

Living with Stigma and Managing Sexual Identity: A Case Study on the Kotis in Dhaka

Md. Azmeary Ferdoush
University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Email: tourzodu_05@yahoo.com

Received May 15th, 2013; revised August 1st, 2013; accepted August 19th, 2013

Copyright © 2013 Md. Azmeary Ferdoush. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Identity as a koti in Dhaka as well as in Bangladesh has always been a stigmatized one. The study aims to explore how the kotis in Dhaka manage their sexual identity and stigma attached with it. To do so eighteen kotis were selected from two areas of Dhaka and unstructured face to face in-depth interviews were conducted. The results show that the kotis in Dhaka have to face numbers of difficulties if their sexual identity is disclosed and knowing or unknowingly they have adopted the stigma management strategies identified by Goffman.

Keywords: Koti; Stigma; Identity; Dhaka; Bangladesh

Introduction

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.

Munmun, A Respondent.

In 1963, Goffman published his groundbreaking analysis on stigma and defined stigma as “An attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman, 1963: p. 6). Goffman argues that to truly understand stigma researchers should shift their attention from a focus on attribution to a focus on relationship (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004). Sexual identity of a koti is also a stigmatized one in Bangladesh and they have to manage their sexual identity through different strategies which have been termed as stigma management strategies by Goffman. Kotis in Dhaka city have been found to adopt different types of stigma management strategies during different stages of their sexual identity development. Their identity as a koti is a stigmatized one and they always have to be very much aware of managing this stigma.

As by definition it is clear that kotis are a subcategory of homosexuals. But they are not the conventional homosexuals or gays or bisexuals as we are used to know. They are a type of male who think that psychologically they are females and have been trapped into a body of a male. They assume all the female roles starting from performing the household chores to sexual intercourse. They never play the penetrative role but only the receptive role during sexual intercourse. But they are very hard to identify as they don't dress like females in public and they don't reveal their real identity in front of unknown. Why people become homosexual has been a big question. Kirkpatrick (2000) showed that there are three major reasons behind that. Genes

are the first according to him, Individuals who identify themselves as homosexual or bisexual are found in particular family lines. Monozygotic twins have concordance for non-heterosexuality at about twice the rate of dizygotic twins, suggesting some genetic influence on the findings on family aggregation. Hormones are second factor according to him though data are contradictory concerning hormonal and developmental differences between those who engage in homosexual behavior and those who do not. Finally Environment is the factor which contributes to homosexual identity development. According to him homosexual behavior is correlated with social and demographic variables. Dubé (2000) also has shown support to this argument. Military service increases the likelihood of homosexual behavior by 50%. Public school attendance in England doubles the likelihood of adolescent homosexual behavior (Kirkpatrick, 2000).

Kaufman and Johnson (2004) have shown that there are different models of homosexual identity development which vary from four to six stages but do not concentrate on the issue of complex social connections and stigma. According to them many of the homosexuals may abandon their homosexual identity reevaluation in different stages as a result of failing to cope with stigma. Social responsibilities, choices and actions are all related to self perception and adaptation over time. Finally according to them these models fail to sufficiently acknowledge that managing stigma and disclosure is a life-long process (Kaufman & Johnson, 2004).

Homosexuals have to face stigma from the society much more than any other groups because of the attitude existing against them. As a result they always have to manage stigma and adopt different stigma management strategies. The major attitudes existing in the society about homosexuality have been divided into four major categories by Gallagher (1979). According to him the first attitude toward homosexuality is that it is intrinsically evil because it excludes all possibilities of procreation. Second is that homosexuality is essentially imperfect

because it violates the normal norm of love making. Third the society evaluates homosexual acts in terms of the relational significance and the final category is that homosexuality is legitimate by its own rights and is seen as not a problem at all (Gallagher, 1979). But the last couple of attitudes are not the traditional society's attitude; these are found more in the developed world.

Sexual identity is also an important factor. How one's sexual identity is developed depends both on the social values and the perception of the individual himself. Brekhuis (1996) categorizes six major dimensions of sexual identity. These are:

- Quantity of Sex e.g. slut, whore, tease, stud and so on.
- Timing of Sex e.g. too early, too late, pre-sexual and so on.
- Level of Enjoyment e.g. frigid women, impotent men, sexual compulsives and so on.
- Degree of Consent e.g. exhibitionist, peeping tom and etc.
- Orientation e.g. homosexuals, child molesters, zoophiliacs, gerentophiles and etc.
- Social Value of Agents e.g. rapist, virgin, perverse and many more.

The sexual identity of the kotis can be categorized in the fifth category which is termed as *Orientation*. The kotis are labeled as what they are only because of their sexual orientation.

No study so far has been conducted in Bangladesh concerning the stigma management and sexual identity of the kotis. The real fact is that very few persons are aware of a different homosexual category called kotis in Bangladesh. There is a Non Government Organization named Bandhu Social Welfare Society (BSWS) which works toward the wellbeing of the stigmatized individuals and sexual minorities in Bangladesh. This is the only reliable source from which one can come to know about the kotis. A study conducted by the BSWS brought some important data about the kotis in Bangladesh. The study was conducted on 108 homosexuals of different categories among whom 25 were kotis. It showed that about 18 out of the 25 kotis had an income of less than 6000 BDT (US \$ less than 100) per month, 17 of them had studied less than or equal to H.S.C (Twelve years of formal schooling), 20 out of 25 kotis were aged between 20 to 30 years. On the other hand 10 of the respondents reported police harassment over them in forms of extortion, beating, blackmailing/threatening, restriction on movements, sexual assaults and others. 22 of the respondents reported sexual harassments over them. 23 of them also reported harassment by the mastans (local muscle men) and goons (Bondyopadhyay & Ahmed, 2011: pp. 21-29; Ahmed, 2011).

The current study focuses on the stigma management with each of the stages of sexual identity development by the kotis in Dhaka. These stages are adopted from the model of V. C. Cass (1984). Cass's model consists of six stages of identity development, but here at this study the first four stages are discussed. The final two stages are not elaborated as these were not found relevant by the study for the discussions of stigma management. All the respondents were found to say that they had to face lots of problems from the society as well as from the family being a koti and all the time they had to manage their stigmatized sexual identity through different strategies.

Objective of the Study

The major objective of the study was to find out how the kotis in Dhaka manage the stigma involved with their sexual identity and what the strategies they adopted to do so were.

Methodology and Sources of Data

Data were collected from 18 kotis from Dhaka. Nine of the kotis were selected from New Palton and the rest were selected from Old Dhaka. Two types of nonprobability sampling were used. First of all the respondents were selected purposively from the branches of BSWS in the study areas. These respondents were involved with BSWS either as employee or as registered members. Other respondents were selected using the method of snowball sampling. Half the respondents were selected purposively and the half was selected using snowball sampling. All of them were first told about the purpose of the study and the ethical issues considered by the researcher and with their permission data have been collected. To ensure the anonymity and privacy of the respondents no real name has been used, all the names used in the research have been pseudonyms. An open ended checklist was developed to interview the respondents and all the interviews were recorded with consent of the respondents by an electronic recorder. On an average an interview took 93 minutes to be completed. Then the whole interview was translated into English and was written down with the original verbatim. Data have been analyzed manually from the written interviews keeping the objectives in mind. The checklist included 23 questions. All these questions could be divided into seven major categories which included general demographic questions, defining own sexual identity, details about own sexual identity, reactions of others from the society and family, reaction of own self after receiving all these reactions, relationship of them with their partners and finally questions regarding the koti community. But only the questions listed in the checklist were not asked, as all of the interviews were open ended, numbers of questions were asked based on the answers provided by the respondents and based on the objective of the study.

Stigma

This definition of stigma cited at the beginning is adopted by the study to define homosexuality as a stigma. Thus a koti is a stigmatized person in the society according to this definition. Goffman (1963) categorized stigma into three major categories. These are:

- 1) Abominations of the body or the various physical deformities.
- 2) Blemishes of individual character perceived as weak will, domineering or unnatural passions, treacherous and rigid belief and dishonesty, these being inferred from a known record.
- 3) Tribal stigma such as race, ethnicity, religious minority and so on (Goffman, 1963).

Goffman's analysis of stigma also showed four patterns of it based on the process of socialization. According to Goffman:

"One pattern involves those with an inborn stigma who become socialized into their disadvantageous situation even while they are learning and incorporating the standards against which they fall short. For example, an orphan learns that children naturally and normally have parents, even while he is learning what it means not to have any. After spending the first sixteen years of his life in the institution he can later still feel that he naturally knows how to be a father to his son.

A second pattern derives from the capacity of a family, and to a much lesser extent a local neighborhood, to constitute itself a protective capsule for its young. Within such a capsule a congenitally stigmatized child can be carefully sustained by

means of information control. Self-belittling definitions of him are prevented from entering the charmed circle, while broad access is given to other conceptions held in the wider society, ones that lead the encapsulated child to see himself as a fully qualified ordinary human being, of normal identity in terms of such basic matters as age and sex...

...A third pattern of socialization is illustrated by one who becomes stigmatized late in life, or learns late in life that he has always been discreditable—the first involving no radical reorganization of his view of his past, the second involving this factor. Such an individual has thoroughly learned about the normal and the stigmatized long before he must see himself as deficient. Presumably he will have a special problem in reidentifying himself; and a special likelihood of developing disapproval of self...

...A fourth pattern is illustrated by those who are initially socialized in an alien community, whether inside or outside the geographical boundaries of the normal society, and who then must learn a second way of being that is felt by those around them to be the real and valid one." (Goffman, 1963: pp. 29-32).

The third pattern of stigma is very much important for the current analysis. This is the pattern by which the kotis realize that they are being stigmatized in the society. All the kotis at their childhood learned that they were different from other boys and at their adolescence or at teen age, they started to realize that they have always been a discreditable. At the very beginning of their childhood they already had learnt the difference between a normal and a stigmatized. It was long before they realized their true sexual identity, they found themselves being stigmatized by the society.

Goffman (1963) also differentiates a couple of states of a stigmatized person. These are:

1) Discredited: A discredited person is one whose stigma is obvious or well-known to others. His biggest concern is the management of tension of that stigma.

2) Discreditable: 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.

A koti is simultaneously both a discredited and a discreditable individual. Sometimes when his behavior pattern reveals his identity as a koti in front of others he becomes a discredited person. On the other hand he always tries to control the information about his sexual identity and wants to remain as a discreditable individual. These two categories are very much important in analyzing the sexual identity of a koti in Bangladesh.

Stigma Management

Goffman (1963) also discussed about some strategies of stigma management. Stigmatized individuals adopt different strategies to manage their stigma. But when they fail to manage stigma and fail to adopt these strategies they become a discredited individual. These strategies are discussed below.

1) Visibility

Visibility is the first management strategy discussed by Goffman. If a stigma is very much visible the person becomes discredited. For example: a handicapped person. On the other hand 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 or a bisexual.

2) Personal Identity

Personal identity like 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.

3) Biographical Others

For every individual there is a circle of known and unknown persons. The known persons have the biographical information about the individual and knows him deeply than others. To these circle the individual cannot hide his stigma. On the other hand there are other individuals to whom the person is none but a stranger. It is easy to hide the stigma from them. But the known persons who are termed as biographical others by Goffman (1963) constitute the social recognition of that individual.

4) Passing

Passing is an important stigma management strategy for the stigmatized individuals. They try to pretend as *normal* in front of others which is called passing. For example: A homosexual pretending to be heterosexual in front of others is a strategy of passing.

5) Information Control

Information control is somehow related to passing. The individual tries to conceal the information about the features which are labeled as stigma in a society.

6) Covering

Covering is related with the known and unknown. This is the process by which an individual becomes discredited or discreditable.

7) In-Group Alignments

To manage stigma the stigmatized individuals create a group of their own categories. This is called in-group alignment by Goffman (1963).

8) Out-Group Alignment

Out-group alignment is the situation where a stigmatized individual attempts mixing with other normal individuals and their groups. In this normal group of people sometimes the stigmatized individual may have to do the ice breaking and mix with them. It happens when the normal individuals fail to ignore the stigmatized individual (Goffman, 1963: pp. 42-97).

Findings

The major findings of the study can be categorized under two sub categories. The first one is "stigma management with sexual identity development" which discusses about the management strategies adopted by the kotis during their sexual identity development stages. The second one focuses on the problems encountered by the kotis in Dhaka because of their stigmatized identity.

The findings of the study are arranged in conformity to the first four stages of Cass's (1984) model. All these stages are discussed below.

Identity Confusion

At this stage no one is ever sure about his own sexual identity and is in a doubt whether he is a homosexual or a heterosexual. He hardly tells any one about his feelings and expresses himself in front of others. It is a painful stage of identity construction and at this stage previously held identities come into question (Cass, 1984). Almost all the cases studied in this study conform to all these characteristics of the first phase of identity development.

For example Misti explains this stage of development as:

I came to know the term Koti after a long time in my life. But when I was in class two or three I found that I liked to play with dolls with my sisters, do household chores, cook, and all the girlish types of games. Seeing these types of behavior my parents used to ask me "why don't you play with boys?" "Why do you use to play with girls all the day long?" I told them this is how I liked it. I didn't play with boys; I always played with girls and with my sisters. I loved it. And when I got into class V, I started asking myself why am I different or why is it happening to me? Then when I got a bit older I discovered that passing time with boys made me feel good, touching them, holding their hands made me feel excited. Started to feel the urge and desire of sexual contact with boys, when I was at class VII or VIII. (Seventh and eighth year in formal schooling).

Misti, A Respondent.

In Misti's experience he was not sure about his identity at his childhood and he used to ask himself questions like why he was like that and why is it happening to him, which is a conformation to some of the major characteristics of the first stage of identity development like not being sure about own identity and asking own self about his own identity.

There is another distinct characteristic of this stage which has been shown by Cass as not to tell anyone about the feelings and desires felt by the individual at this stage (Cass, 1984). This is also found in many of the responses among which the response of Shammi is cited below.

Aaaaa...when I was a kid, I thought I was a girl and I always behaved like a girl. I used to say that I am a daughter of my father. I have two brothers and a sister, I used to say that my father has two daughters and two sons, that is... I thought I was a daughter of my father. I did not try to hide what I was thinking of myself when I was a kid. But when I grew a bit older and started to understand that what I was thinking was not acceptable and was wrong, I started hiding my thoughts, feelings and behavior from others. I realized that what I was thinking was not acceptable.

Shammi, A Respondent.

Identity Comparison

The second stage of identity development according to Cass (1984) is the stage of identity comparison. At this stage the confusion about self identity seems to be lessened and the individual feels that he might be a homosexual. As a result, some of them start alienating themselves from others and from the society. Sometimes they also prefer to act like homosexuals and seek for group identification (Cass, 1984).

All the cases studied here also conform to all these characteristics of this stage. For example, Shabnur states:

When I became an adolescent I found that I don't feel any attraction to the girls. Even touching their hands didn't create any reaction into me. Rather I found that I like boys than girls and their company made me happier and excited.

Shabnur, A Respondent.

There is another important characteristic of this stage according to Cass and that is the feeling of being different from others and feeling alienated from the society. This is also very conforming to the experiences of the respondents. Regarding this characteristic, the case of Selina seems to be highly relevant. According to him:

And when I was in class six or seven I started to feel sexual attraction to the boys. I fall in love with a teacher in my school

who was a male, but I never could tell him, actually never could tell anybody. I kept asking myself why am I like this? Why am I not like the other boys? Why don't I feel any attraction to the girls? Why I can't do like all other boys do? Why I feel good when I touch a boy, when I am with a boy? Why not with a girl? I always used to think that I am a girl, somehow I have been trapped in a body of a boy. I could not share all these with others... I realized one thing clearly that I was a boy and what I was thinking is not accepted by others. If some others get to know that I was feeling this way and I was thinking this way, I would have to face problems. That's why I always tried to hide my feelings and behavior from others.

Selina, A Respondent.

Selina stated that he started to realize from the very childhood that he was not like the other boys surrounding him and when he realized that he might be a koti, he started to feel different, alienated and scared. He was scared of facing problems from others and from the society. That is why he tried to hide his real feeling and behavior.

Identity Tolerance

The third stage of development is identity tolerance and at this stage the individual becomes fairly sure about his own sexual identity. He accepts his sexual identity as a homosexual for the time being but he is not sure about the future role. He tolerates the identity of a homosexual for the time being and he seeks for persons who are like him (Cass, 1984).

Shammi stated clearly that when he became sure to some extent that he was a koti he tried to find other guys who were like him. In his language it was:

Gradually I discovered that I started to dream about boys at nights, I dreamt of beautiful boys and felt sexually excited. Then one day one of my class mates told me that he wants to be friend of mine. Then I had the first sexual experience of my life with that friend. I was very much excited to do that and I wanted to have someone who would penetrate me. But I used to hide my feelings. Later I met with some other boys who were kotis and they told me that what I am is called a koti, not a boy. From them I learned that I am a koti.

Shammi, A Respondent.

On the other hand the case of Ritu states much more clearly about the fact that he wanted to find out and mix with some other individuals who were like him. He explained this as below:

...then I met a boy in my school who was in class X (the tenth year of formal schooling) then. Actually he identified me and we had a good friendship. He was also like me and he told me that what I actually feel inside me is not abnormal anyway. He also felt the same way and he knew some others who were like me. I met with some other boys who were like me through that friend and they were much more senior to me. They were about twenty to twenty five years old then. They taught me the term koti and through them I got to know BSWS and came here. (Explanation added)

Ritu, A Respondent.

Both Shammi and Ritu said that they became fairly sure about their sexual identity gradually when they became older. But at that moment they were not fully sure about their future identity. As well, both of them tried to find some other individuals who were like them and they felt comfortable with them rather than with their known persons.

Identity Acceptance

After the identity tolerance, comes the fourth stage called identity acceptance. This stage is marked by acceptance of the identity and being totally sure about one's sexual identity. At this stage the individual is ready to tell others about his identity and does not think that he should hide his identity as a homosexual from others. As a result he starts passing more times with homosexuals. But at the same time the individual is still in doubt that others may create problem for him if they know about his identity as a homosexual (Cass, 1984).

Regarding the acceptance of identity all the respondents were very confident. All were asked about their identity and all the eighteen respondents identified themselves as being koti without any hesitation.

Misti said:

Look I am a koti and I don't have any doubt or confusion about it. But the society does not recognize this identity. I myself think me as a koti. I think about myself such a way because of my feelings, thoughts, behavior and my lifestyle.

Misti, A Respondent.

Sumona also clearly defined himself as a koti in the following way:

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.

Sumona, A Respondent.

On the other hand Mousumi says:

I am a koti, and I don't think of myself anything except a koti.

Mousumi, A Respondent.

At this stage as Cass said, the individual becomes sure about his identity and accepts it. All the respondents studied in this study had accepted their identity as a koti and they did not even hesitate to talk about their identities.

While answering questions about revealing sexual identity at a later period of life and telling others about own sexual identity almost everyone conformed to the theory of Cass (1984). The case of Selina is well elaborative of this stage.

Selina explained this event as below:

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 IX or X, 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 parents tried a lot to change me, they took me to the doctor, to the kabiraj (traditional healers) but nothing happened. (Explanation added)

Selina, A Respondent.

Problems Encountered by the Kotis

Being a koti and living in a traditional society like Bangladesh the kotis have to face a lot of problems. Every one probably took the longest time when asked about the problems they face being a koti to reply. The major problems faced by the kotis are discussed below.

Behavior Pattern

The behavior pattern of the kotis is itself a problem for them.

No one accepts the way a koti behaves. A koti behaves like a girl, talks like a girl, walks like a girl and plays the role of a girl during sexual intercourse. They cannot always hide their behavior pattern from the outsiders. As a result of their behavior they face problems from the society, because the society expects him to act like a male, not like a female.

Family Relationship

The biggest problem for a koti probably rises from his family. In most of the cases the parents can't accept it. Sometimes they totally cut off their relationship with him, brothers and sisters also don't want to recognize him as brother. He becomes completely a rootless person. Sometimes they are not even allowed to participate in family decisions and marriage ceremonies of siblings.

Relationship with Relatives

It is obvious that if the parents don't continue any relation with their child then the relatives would not do so. All the relatives also don't want to keep any relationship with the koti. As a result the koti becomes totally a lonely person who has nowhere to go except his koti friends.

Property Inheritance

There are instances also that the koti is being deprived of his inherited property. Sometimes his father does not allow him to inherit any property and sometimes his siblings cheat him. Many of the respondents told that they were deprived of their inherited property.

Distinction between Hijra and Koti

Almost all the kotis said that the major problem for them is the common people's inability to distinguish between a hijra and a koti. Most of the people don't know about kotis. As a result when they see a boy is behaving like a girl, they categorize him as a hijra commonly and treat him like a hijra.

Police Harassment

Another major problem for the kotis is harassment by the police. They can't go to the police for any support. Because they know most of the times the police will harass them, they will sometimes take bribe from them instead of helping them. Not only that, sometimes the police takes bribe from them only in exchange of the guarantee of free movement.

Sexual Harassment

A large proportion of the kotis are sexually harassed both by the police and the local mastans (muscle men). There are several examples of being raped and to have sexual intercourse against the permission and will of the koti by the local mastans and goons.

Teasing and Abusive Comments in Public Place

All the kotis are victim of teasing and abusive comments in public places like bus, public gatherings, streets and so on. People make fun of them and insult them by throwing filth, bottles and stones to them.

Recognition by Others

Not being recognized by others is a major problem for the kotis. Their parikh (relatively permanent partner), friends and colleagues even don't want to recognize them in front of others. As a result self hatred and frustration develop within them.

Relationship between a Koti and a Parikh

The parikh is a relatively permanent partner of a koti. A koti develops a romantic relationship with his parikh and perceives him as his husband. A parikh is like a boy friend to a koti. It's a relationship of loyalty and love. A koti and his parikh sometimes live together in a rented house or room like a husband and a wife, sometimes they don't live together but their relationship remains the same. A parikh while having a relationship with a koti is not permitted to have any other relationship with another koti or another female. The koti plays the role of a female in this relationship. He maintains the household, does all the household chores like cooking and washing. Sometimes the koti helps his parikh financially also. But the major problem in this relationship is that it is not permitted by the society as well as by the law. As a result the parikh can leave the koti whenever he wants to and the koti can do nothing about it. Moreover, the parikh, most of the times, don't want to recognize his koti partner in front of others only because they are not accepted and stigmatized by the larger society.

Discussions

Identity Confusion

The first stage is identity confusion and at this stage the koti is not even sure about his sexual identity. He sometimes questions himself why he is so different from others, and why he is like this. But he does not even think that he is a homosexual. A doubt can cross his mind but he does not approve it within himself. At this stage there is nothing which is related to stigma. But he falls in the third pattern of stigmatized individual according to Goffman (1963) at this stage. Because he starts to realize that homosexuals are stigmatized in the society and if his feelings and thoughts are identified as homosexual he might be stigmatized. As a result he becomes much conscious and scared of his sexual identity and never wants to reveal it in front of others.

Identity Comparison

Identity comparison is the second stage of identity development as a koti. At this stage the koti's confusion about his sexual identity seems to be lessened. He feels that he might be different from others and begins to alienate himself from others. A couple of stigma management strategies work here, these are *covering* and *information control*. The koti does not want to reveal his thoughts and behaviors in front of others and thus alienates him from others because he does not want to be discriminated before he even is sure about his sexual identity. At the same time he starts searching for people who are like him and searches for a group alignment. This is the strategy of *in-group alignment*. The koti also acts like a normal heterosexual at this stage which involves the strategy of *passing*. These are the strategies used at this stage of identity development to manage stigma by a koti.

Identity Tolerance

The third stage of identity development as a koti is identity tolerance. At this stage the koti becomes quite sure about his identity and tolerates it, though he is not quite ready to reveal his identity in front of others. The identity tolerance is a strategy of stigma management which is called *information control*. Within himself he now knows that he is a koti and he is different from others, but he hides this information from others as a strategy of stigma management. He also acts like a heterosexual that can be termed as *passing* to manage stigma. He acts like this so that nobody could know about his real identity and the stigma attached with it. He remains as a discreditable person at this stage. *In-group alignment* is also used as a strategy to manage the stigma because he keeps searching for groups and people like him.

Identity Acceptance

Identity acceptance is the fourth stage of the development of a koti identity. At this stage the koti accepts his identity as a koti but still he does not reveal his identity in front of all others. He still remains as a discreditable person. At this stage he is ready to reveal his sexual identity in front of few selected persons. These may be his friends, his relatives or some other kotis. He does this as a strategy of stigma management which is the *in-group alignment*. By revealing his identity to only a selected others he wants himself to be added in a group and feels secure. But the selection is very important. He only selects those whom he believes. He also starts passing more time with them as a result of the in-group alignment. But the strategy of *passing* continues to be adopted to hide his real identity from others. He also is in an insecure position at this stage as he thinks that others may create problem if they know that he is a koti, thus the strategy of *covering* is also adopted by him at this stage.

Conclusion

The objective of this study was to find out how the kotis in Dhaka manage the stigma involved with their sexual identity and what the strategies they follow to do so are. What the current study has found is that the kotis in Dhaka have to pass through different stages of identity development as a koti and at all these stages they have to manage stigma. The identity of a koti is a stigmatized one and they knowingly or unknowingly have adopted the strategies to manage the stigma shown by Goffman (1963). Koti identity is a stigmatized one and a koti has to live with stigma. But what he does is that he tries to remain discreditable rather than discredited to his best.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. (2011). *Reflection of the year: Annual report 2010*. Dhaka: Bandhu Social Welfare Society.
- Bondyopadhyay, A., & Ahmed, S. (2011). *Same-sex love in a difficult climate: A study into the life situation of sexual minority (lesbian, gay, bisexuals, kothi and transgender) persons in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: Bandhu Social Welfare Society.
- Brekhus, W. (1996). Social marking and the mental coloring of identity: Sexual identity construction and maintenance in the United States. *Sociological Forum*, 11, 497-522.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/BF02408390>
- Cass, V. C. (1984). Homosexual identity formation: Testing a theoretical model. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 20, 143-167.

- <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224498409551214>
- Contrada, R. J., & Ashmore, R. D. (1999). *Self, social identity and physical health: Interdisciplinary explorations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Dubé, E. M. (2000). The role of sexual behavior in the identification process of gay and bisexual males. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 37, 123-132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224490009552029>
- Gallagher, R. (1979). Understanding the homosexual. *The Furrow*, 30, 555-569.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. London: Penguin.
- Hooberman, R. E. (1979). Psychological androgyny, feminine gender identity and self-esteem in homosexual and heterosexual males. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 15, 306-315.
- Kaufman, J. M., & Johnson, C. (2004). Stigmatized individuals and the process of identity. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 45, 807-833.
- Kirkpatrick, R. C. (2000). The evolution of human homosexual behavior. *Current Anthropology*, 41, 385-413.