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Research Article

# Religious Commitment, Shame, Guilt, and Social Interaction Anxiety among Pakistani Gays and Bisexual Men

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**Abstract**

Homosexuality is considered as a taboo in Pakistan; thus, systematic investigations of psychosocial problems of homosexuals are very rare. The present research was undertaken to explore religious commitment, shame, guilt, and social interaction anxiety among Pakistani gays and bi-sexual men. Specifically, the study hypothesized a) a positive relationship between religious commitment, shame, guilt, and social interaction anxiety, b) impact of religious commitment and shame on guilt and social interaction anxiety, and c) group differences between gay and bi-sexual men on study variables. The participants comprised of 65 gay and 50 bisexual men with an age ranging from 16 to 35 years. Result obtained from the participants supports the LGBT identity. Correlation analysis of overall result explains that religious commitment is significantly correlated with social interaction anxiety and guilt. Moreover, shame is also correlated with social interaction anxiety and guilt. Linear regression analysis of overall result demonstrated religious commitment and shame as significant predictors of social interaction anxiety and guilt. Limitations, suggestion and implications of current study for further empirical endeavors have also been discussed.

**Key words:** Queer, Muslim culture, religion, shame, guilt, social anxiety.

## Introduction

The term 'queer' was tossed in for non-heterosexual identities, a century ago (Ziad, 2016). Sexual identity is the most crucial component of sexuality and can be developed by the process of having sex (Herdt & Boxer, 1993) or without having sex (Dubé, 2000). No matter how individuals develop their sexual identity they always have a strong emotional attachment with it (Plummer, 1995). Homosexuality is considered as one of the most controversial social and religious problem in most countries. In countries like Pakistan, it is considered as a taboo and so objective and systematic research is very rare partly due to issues like challenges in access to such population and difficulties in assessment and measurement (Farooq, Khan & Jibeen, 2015).

There can be extremely harsh consequences if the sexual identity of any Muslim lesbian, gay, and bisexual is found out and as a result of this these young people often struggle to align their sexual orientation with their cultural and religious identities. Dealing with homosexuality issues for any Muslim can be a subject of crime, sin, and deviation instead of difference and diversity (Mustanski, 2003). The religious comfort theory states that religious beliefs help to elevate negative emotions. When people form religious beliefs, it makes them feel good and reduce guilt, grief, anxiety, depression and other negative emotions (Swan, 2018). In a study, the findings indicated that majority of LGB adults are religiously affiliated, in this study all gay, lesbian and gays were found related to religion, following

this survey whereas three out of ten LGBT adults feel unwelcomed to their religious organization (Murphy, 2015).

Fundamental social values are common among religious groups. That's why religion is also considered to be the enhancer of the relationship between social members and social requirements and the main purpose of religious negotiation is to develop an insight about God and religion in human societies rather than creating belief in God (Zareie, Raeisi, & Saeidi, 2015). Albertsen, O'connor & Berry (2006) concluded that in the measurement of guilt. Religion, spirituality and religious affiliation play vital role. In a study on 246 undergraduates, they found that spirituality, religious emphasis and ethnicity were significantly correlated with the construct of guilt. According to a report of International Humanist and Ethical Union (2008) in present situation being gay is not a desirable position to find one self in. Gay people are under continuous fear that if they dare to act on their impulse they will face fatal consequences that will be highly unpleasant as well. That is why they choose to live in a shame of being homosexual and fear of the consequences of their acts. Negative self-evaluation based on morality is guilt and non-moral self-evaluation is shame which may include considered oneself responsible for fault (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2018).

Both shame and guilt are mainly differentiated by the fact that shame implies with the feeling or worthlessness, passivity and powerlessness and guilt is associated with perceived sense of agency or control (Fontaine, Luyten, Estas & Corveleyn, 2004). A study of 389 gays, lesbian, bisexual men and women examined the interrelations among shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, internalized heterosexism (IH), and problematic substance abuse. findings indicated that shame and IH are related. Additional investigations of these associations would supplement current understandings of sexual minority stress and advance the development of substance-related intervention and prevention efforts targeting sexual minorities (Hequembourg & Dearing, 2013).

Ward (2014) in order to find the relationship between guilt and shame on social connectedness and self-esteem studied 115 adults including 39 men and 76 women of age between 18 to 52 years. His study indicated that there exist a strong and significant relationship between shame and guilt. Demaria and Kassinove (1988) narrate that religiosity was found to be a significant guilt predictor ($r = .20$, $p < .001$). In a study of adult gay and bisexual men (ranging in age from 20 to 70, $M = 38.6$, $SD = 9.4$), recalled peer rejection was found to be independently associated with adult attachment anxiety and to mediate the association between childhood gender non-conformity and attachment anxiety (Landolt, Bartholomew, Saffrey, Oram, & Perlman, 2004). Ward (2014) found that the increment in shame significantly and highly decrease social interaction. Social inclusion is one of the fundamental needs of human beings (Kashdan, 2002). For LGB community the expectation of being rejected by heterosexual is the key factors of psychological problems and it was also found that gay men who are less open about their sexual orientation and those who are less comfortable with being gay were more likely to experience anxiety in social interactions (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2006). In a research Zarzycka, Rybarski and Sliwak (2017) found religion contributing 5 % variance while predicting social anxiety. It was stated that negative emotions toward the God also significantly predict social anxiety. Levinson, Thomas & Rodebaugh (2016) found that shame prospectively predicted both social anxiety and blumia nervosa symptoms. Study concluded that shame, but not guilt, prospectively predicts both social anxiety and bulimic symptoms. Shame was found to fully explain the association between social anxiety. A survey on nonclinical participants that the relationship between religiosity and social anxiety (McConnell, Pargament, Ellison, & Flannelly, 2006).

**Method**

The present study used correlation survey research design to test the following hypotheses:

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***Hypothesis 1, 1A, 1B, 1C***: It was hypothesized that there would be a significant positive relationship between social interaction anxiety and shame (1), social interaction anxiety and religious commitment (1A), religious commitment and guilt (1B), shame and guilt (1C).

***Hypothesis 2, 2A,2B, 2C***: It was hypothesized that religious commitment would be a significant predictor of social interaction anxiety (2), Religious commitment would be a significant predictor of guilt (2A), shame would be a significant predictor of guilt (2B) and shame would be a significant predictor of social interaction anxiety(2C).

**Hypothesis 3:** It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference among social interaction anxiety, religious commitment, shame and guilt in gays and bisexual men.

## Participants

Total sample of one hundred and fifteen participants were taken (*N*=115) in the study. The sample included (*n*=65*)* gays and (*n*=50) bi-sexual men. The data of (*n*= 45) gays and (*n*=45) bisexual men was collected from Facebook gay groups by using purposive sampling technique while (*n*=20) gays and (*n*=5) bisexual men were approached thorough snowball sampling techniques. The age range of participants was 16-35 years (*M* = 25.5, S.D = 13.43).

***Inclusion criteria.*** Men who were sexually attracted toward men or both women and men identified themselves as gay and bi-sexual respectively, were included in the sample.
***Exclusion criteria.*** Heterosexual men who were sexually attracted toward women and transsexual men who want to bring change in sex and trans sexed who have changed their sex and intersex people, people whose sex cannot be distinguished at the time of birth were excluded from the sample.

## Instruments

Social interaction anxiety scale developed by Mattick and Clarke (1998) was employed to measure social interaction anxiety in the participants. The scale contains 20 items, with all items anchored on a 5-point Likert scale. The internal consistency of SIAS was determined by Cronbach's *α*, which ranged from 0.88 to 0.93. (Mattick & Clarke, 1998). Religious commitment was measured through Religious commitment inventory-10 developed by Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCullough, Berry, Schmitt, Berry, Bursley, and O'Conner (2003). It comprises of 10 items with alpha reliability estimated as 0.87 (Worthington, et al., 2003). The third questionnaire used in the present study measured shame and guilt proneness through Personal feeling questionnaire-2 (Harder and Lewis in 1987. It contains 22 items with 5-point Likert type response format. Item number 1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18 and 21 are scored for shame proneness. Likewise, items measuring guilt proneness are 2, 4, 8, 11, 17, 22. Item number 5, 9, 13, 15, 19 and 20 are fillers and remain un-scored. Cronbach's alphas for the PFQ-2 guilt and shame subscales were found to be .85 and .86, respectively (Harder & Lewis, 1987).

## Procedure

Participants of the study were mainly approached through gay Facebook groups. In addition, snowball technique was also utilized to access some participants. Personal information required for research purpose was taken through the demographic sheet including sexual orientation, age and socioeconomic status. Questionnaires were handed over to participants along with the verbal and written instructions. On average, it took 20 to 25 minutes to fill the booklet.

**Ethical considerations.** According to the nature of current research, departmental ethical committee allowed to use deception as the participants of the study were not told about the complete purpose of the research and it was confirmed that participation in this research does not lead to any psychological, economical and physical harm. Study sample was assured about the confidentiality of the data. However, before informed consent the participants were clarified that they have freedom to leave the research at any time and discrimination won't happen against the individual who would prefer not to take part. Then participants were debriefed about the actual purpose of the study after the submission

of booklet, however, no one has objected or demanded to delete their responses to be taken into account for the present study.

## Result

### *Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations*

Descriptive statistics (Means, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis) as well as reliability estimates (Cronbach's alpha) were computed for the religious commitment, shame, guilt and social interaction anxiety. The results are given in Table 1.

**Table 1**
*Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Estimates for the Study Measures (N = 115)*

|  | α | *M* | *SD* | *Skewness* | *Kurtosis* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| RC-10 | .75 | 32.00 | 7.03 | .15 | .36 |
| Shame | .77 | 22.24 | 7.15 | -.05 | 1.02 |
| Guilt | .70 | 14.46 | 5.72 | .17 | 1.71 |
| SIAS | .79 | 32.36 | 11.84 | .13 | .49 |

*Note*. RCI-10= Religious Commitment Inventory-10, SGP= personal feeling questionnaire-2: a measure of shame and guilt proneness, SIAS= Social Interaction Anxiety Scale

Table 1 depicts the results of the descriptive table. Reliability estimates, that is, .75 .77, .70, and .79 for religious commitment, shame, guilt, and social interaction anxiety, respectively, indicated acceptable internal consistency. Skewness and Kurtosis level also ranged between ± 2.5 suggesting that constructs univariate normality is acceptable.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether gays scores and bisexual scores were related. There was no significant difference between gay scores and bisexual scores on the study variables. There are several studies that uses psychological construct on the sexual minorities or LGBT individuals which shows that the difference on the level of variables do not occur among LGBT individuals. These researches conclude that expectation of being rejected by heterosexual is the key factor of psychological problems in LGB community (Pachankis & Goldfried, 2006).

Next the correlations between social interaction anxiety, religious commitment, shame and guilt were computed. The results are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**
*Intercorrelation Between Religious Commitment, Shame, Guilt and Social Interaction Anxiety (N = 115)*

|  | Variables | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Social Interaction Anxiety | .19* | .45** | .05 |
| 2. | Religious Commitment | - | .11 | .19* |
| 3. | Shame |  | - | .43** |
| 4. | Guilt |  |  | - |

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Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$

Table 2 describes bivariate correlation among all the variables of study. It suggests that social interaction anxiety is significantly positive correlated with religious commitment ($r=19$, $p<.05$) and shame ($r=.45$, $p<.01$). It also shows that religious commitment is positively correlated with guilt ($r=.19$, $p<.05$). Furthermore, shame is significantly positive correlated with guilt ($r=.43$, $p<.01$).

### *Predicting Social Interaction Anxiety and Shame from Religious Commitment and Guilt*

Table 3 demonstrates linear regression analysis for religious commitment and shame as predictors of social interaction anxiety and guilt. The religious commitment is significantly correlated with social interaction anxiety and guilt. Table shows that the social interaction anxiety {$F_{(2, 113)} = 4.35$, $\beta = .18$, $p<.05$} and guilt {$F_{(2,113)} = 4.21$, $\beta = .19$, $p<.05$} are significant positive predictor of religious commitment. The value of $\Delta R^2 = .03$ indicated that 3% variance is contributed by social interaction anxiety and 3% by guilt i.e. $\Delta R^2 = .03$. Moreover, table illustrated that the shame is significantly correlated with social interaction anxiety {$F_{(2, 113)} = 29.36$, $\beta = .45$, $p<.001$} and guilt {$F_{(2, 113)} = 25.27$, $\beta = .43$, $p<.001$} 19% variance is contributed by social interaction anxiety $\Delta R^2 = .19$ and 18% by guilt $\Delta R^2 = .18$.

**Table 3**
*Regression analysis with social interaction anxiety and guilt as dependent variable and religious commitment and shame as interdependent variables (N = 115)*

| Variable | Social Interaction Anxiety | | | Guilt | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | $\beta$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $F$ | $B$ | $\Delta R^2$ | $F$ |
| Religious Commitment | .18* | .03 | 4.35 | .19* | .03 | 4.21 |
| Shame | .45*** | .19 | 29.36 | .43*** | .18 | 25.27 |

*Note: *$p < .05$; ***$p < .001$

**Discussion**
Initially, in order to check the relationship among variables, correlational analysis was carried out. According to Pachankis and Goldfried (2006) gay men who are less open about their sexual orientation and those who are less comfortable with being gay were more likely to experience anxiety in social interactions and the expectation of being rejected by heterosexual is the key factors of psychological problems in LGB community.

### *Hypothesis 1, 1A, 1B, 1C*
Hypothesis (1) postulated that there would be a significant positive relationship between social interaction anxiety and shame. Findings of the current study have proved the first hypothesis right. Moreover, findings are in line with previous findings. The findings are in line with the Gilbert (2000) findings in which social interaction anxiety were found to be highly correlated with shame. Similarly, social interaction anxiety and religious commitment was also found to be positively correlated by the findings of the study which confirm the hypothesis (1A) and the findings are in line with the research of McConnell, Pargament, Ellison and Flannelly (2006). Moreover, the hypothesis (1B) that religious commitment and guilt would be positively correlated was proved and confirms the study of (Albertsen, O'connor & Berry, 2006). Likewise, the hypothesis (1C) that shame would be tatistics related with guilt is also found to be proved by the results of the study and furthermore it also confirms the findings of Ward (2014).

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In the Pakistani Muslim society homosexuality in considered as taboo. So, it become very stressful for LGBT individuals to practice their orientation and religion at the same time. As argue Pargament, Murray-Swank, Magyar and Ano (2005) that it becomes the source of stress when religion emphasize too much on sinful behaviors and focus upon punishment from GOD. In Pakistan due to great religious influence gay and bisexual who affiliate themselves from religion and attend more religious event tend to feel more social anxiety due to hidden guilt and shame of being homosexual that is not accepted by both religion and society. That's why the study variables correlate with each other in positive direction as hypotheses narrates.

### Hypothesis 2, 2A, 2B, 2C
Hypothesis (2) postulated that religious commitment would be a significant predictor of social interaction anxiety was proved to be right by the findings of the study result and is in line with the previous findings of Zarzycka, Rybarski and Sliwak (2017) which suggest that religion contribute 5% variance in social anxiety. The hypothesis (2A) that religious commitment would be a significant predictor of guilt was found to be proved by the findings of the study of Demaria and Kassinove (1988). Likewise, the hypothesis (2B) that shame would be a significant predictor guilt was found to be proved by the findings of the research and also in line with previous findings of Ward (2014). Hypothesis (2C) that shame would be a significant predictor of social interaction anxiety was also proved by the findings of this study and was in line with previous findings of Thomas and Rodebaugh (2016).

In a Muslim majority nation like Pakistan, where people are too much influenced by religion and are concern with their religious values the results like religious commitment predict guilt and social anxiety are not sane as per religious comfort theories says that religion creates comfort in the lives of followers and the Muslims of Pakistan are too much possessive about the religious rituals and teaching. Here we can narrate that though religious comfort theories states that religion and its belief weaken the negative emotions and create comfort in its followers but the findings of the study report that religion provide comfort only if our orientation are confirmed by our religious teaching. If our sexual orientation go against our faith then rather than predicting comfort the religion become the source of anxieties, guilt and other negative emotional states.

### Hypothesis 3
The hypothesis (3) that there would be no significant difference among social interaction anxiety, religious commitment, shame and guilt in gays and bisexual men was proved by the findings of *t*-test analysis.

In last few decades the termed "queer" tossed which is an umbrella term for sexual minorities i.e. LGBT (Ziyad, 2016). There are several studies that uses psychological construct on the sexual minorities or LGBT individuals which shows that the difference on the level of variables do not occurs among LGBT individuals. These researches include the research of Pachankis and Goldfried (2006) that conclude that expectation of being rejected by heterosexual is the key factors of psychological problems in LGB community. The study of Hequembourg and Dearing (2013) examined the interrelations among shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, internalized heterosexism (IH), and problematic substance abuse and the study of Collier (2014) on lesbian, gays, bisexual queer adolescents which revealed that LGBQ adolescents who experience peer victimization report more suicidal ideation and attempts than heterosexual peers who are victimized just as often (Collier, 2014).

### Theoretical contribution
Research have successfully complied with the queer theory. Queer theory gives the idea of unstable identities and is rooted from gay, lesbian studies. It gives us idea about non binary gender constructs. It argues that the reality is far more complex in which we live. Moreover, this study has extended the religious comfort theory which states that forming religious belief bring comfort to the life by eliminating negative emotions such as depression, guilt, anxieties and others. In contrast the findings are opposite and indicated that high religiously committed gay and bisexual men score high with social

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anxiety and guilt and further it religion also predicts social anxiety and guilt in them. These findings contributed to the religion comfort theory and concluded that religious belief comfort a person if his sexual orientation complies with orientations and belief of religion, he is following otherwise religious beliefs cause discomfort rather than comfort. This is the reason Muslim gays and bisexual men who are highly committed to religion scored high on discomforts like social anxiety and shame.

**Limitations and suggestions**
The research has been conducted only on gays and bisexual men, lesbians or bi sexual women are not included. So, in further researches lesbian, bisexual women should be included. The sample size ($N$=115) is another limitation of the study so there exists some generalizability issues. So, in order to overcome these issues a larger sample of cross-cultural nature should be use in future researches.

**Implications**
Results of the study contribute to literature in the field of counseling, gender, clinical, community and social psychology. It will open new horizons of knowledge and awareness which would be fruitful for psychologist dealing with people with same or both sex orientations, with sexual minorities suffering from social anxiety, community issues, overwhelm feeling of shame and guilt.
It may also guide community psychologist to deal with religious issues and homosexuals. It might also help them to understand the factors causing social anxiety and guilt. Translation of scales will be helpful for Pakistani researchers and student to use in their work.

**Conclusion**

The present study explores gay and bisexual on different variables including social interaction anxiety, religious commitment, shame and guilt. The findings reveled that all correlation is positive among study variables. As social interaction anxiety is correlated with religious commitment and shame and also predicted by both, positively and significantly. Likewise, the guilt is correlated with shame and religious commitment as predicted by both as well. Results also revealed that there exists no correlation between social interaction anxiety and guilt and there is no significant sexual orientation difference among study variables.

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