage 4 from Stage 5. This was so because they were the two youngest women to become aware of their difference at their early childhood, not at puberty. Moreover, three of their respondents were also found not to agree with the final or the sixth stage of Cass’s model of identity development (Degges-White et al., 2000). Furthermore, there is another important aspect termed reflected appraisal, which has something very significant to do with the identity development process of homosexuals. Reflected appraisal is the interpretation of the individual about his or her self-identity based on the feedback from interactions with other people. Researchers have shown that reflected appraisal is a significant element while someone develops self-identity (Felson, 1985; Franks & Gecas, 1992; Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983; Ichiyama, 1993). This study attempts to answer how the homosexuals in Dhaka, Bangladesh, develop their sexual identity and eventually rethink some other probable pitfalls of this model in context of a traditional society where homosexuality is prohibited as well as seen as a sin, where homosexuals cannot even reveal their identity as homosexuals.

Method

Eighteen kotis were selected purposively for the study, and all were from Dhaka city. Two types of non-probability sampling were used to locate the participants: purposive and snowball. Nine of them were selected from Palton, and the rest of them were selected from Old Dhaka. First of all, half of the respondents were selected purposively from the branches of Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS). Rest of the respondents were selected using the technique of snowball sampling. Those who were purposively selected were involved with BSWS either as employees or as registered members. All of them were first told about the study, the objectives of the study, and the ethical issues that were seriously considered by the researcher. All the names used in the study have been pseudonyms to protect their real identity. The study was conducted as a master’s thesis, and the sampling procedure was approved by the academic committee as well as the supervisor.

One of the respondents was less than 20 years of age and had completed Class VIII (8 years of formal education). Five of the respondents were aged from 20 to 25 and completed secondary school certificate (the final examination after completing 10 years of formal schooling). Eleven respondents were aged between 25 and 30 and completed higher secondary certificate (the final examination after completing 12 years of formal schooling). Another respondent was aged between 30 and 35 and the only one to complete graduation. All of them came from the lower middle class strata of the society and were based in Dhaka during the time of interview. All of them were either living alone or sharing house with friends. None of them was living with their parents because either they were not comfortable living with their parents or vice versa.

An open-ended checklist was used to interview the respondents, and all the interviews were recorded with consent of the respondents by a digital audio recorder. On an average, an interview took 93 minutes to complete. Then, the whole interview was translated in English and was written down with the original verbatim. Data have been analyzed manually from the written interviews. Common patterns and themes were first searched in the responses. Then, these themes were coded and recoded several times. Based on the coding, different responses were linked with the six stages of Cass to compare and contrast. The checklist included 23 questions, although these were not the only questions asked to the respondents. Questions were asked following the answer of the respondents depending on the context of the interview and keeping the objective of the research in mind. The distributions of the questions can be divided into seven major subcategories. The first subcategory included personal demographic questions such as “how old are you?” Second one included defining sexual identity questions such as “how do you define your sexual identity?” Third one included questions asking detail about self-identity such as “when and how did you come to realize that you are a koti?” The fourth category included questions about the reactions of others they generally received from the society such as “What are the problems do you have to face generally when your sexual identity is revealed in front of others?” Fifth category included questions regarding reaction of own self after receiving reactions
from others when the sexual identity is revealed such as “How do you feel after receiving such kind of reactions from others?” Sixth category included questions that ask about the kind of relationship they have with their partners such as “Does your parikh acknowledge your relationship with him in front of others?” Parikh is relatively a long-term partner of a koti with whom the koti develops a romantic relationship, which may extend to living together like husband and wife where the koti plays the female role and the parikh plays the male role from performing household chores to sexual intercourse. Final category included questions regarding koti community such as “Is there a guru–follower relationship in the koti community like the hijra community?”

Revisiting Cass’s Model of Homosexual Identity Development

First of all, this study shows, with all the stages of identity development, different stigma-management strategies are involved. According to Goffman (1963), stigmatized individuals use different strategies to manage and hide their stigma from the wider society. All these strategies are adopted by this study to revisit Cass’s model. Cass (1984) was not concerned about any stigma-management strategies while one develops identity as a homosexual. Cass assumed a linear progression from Stages 1 to 6 of homosexual identity development. Moreover, this study argues, due to different stigma, and stigma-management strategies, the sexual identity development of kotis in Dhaka, Bangladesh, is not fully developed. All the kotis (studied) were found to develop their identity till the fourth stage, which is termed identity acceptance by Cass. The final two stages, where the identity is fully flourished and synthesized in the life of a homosexual, are not applicable to the kotis in Dhaka.

Stage 1: Identity Confusion

The first stage identified by Cass is the stage where the homosexual men or women are confused about their identity. One is not sure about his or her sexual identity at this stage and remains confused. Hardly has [s]he revealed his or her feelings about his or her own identity to others. This is a painful stage where one remains very much confused. According to Cass (1984), the previously held identity comes into question at this stage. All the respondents agreed with this situation and expressed their opinion supporting Cass. For example, Shagorika expressed this situation by saying,

Actually I did not know the term koti when I was in Kustia. First I heard the word “koti” after I came to Dhaka and met some other people who were like me. But the characteristics and the behavior pattern which are typical of a koti were within me from the childhood. Such as, when I was about six or seven I never used to go to the playground, I did not like to play football or cricket, I did not want to play the outdoor games. I used to look for indoor games, especially which were typical of girls. For example, I used to play with dolls, I liked to play ranna-patil (a typical game which is played by the girls and which includes small version of household tools like pots, frying pans, jugs, spoons and so on), I used to help my mom with her household chores. And when I became and adolescent, for the first time I found that I don’t feel any attraction to the girls. All the classmates of mine used to like girls, but I didn’t. I was in a real stressed situation when I found that I started to like boys rather than girls. My friends used to make fun of me. Then I always tried to hide what I was feeling inside. (Explanation added)

Shagorika was not sure about her identity at the beginning and was in a stressed state of mind about her identity. She neither knew what she really was nor could she tell anybody about her feelings of being different. This is a conformation to some of the major characteristics of the first stage of Cass’s model. Another characteristic feature of this stage according to Cass (1984) is that the individual cannot tell anyone the way [s]he feels inside about his or her desires and attractions. Moreover, it is a painful time for the person as [s] he cannot share his or her feelings with others as well as has to remain very conscious about disguising his or her real identity. As Sumona says,

Yes, I tried to hide my real feelings and expressions when I found that these are not accepted in the society. Even my family members still do not know that I am a koti. I try to behave as normal as a boy in my home and with my known persons. But sometimes instinctually my behavior comes out. I guess my family members and parents have doubt about my sexual orientation, sometimes they also ask me why I am like this. But I don’t confess in front of them. On the other hand, I also try to conceal my real behavior from others but not always successfully. Sometimes many people ask me why do you talk like this? Why do you behave like a girl? I try as much as to conceal myself from others. I do not use to get out of my home much and even did not talk with friends in the school. Still I have to do so.

Finally, at this stage, the previously held identities come into question according to Cass (1984). Individuals start questioning their previously held, and believed, identities because they start to realize that they are not like the heterosexuals or they are not like other individuals they are used to interact with. All the kotis also had the same feeling, and all of them were in doubt about their identity as a male or as a boy. Sharmin explains this experience as,

. . . I started to think that somehow I have got the body of a boy. From my childhood I was aware that I am different and gradually I came to know that my real identity was neither a male nor a female but a koti.

Stage 2: Identity Comparison

The second stage in Cass’s model is “Identity Comparison.” At this stage, according to Cass, the confusion about
self-identity seems to be lessened, and the individual starts to feel that there is a possibility [s]he might be a homosexual. Some of them start to alienate themselves from the society, whereas some others start looking for group identification at this stage (Cass, 1984). As Sumona says,

I found it by comparing myself with boys and found that I am not like the typical boys. I found from my early childhood that though I was a boy biologically and in appearance, my thoughts and psyches were not like the typical boys. Say for example, I used to pass time with girls, liked to play with them, to behave like them. But I was not at all fascinated to the boy’s games like cricket or lattu (top spinning). I used to play with girls, dance like them and play all the indoor games. I liked to copy what other girls did. I copied their gestures, their style of talking and everything. I wanted to impress the boys by acting like girls. I wanted them to like me. I was in a fix about my self-identity. I knew that I was a boy, but why I was not behaving like a boy was a mystery to me. For example, I wanted to do all the household chores like the girls, I felt sexually excited when a boy touched me, but felt nothing while touching a girl. I couldn’t share it with others. I was afraid to do so, what would I share actually? Is it something to share with others? Later I came to know some other boys who were like me and from them I learned that I am a koti. I learned the term “koti” from them as well. I used to think of myself as an abnormal human being. But gradually found many friends like me, found the Bandhu Office and now I know who I am.

In Sumona’s experience, she started to feel that she was different from other typical boys by comparing her behavior as well as thoughts with others. That is, she started to compare her identity while she thought that she was different. According to Cass (1984), identity comparison takes place this way. There are some other characteristic features found in this study at this stage, which are different from Cass (1984). Different stigma-management strategies come into play at this stage. No one wanted to reveal their feelings in front of others because they feared that they would be stigmatized. The major stigma-management strategies at this stage are passing, which means trying to pretend as normal as a boy; covering, which means try not to be discreditable; and information control and in-group alignment meaning to seek for the same group members. Munmun expresses her ideas in this context as,

... Yes I had to do so. I tried to act like a normal boy when I was young. Because everyone told me that I was not acting like a normal boy. My parents used to punish me for my behavior. I learned from others that I was not acting like a normal boy and I was so humiliated all the times by others that I always tried to act like a normal boy. I used to observe other boys and tried to follow their behavior pattern.

That is, Munmun used the stigma-management strategies, which could be termed passing and covering. Parvin provides example of in-group alignment. In her words,

Stage 3: Identity Tolerance

The individual becomes fairly sure about his or her identity and accepts it for the time being. However, according to Cass, this does not guarantee that the individual will develop his or her identity as a homosexual in future (Cass, 1984). The individual tolerates the identity as a homosexual at this stage. As the person is not fully sure about the identity [s]he pretends to be heterosexual at this stage and adopts many stigma-management strategies such as passing, information control, and in-group alignment. The case of Shakila supports all these arguments clearly as she says,

Aaaaa . . . when I was in class five or six I discovered that I was feeling attracted to the boys of my class and never felt anything about the girls. When the boys touched me, held my hands I felt excited, it made me feel good. I always tried to perfect myself in the typical jobs of the females like sewing, cooking and so on. I was different in the sense that I talked like a girl, my gestures were like a girl, and my body language was like a girl. But I never did all these willingly, these were natural to me. Then, when I was in class nine, for the first time I had sexual experience and it was not with a girl, rather it was with a boy. I played the role of a girl and I really enjoyed it. Though it was hurting at the beginning, it gave me mental satisfaction. I was then becoming much obvious about my sexual feelings. I have never met with a girl and I never feel any urge within me to have any kind of relationship with girls. Rather, having sexual intercourse with a boy gives me immense pleasure. Gradually after that event I became sure that I am not like a normal male. Though I am a male biologically, I am a female in my mind, in my wants, in my feelings. I started to accept the feelings and the identity as a koti . . . when I began to understand how the society wants me to act, how other people want me to see, how my parents want me to behave; I tried to change my behavior. I always tried to act like a normal boy. Still sometimes spontaneously my natural behavior came out. But I always tried to hide my feelings and behavior. Only a few friends knew about my real feelings. I told you that when I was in class nine, I had the first sexual experience. But I never let others know what was going inside me. But always there was a guilty feeling within me. I thought I was doing wrong, what I was thinking was wrong, what I was wanting was wrong, but I could not change all these. All these are within me from my very childhood.

The experience of Shakila clearly shows that she became fairly sure about her sexual identity after she had the first experience of sexual intercourse, but she could not fully accept her identity. She tolerated it for the time being and
adopted the stigma-management strategies such as *passing* by acting like a normal boy, by not letting others know about her real feelings. This is the strategy of *information control* while, only letting a few friends know about her real identity can be seen as adopting the strategy of *in-group alignment*.

### Stage 4: Identity Acceptance

After the individual has tolerated her identity as a homosexual and accepts it as her identity, [s]he steps into the fourth stage of Cass’s model, which is *identity acceptance*. The person becomes fully sure about his or her identity and role at this stage. [S]he becomes ready to tell others about her identity and does not try to hide it. Moreover, [s]he starts passing more time with other group members (Cass, 1984). But there are still some doubts in the mind of the individual that others may create problems if they know about her real identity. This study shows a couple of important features of this stage, which the original model of Cass did not show. First, the individual has to adopt different stigma-management strategies such as *passing*, *covering*, and *in-group alignment*. Second, although the person accepts her identity as a koti, she does not want to reveal it in front of others easily. The experience of Sumona supports the argument as she says,

I think I am a koti and I don’t have any doubt about it. Though I have to face a lot of problems and difficulties because of my identity, I am a koti. I have no problem to acknowledge in front of others that I am a koti, but I can’t do it always because it creates problems for me. Nobody would have been happier than me if I could shout and say that I am a koti. Sometimes I wish to do so, but you know, I can’t.

Selina also supports the arguments by saying,

Well my parents did not know that I am a koti at the beginning. I also tried to hide my thoughts and feelings from them. But when I was in class nine or ten, I told them that I was not a normal boy. I told them everything about me and told them that I have nothing to do in this matter. They were shocked. Then my

| Stigma Management Strategies | Stages of Development | Identity Status of the Koti |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|
| Does not have to face any Stigma at this stage. | Stage One: Identity Confusion | At this stage there is no need to manage Stigma |
| Passing                      | Stage Two: Identity Comparison | Stigma is managed through these mechanisms and thus proceeds toward the next stage |
| Covering                     | Stage Three: Identity Tolerance | Stigma at this stage is also managed through these strategies and proceeds toward the fourth stage |
| Information Control          |                        | |
| In-Group Alignment           | Stage Four: Identity Acceptance | The identity as a koti is accepted though stigma management strategies still are in operation. |
| Visibility                   | Stage Five: Identity Pride | Identity can’t be developed to these two stages because of the stigma management strategies. Identity development has to be completed without managing any stigma. But stigma operates also in these two stages in Dhaka. |
| Personal Identity            | Stage Six: Identity Synthesis | |
| Passing                      |                        | |
| Withholding from Others      |                        | |

**Figure 1.** Development of koti identity.
parents tried a lot to change me, they took me to the doctor, to the kabiraj but nothing changed.

The cases of Sumona and Selina clearly show that at some stage of their life, they accepted themselves as koti and they let their parents know about their sexual identity. However, it was not the solution of their problems. They had to face a lot of difficulties from the society. Their parents could not accept it easily; the people around them did not accept themselves as kotis. Moreover, they had to face a lot of problems in different forms. Sumona said, although she has no problem to reveal her real identity in front of others, she cannot. She has to hide it from others, because the larger society would not accept it, and she would be stigmatized. Figure 1 summarizes the whole argument clearly.

**Stage 5: Identity Pride**

The fifth stage according to Cass (1984) in developing a homosexual identity is identity pride. At this stage, the individual starts feeling pride of his or her identity and enjoys living as a homosexual. [S]he is now prepared to tell everybody that [s]he is a homosexual and never hides his or her real identity. Opinions of homosexuals become much more important than the heterosexuals. And sometimes, the individual may get angry the way [s]he is treated by the heterosexuals. However, the interesting finding of this study is that this stage does not apply to the kotis (studied) in Dhaka. They do not feel any pride of their koti identity. Rather, they face endless problems from the society as soon as they reveal their identity as a koti to others. Not a single respondent told that they ever felt proud of their identity. In the language of Mitu,

I have to face a lot of problems because of the behavior pattern. I live with my sister and her husband. They always keep asking me why I mix and interact with hijras though I don’t mix with hijras, I mix with kotis. They even cannot distinguish between a hijra and a koti, then how would common people do so? When there is a big occasion or party in the family or there is a get together of family members, I am not accepted there or even they do not ask me to join them. Even I could not attend my younger sister’s wedding because of my koti identity. When major decisions are made in the family or about family matters, my decision or opinion is not valued at all. When I walk on the roads or travel on the public transports there are a whole lot of comments coming from all around me. Sometimes people tend to tease me, sometimes they assault me physically. Even some people with whom I use to interact or sometimes I have helped them some way, tell me not to talk with them or call them in public. Again sometimes the boys with whom I had sex pretend not to recognize me the next day. Sometimes people behave like barbaric; they throw filth, water bottle and so on to me.

The experience of Munmun is more or less same as Mitu. When asked how she feels about being a koti, Munmun says, There are endless problems a koti has to face. First let me start from the family, the problem starts from the family. For example, my family members could not accept me as a koti. They wanted to change my behavior pattern first, and then I was humiliated again and again by my family members. My own parents could not accept me. My friends also could not accept me. They used to make fun of me. Sometimes they wanted to have sex with me forcefully. Sometimes they harassed me sexually. When you go to rent a house or room to live, again you’ll have to face difficulty. As soon as the land lord realizes that you are not a normal male, he will not let you stay in his house, although you are paying the full rent. The society creates problems; a public place is like a place of horror to us. The mastans (local muscle men) in your locality would create problem for you, even the police would harass you, they would take bribe from you, and sometimes they also rape a koti. There is no place to go for a koti and there is no end of problems for her. (Explanation added)

Perhaps the response of Misti summarizes it all about the experience of being a koti. Misti says,

Look, this life is a very miserable one. We are neither hijra nor male; we are a category which is not recognized. Sometimes I feel that life of a handicapped person is better than me. Sometimes I ask to God, why he has created me like this? Religion sees this as a sin, society stigmatizes us, and we are discriminated. Even the man with whom we grow up relations, leaves us a time after. Sometimes I feel that I am worthless and think of committing suicide. But can’t do so. Even sometimes I wish to escape from the society and lead a lonely life. But where would I go?

**Stage 6: Identity Synthesis**

The sixth and final stage is identity synthesis in Cass’s model. This stage is characterized by different features. The individual is happy with his or her identity, and [s]he is prepared to tell anyone about his or her identity. [S]he starts mixing with a fairly equal proportion of heterosexuals and homosexuals. [S]he starts realizing that homosexual identity is not everything in life, it is just a part of life, and there are many other important aspects to it. A lifestyle as a homosexual is developed at this stage. However, these assumptions also are not applicable to the kotis in Dhaka as the previous stage does not apply. As Ritu says,

Yes, I just told you now that I always tried to hide what I was feeling inside me. My parents didn’t know that I was a koti, still they even don’t know that I am a koti. They just know that I am a bit like girls, sometimes I talk and behave like girls, because I always try to hide my behavior and thoughts from my family members.

When the respondents were asked of their reactions and feelings about their life, none of them told that they were happy. Rather, this brought some pathetic replies from them. Satabdi says,
There are lots of problems. People sometimes treat me as a hijra and sometimes try to sexually harass me. Even the people do not want to give me their house for rent though I want to pay the regular rent timely. Sometimes local mastans try to harass me and take money from me. People do not want to talk with me. My relatives use to avoid me during any family function. Nowadays brother and sisters do not want to talk with me. Because of me, one of my sister’s marriage has been broken. My father faces some problems in my area because of me, people asks him question about me. It makes him sad all the time. In public places people give me strange look all the time. In public buses or while walking on the street I have faced different type of comments from people. The most painful thing is when someone works with me and knows me well, still does not want to recognize me in front of others.

Whether the respondents mix proportionately with kotis and other heterosexual men was also asked. However, most of them said that they like to mix with their community people, and they have hardly any friends beyond their community. In this regard, Shejutty replies,

It hurts me all the time, especially when I receive the negative looks or reactions from my family it hurts me a lot. The people whom I love most use to hate me; it makes me to hate myself. Sometimes the overall situation just frustrates me. Sometimes it is hard to bear the negative comments and humiliation from other. Because of this I, cannot interact with other people, I cannot make any friend. I have only a selected numbers of friends and most of them are like me. But I want to live a normal life and want to make friends with other people. But I know it is impossible for me considering my position and identity.

Cass (1984) said that a lifestyle of homosexual is developed at this stage. However, none of the respondents could develop any lifestyle of their own as a koti. Ritu explains her view as follows:

Look I have managed it. I know that people don’t take a koti easy. I don’t even expect good behavior from other people. How can I expect from others while my parents would not behave well with me after knowing that I am a koti? But I think if the social values were different, much flexible and tolerable, problems for the kotis would have been way much less. It’s not that I don’t feel sad or bad after seeing reactions from others. But generally I try to ignore these reactions and try to forget all those.

The discussions above lead one to believe that the final two stages of identity development shown by Cass (1984) cannot be applied on the respondents studied in Dhaka. None of them feel proud of their identity nor have they been able to develop a homosexual lifestyle.

Discussion and Conclusion

The final two stages where an individual develops his or her identity as a homosexual completely and the process of identity development is completed are identity pride and identity synthesis. These two stages are characterized by some features that are not applicable to the society where a koti lives because the stigma-management strategies (Goffman, 1963) are in operation. The first feature is the feeling of pride. According to Cass, the homosexual starts feeling proud of his or her identity after [s]he accepts it. However, a koti cannot feel proud even if she wants to. This is because the state does not allow any homosexuality, as well as the dominant religion Islam does not permit it. However, to feel proud of her identity as a koti, she has to be comfortable with her sexual orientation and she has to be ready to make her sexual orientation visible to others. However, none of the kotis can do it; rather, they have to hide it from others. And if accidentally or incidentally her identity becomes revealed, she faces huge problems. As a result, instead of feeling proud, a koti always has to be very careful about the stigma management at this stage. And this is visibility. The identity becomes a stigma rather than a pride for a koti.

The second feature of these two stages according to Cass is that the homosexual starts enjoying living as a homosexual. However, none of the kotis said that they enjoy living as a koti; rather, they wish they did not have a life like this, and sometimes they became so frustrated that they even attempted suicide. Another stigma-management strategy also works here, which is called personal identity. All the kotis said that their identity in the national identity card or in any other identification document is of a male. Although they were supposed to enjoy living as a koti, they live with a false identity of heterosexual.

The third feature is that the individual is prepared to tell everybody that [s]he is a homosexual. However, it does not happen in case of kotis. They cannot tell everyone that they are kotis. Always, they have to adopt the strategy of passing.

The fourth feature according to Cass is that at this stage, the individual becomes happy with his or her identity. However, none of the respondents said that they were happy with their identity. It is because this identity is not accepted in the wider society; rather, it is a stigmatized one.

The final feature of the sixth stage according to Cass is that the individual starts mixing with proportionately equal number of homosexuals and heterosexuals. However, in the case of the kotis, it did not happen this way. They only mix with a few selected numbers of persons. Because, according to Goffman (1963), the stigmatized will withhold himself or herself from the non-stigmatized if they find that the non-stigmatized are not comfortable with them. And as the normal people in Bangladesh society are not comfortable with the kotis, they withdraw themselves from the wider society to a great extent.

The major finding of this study is that although the first four stages of the identity development model of Cass (1984) could be applied to understanding the identity development process of the kotis in Dhaka city with some stigma-management strategies adopted, the fifth and sixth stages, which are termed as identity pride and identity synthesis, cannot be. Although Cass (1984) said that at the fifth stage, an individual feels pride of his or her identity as a homosexual and enjoys living as a homosexual, nothing such was
found in this study. None of the respondents told that they were proud to be a koti; rather, they wanted to hide the fact form others. And about the sixth stage, Cass’s assumptions were that the individual becomes prepared to tell anyone that [s]he is a homosexual and starts to think that homosexual identity is not everything about an individual’s life; it is only a part of his or her life. Thus, a lifestyle is developed as a homosexual at this stage. However, findings of the current study also do not support these. No koti was ready to tell everyone that she is a koti, and none of them could develop a lifestyle of a koti. The study concludes that the model could be more effective to answer these questions if the stigma-management strategies were included.

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Notes
1. Used not in a conservative sense, rather in Edward Said’s (1978) use of the term to define the “Orient” as traditional.
2. Bandhu Social Welfare Society, a non-government organization, which works for the welfare of the stigmatized people in Bangladesh.
3. A discreditable person is one whose stigma is not obvious or known. His biggest concern is the management of information about his stigma. He does not want to let others know about his stigma (Goffman, 1963).
4. If a stigma is very much visible, the person becomes discredited, for example, a handicapped person. However, if the stigma is not easily visible, the person is a discreditable person and he always wants to conceal his stigma, for example, a homosexual person (Goffman, 1963).
5. Personal identity such as a driving license, an identity card, or even the name is also a management strategy of stigma. For example, a criminal assumes pseudo name to hide his identity (Goffman, 1963).

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