



ISLAMIC AND BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
ISSUES OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND  
TRANSGENDER (LGBT): AN ANALYSIS.

BY

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A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of requirement for the  
degree of Master of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The issue of LGBT has been discussed by different experts and scholars from many perspectives and fields of study. However, these perspectives include only those which are considered scientific in nature while religion is always excluded from the discussion. This is due to the influence of secularism which urges the separation between worldly matters and religion. It has caused the process of elimination of religious influence from anything related to human activity and life. The scientific view on LGBT is a mere description without any attempt to derive any moral judgment. Consequently, although the practice of same-sex sexual activity has been proven to be hazardous to the physical and mental health of human beings, the issue is still not being considered as immoral as putting immoral status to it is considered to be immoral in the first place. The view of religion on the issue of LGBT needs to be re-emphasized as it will solve the problems in this matter.

## ملخص البحث

لقد ناقش الخبراء والعلماء قضية المثليين من وجهات نظر عديدة، وكذلك من خلال مجالات دراسية مختلفة. غير أن هذه الدراسات قد تضمنت فقط الأمور المتعلقة بالمجالات العلمية في الطبيعة فقط، ودائماً يُستبعد الدين من هذه المناقشات والدراسات. ويرجع ذلك إلى تأثير العلمانية التي تحث وتشجع على الفصل بين أمور الدنيا والدين. وقد تسبب ذلك في القضاء على النفوذ الديني وأحكامه في الأمور المتعلقة بالأنشطة البشرية الحياتية. وتعد وجهة نظر العلمية على المثليين بأنه مجرد من الوصف دون بذل أي جهد في محاولة استخلاص أي حكم أخلاقي. ونتيجة لذلك، إذا ثبتت خطورة ممارسة المثليين على الصحة البدنية والعقلية للإنسان، ولم يتم النظر في هذه القضية على أن الممارسة لا تُعدغير أخلاقية باعتبارها غير معترف بها في بعض الولايات في حين أن ولايات أخرى قد اعترفت بها. لذا ينبغي لنا العودة والرجوع إلى رأي الدين وأحكامه في مسألة المثليين لأنها سوف تسهم كثيراً في حل هذه القضية

## APPROVAL PAGE

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*This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents, wife and family*

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In the Name of Allāh, the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful

All Praise and Gratitude to Almighty Allāh SWT May Allāh's Peace and Blessing be upon our Prophet Muhammad SAW, his family, companions and all those who follow him until the end of time. I thank Allāh SWT for His Infinite Mercy, for the Blessings and for giving me an opportunity to undertake and complete this research.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
APA	American Psychiatric Association
DOMA	Defense of Marriage Act
DSM	Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder
HPV	Human Papillomavirus
ICD	International Statistical Classification of Diseases and related Health problem
IKIM	Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, bisexual, Transgender, Queer
NOW	American group of National Organization for Women
QQIAA	Queer, Questioning, Intersexed, Asexual, Ally
STD	Sexually Transmitted Diseases
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nation
WHO	World Health Organization

## TRANSLITERATION TABLE

Arabic Transliteration Scheme  
(According to IIUM Thesis Manual)

### *Consonant*

Arabic Term	Transliteration	Arabic Term	Transliteration	Arabic Term	Transliteration
ء	'	ز	Z	ق	Q
ب	b	س	S	ك	K
ت	t	ش	Sh	ل	L
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	M
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	N
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	هـ	H
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	W
د	d	ع	'	ي	Y
ذ	dh	غ	Gh		
ر	r	ف	F		

### *Vowel*

Arabic Term	Transliteration	Arabic Term	Transliteration
اَ	a	اَ + اِ	ā
اِ	i	اِ + ي	ī
اُ	u	اُ + و	ū
اي	ay	او	Aw

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

LGBT is an abbreviation which refers to the four different phenomena of sexual orientation between two partners of similar gender which include the sexual relationship between men as well as between women. The term LGBT which generally refers to the community of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgenders is the most accepted term to identify those with sexual preference towards others of the same gender. However, according to some views, the term LGBT does not only describe the four different sexual relationships between the same genders, it also covers the emotional aspect of the person committing such practices i.e. the feeling of love and attraction towards the person of the same gender. Thus, the term LGBT signifies not only physical actions, but includes emotional attractions as well.<sup>1</sup> In other words, LGBT is both behavioural and emotional issues which occur between individuals of a similar gender.

In addition, LGBT is in fact a new term developed in order to address those who practise the same-sex love or same-sex sexual activity. As it is difficult to define each and every one of the sexual orientation of lesbianism, homosexuality, bisexuality and transgender, the definition of LGBT is itself complicated to be explained. Generally, the definition of LGBT varies from one view to another. As some scholars define LGBT as four different phenomena (lesbian refers to women who are emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to or committed to other women;

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ, International Student Services, University of Wisconsin- Madison, <<http://iss.wisc.edu/l/definations.html>> (accessed 3 November 2013)

gay refers to a man who is emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to or committed to other men; a bisexual is a person whose need for warmth, affection and love can be satisfied by persons of either sex through emotional, physical and sexual connection while transgender is an umbrella term for persons who have a self-image or gender identity not traditionally associated with their biological gender)<sup>2</sup>, other opinions focus on the love and sexual relationship between the same gender since all of these four sexual orientations lead to the same result of having sexual relationship between the same genders. Regarding the discussion on LGBT from moral and ethical perspectives, another approach (especially by Muslim scholars) employ an analysis of the issue from its three different dimensions of emotion (alluring to the same gender), of appearance and identity, and of practice (the physical engagement to the practice of LGBT).<sup>3</sup> In the discourse of same sex relationship, LGBT is not the only term used by scholars. There are other terms used in order to describe the similar issue including QQIAA (Queer<sup>4</sup>, Questioning, Intersexed, Asexual, Ally), LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) and so on.

Historically, the phenomenon of LGBT especially the love or sexual relationship between men has been in existence since the time of ancient civilization of Athens and Roman Empire in the West<sup>5</sup> and Japan and China in the Eastern part of the globe<sup>6</sup>. On the contrary, the issue of sexual relationship between women which

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<sup>2</sup> Azizan Baharuddin, *Islam, Fitrah dan Kebebasan*, (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia. 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> An alternative that some people use to "queer" the idea of the labels and categories such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, etc. Similar to the concept of genderqueer. It is important to note that the word queer is an in-group term, and a word that can be considered offensive to some people, depending on their generation, geographic location, and relationship with the word. <<http://internationalspectrum.umich.edu/>> (accessed 6 May 2015)

<sup>5</sup> Murray, Stephen O. *Islamic Homosexualities*, (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 3

<sup>6</sup> History recorded that almost all Chinese and Japanese emperors involved in sexual relationship with handsome males in their dynasty. There are some records as well on the story of "the problems of gender identity" i.e. transgender as mentioned by Leupp. (source: Ed. Wayne Dynes, *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*, New York, 1990, 218.)

was formally recorded and emphasized centuries later, particularly during the period of Christian development, is considered less important and less harmful by some medieval scholars due to some reasons including the non-spilling of sperm that occurs during such a practice.<sup>7</sup> However, both phenomena of same sex relation of men and women can be traced back to the same timeline of history especially during the development of Christianity seen in many manuscripts on religious persecution.<sup>8</sup>

In the West, the discourse on LGBT is analyzed based on the ideology of Eurocentrism (the Europe or the West as the focus and centre of measurement) thus, throughout history, the issue of LGBT is discussed from the perspective of its physical and scientific manifestation rather than its moral and ethical perspectives.<sup>9</sup> This is due to the rejection of religious morality and ethics to be employed in the discussion of the matter which falls under the jurisdiction of non- religious affairs. Regarding this rejection, secularism and the process of secularization which occur in the West play an important role in shaping the world into two different and irreconcilable categories, namely the sacred and the profane. The statement “don’t moralise!”<sup>10</sup> in the discussion of AIDS as one of the many impacts of LGBT has been the preaching of Western experts each time there is an attempt to tackle the issue from the ethical and moral stand points. As a result, the discourse on LGBT shifted from one particular approach to others including social, medical, psychological, historical and psychiatric fields of study without focusing on religious moral judgment.

In Western historical records, the first and earliest encounter of LGBT with religion, especially the practice of lesbianism and homosexuality is perhaps with

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<sup>7</sup> Judith M. Bennett *“Lesbian-Like” and the Social History of Lesbianism*, (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2009), 3

<sup>8</sup> Malik Badri, *The AIDS Crisis: a Natural Product of Modernity’s Sexual Revolution* (Third Edition), (Kuala Lumpur: Medeena Books, 2000), 4

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12

Christianity<sup>11</sup>. The moral and ethical laws which are brought by Christianity have discovered many moral violations and abuses in people's lifestyle before its advent, especially during the reign of Greek and Roman Empires. Immoral activities including the vast and unlimited enjoyment of sexual intercourse either inside or outside marriage, either between partners of opposite or similar genders, either between human beings or animals were then considered as threats to the concept of salvation promoted by Christianity.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, the widespread practices of homosexuality during the Roman Empire (for example, Julius Caesar who was known as both a homosexual and bisexual) had vanished after the coming of Christianity during which sexual intercourse was declared as an evil and a sinful practice.<sup>13</sup> The turning point of history related to sexual orientation in the West was during the Renaissance which was marked by a series of attacks and assaults to the fundamentals of Catholicism, including its concept of morality and ethics.<sup>14</sup> LGBT then was resurrected which later on was nourished by the fundamentals of modernism as well as secularism<sup>15</sup>.

Secularism is one of the biggest threats to world religions and to the traditional ways of life. The ideology which can be traced back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century was at its peak during the era of European Enlightenment, particularly with the aid of the development of science and the glorification of human reason which marked the very foundation of European civilization.<sup>16</sup> With the theme "God is dead" as proposed by one of its founding fathers, Nietzschean, and the "world without religion" as its utopia, the West suffered from the impact of secularism and Christianity which was

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<sup>11</sup> Malik Badri, 46

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 32

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 31

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 33

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 40

<sup>16</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al- Attas. *Islam and Secularism*, (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1993). 10

the dominant religion of the West which had to endure its impact.<sup>17</sup> The secular influence on Christianity was inevitable to the extent that it (particularly Protestantism) was willing to change its religious landscape to cope with the influences of secularism.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, the rejection of tradition by secularism has placed the religious ethics (catholic ethics) in jeopardy and thus homosexuality which was prohibited and considered as religiously immoral before, is now allowed and considered as secularly moral. Nowadays, the phenomenon of LGBT is one of the many issues which have been transformed into one of the agendas of secular thought and struggle, demanding for public acknowledgement and recognition.<sup>19</sup>

However, Muslims hold the *Quranic* condemnation on LGBT as one of the sexual orientations practised by humans. The prohibition of the practice of sex between similar genders is reported by the *Qur'an* in the story of one nation in which God's Prophet, Lūṭ, was sent to remind the people on the crime of homosexuality that they were committing. Historically, the *Qur'ān* has recorded that the practice of homosexuality or sodomy (*al-liwāṭ*) was first committed by the people of Lūṭ<sup>20</sup>. The prohibition and condemnation on the practice of sodomy are clearly pronounced in the following verse:

And [We had sent] Lūṭ when he said to his people, "Do you commit such immorality as no one has preceded you with from among the

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<sup>17</sup> al-Attas.2

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3

<sup>19</sup> The first official and systematic struggle of recognition was recorded in 1920 with the establishment of ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union). With the motto of "Because Freedom Can't Protect Itself" it seeks to fight for the freedom and human right including the practices of Homosexuality, Lesbianism, Transgender and Bisexual. Among other freedoms which are included under its supervision are right of speech, right of privacy, right of equal protection etc. (source: [www.aclu.org](http://www.aclu.org))

<sup>20</sup> Abu 'Abdurrahman 'Ali bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Musa. *Homoseks, Bahaya & Solusinya*, (Jakarta: Pustaka Imam Asy- Syafi'I, 2007). 9

worlds? Indeed, you approach men with desire, instead of women. Rather, you are a transgressing people."<sup>21</sup>

The stand point of Islam towards the practice of sodomy is clearly highlighted as a grave sin which resulted in the punishments from Allah onto the people of Lūt as mentioned in many verses of the *Qu'rān* in different *Qu'rānic* chapters. There were two types of punishments (*'adhāb*) implicated by Allah on the people of Sodom which were the turning of the towns of Sodom in Palestine upside down and the raining down on them stones of baked clay.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is understood that the practice of sexual relationship between the same genders such as LGBT is forbidden in Islam.

Furthermore, the other approach of giving moral judgment to the practice of same-sex relationship and sexual activity is measured by the understanding of nature (*fiṭrah*) which is bestowed by Allah to mankind in their process of creation. The fact that the nature is embedded in the creation of human beings is recorded by the *Qu'rān* in the following verse:

He (Moses) said: 'Our Lord is he who gave to each (created) thing its form and nature, and futher gave (it) guidance'<sup>23</sup>

According to *al-mufasssirūn* (*Qur'ān* interpreters), the word 'guidance' as mentioned in the above verse refers to the natural ability of every creation of Allah whether living or non-living, to behave and to act in accordance to the ways that necessitate them for their well-being.<sup>24</sup> In another account, the *Qu'rān* further explains the nature (*fiṭrah*) of human beings by pointing out several examples of human needs.

It is made beautiful in the eyes of human being to like what they desire naturally; women, children, huge quantity of gold and silver (ready money), branded horse (luxurious means of transportation), cattle

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<sup>21</sup> Qurān, 7:80-81

<sup>22</sup> Qurān, 15:73-76

<sup>23</sup> Qurān, 20:50

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad b. Jarir b. Yazid al- Tabari, *Tafsir al- Tabari*, (Beirut: Dar al- Fikr, 1405h), v. 18, 317

(farm), good agricultural land, these are the pleasure of life in this world, and with Allah best place to return<sup>25</sup>

The word ‘women’ as mentioned in the above verse shows that one of the natural necessities of human is to have spouses in their life which can be achieved through the contract of marriage (*nikāh*). Marriage however must involve a solemn contract only between two individuals of the opposite gender i.e. man (husband) and woman (wife) which is in line with the definition of the term marriage itself.

In Buddhism however, there was no official religious judgment passed by Siddharta Gautama Buddha on the moral status of same sex relationship and sexual practice, including homosexuality and lesbianism. However, Buddhism is clear on its view towards sexual practices which include homosexuality and heterosexuality as *Vinaya Pitaka* proclaims on their prohibitions for those who engage with the ascetic life, namely monks and nuns (*bhikku* and *bhikkuni*).<sup>26</sup> Any monk or nun found guilty of sexual intercourse (*maithuna-dharma*) faces the penalty of lifelong expulsion from the community of *Sangha*. This teaching can be related to the *jataka* (stories) of Buddha abandoning his life and his family in his quest to achieve the state of enlightenment<sup>27</sup>. In addition, the third precept of *Dasasila* (the ten precepts) which reads “*I undertake the precept to refrain from sexual activity*” which can be understood as a prohibition of marriage is another evidence which substantiates the prohibition of heterosexuality, homosexuality and even lesbianism. Thus, generally, in the case of monastic life engaged by the monks and nuns, the researcher is of the opinion that the sexual practice between the same genders is prohibited on the ground of the non-practice of sex rather than on the ground of its immoral status.

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<sup>25</sup> Qurān, 3:14

<sup>26</sup> Robert E. Buswell, *Encyclopedia of Buddhism*, (Macmillan Reference, USA, 2004), 683

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 684

Nowadays, the issue of LGBT surfaces due to the struggle of public recognition on human rights and freedom devoid of religious guidance. This is also due to the process of secularization of morality that separates moral value from religious value. This is known as the process of “deconsecration of values” which was indeed described by Syed Naquib al-Attas as part and parcel of secularism.<sup>28</sup>

This research however, proposes to underscore the role that religion plays in shaping one’s values and moral concepts by providing guideline and guidance of determining moral and immoral acts. As a matter of fact, the research hypothesizes that religions may share common views and stands on moral issues. Thus, the role of religions in advocating religious values should be re-emphasized as an alternative to secular values.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The issue of LGBT is an intensely debated issue in various countries and societies which receive a number of opposition and support. The discourses of LGBT which focus mainly on its physical and scientific aspects have made it impossible to assign a moral judgment on the practices of LGBT since moral value is not considered as part of the discussion. There is a number of studies that show the harmful effects of homosexuality. Although the practice of same sex sexual activity is proven to be hazardous to the physical and mental health<sup>29</sup> of human beings, the issue is still not being considered as immoral as putting immoral status to it is considered to be immoral in the first place. Also, the issue of LGBT is complicated to be analyzed from the perspective of morality and ethics since its discourses are done on the basis of the secular ethical approach.

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<sup>28</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al- Attas. *Islam and Secularism*, 18

<sup>29</sup> *Mental Health Risk Factors among GLBT Youth*, (NAMI Multicultural Action Center, 2007)

Secular ethics, which relies totally on the ability of human intellect and reason, at the same time claims that religion is not adequate as a basis of ethics serves as the main factor prompting to the problem concerning the issue of LGBT. Hence, this research envisages that the only solution to the problem related to the issue of LGBT is to revive religious ethics to be employed as a basis for discussion.

As such, this research compares the Islamic and Buddhist morality on the issue of LGBT. The researcher attempts at applying religious ethics as a basis of morality to tackle the issue of LGBT as an alternative to secular ethics. It is expected that religions share common values in terms of ethics despite their differences in terms of doctrines and rituals.

This research also aims at suggesting that religion is the only solution to the problems and issues to LGBT, and it serves as the basis for ethics and morality. The fact that religions seek to prevent humans from any harm and to bring them towards serenity should be fully realized so that man will do the right thing because religion says it is good and will avoid doing the wrong thing because religion says that it is bad or harmful.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

This study attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand the origin, meaning, historical development and claims of LGBT.
2. To discuss LGBT from the Islamic point of view such as its jurisprudential perspective, scholarly opinions, etc.
3. To discuss LGBT from the Buddhist point of view such as its different moral status, scholarly discussions, etc.

4. To analyze the converging and the diverging points between Islam and Buddhism.

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This thesis attempts to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is the origin, meaning, historical development and claims of LGBT?
2. How does Islam view LGBT?
3. How does Buddhism view LGBT?
4. What are the commonalities and divergences between Islamic and Buddhist ethics, particularly on the issue of LGBT?

#### **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The issue of LGBT is regarded by some people as an abnormal sexual orientation to be practised by human beings. Today, this issue has invited heated and intense debates between both the supporters and opponents of LGBT. The former have presented their arguments under the disguise of the struggle of human rights and freedom, demanding for equal rights as given to its opposite sexual orientation, namely heterosexuality. In addition, there is a claim that argues on the natural homosexual personality and practices as a biological pattern which is naturally inherited or inborn in a person.<sup>30</sup> This has provided them with stronger justification on the right to practise homosexuality. On the contrary, the latter who consist of religious traditionalists are advocating for religious norms and values by which LGBT is totally rejected. Hence, this issue indeed optimizes the struggle between secular and religious ethics which see the issue of LGBT from different perspectives.

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<sup>30</sup> Douglas A. Abbott *Myths and Misconceptions About Behavioral Genetics And Homosexuality*, (<http://www.narth.org>) (2007), accessed on 25 April 2015

In addition, the proposed topic is a new perspective in understanding the issue of LGBT in the context of comparison between two religions, namely Islam and Buddhism. Therefore, this study will benefit the adherents of both religions in understanding issues related to LGBT from the perspective of their religious worldview and principles.

Besides, this study also helps students of comparative religions in understanding the moral views of both religions towards the issue of LGBT and its discourses. It is also expected that this study provides a comparative understanding between the secular and religious perspectives on the issue of LGBT.

Lastly, it is expected that this study promotes the understanding of LGBT from the religious perspective. Religious values should not be marginalized at the expense of human rights as within the religious framework there is a guided concept of human rights.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

This research is conducted by using the qualitative method of study. The methods of collecting data in this research include library research on a number of related books, articles and journals. The information from the library research is utilised to get a better understanding of the topic of the research as well as to find a new perspective of discourse on the issue of LGBT.

Moreover, the data for this research are gathered from related online articles, journals, magazines and websites. There are different websites on LGBT which provide a number of information useful to the research. Lastly, this research also collects data from a fieldwork method of research which is done through conducting in-depth interviews with related experts on the issue of LGBT. The scholars of

religion are also interviewed in order to get their opinions and points of view on the issues of LGBT.

In terms of the analysis of data, this research employs the textual method of analysis by which the contents of books, articles, journals and scriptures are studied. Thus, the nature of the study is textual, contextual, historical and comparative.

### **1.7 JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH**

The proposed topic of this research analyses the discourses of LGBT such as its origin and historical development, its philosophical implications on the understanding of human rights and religions (namely Islam and Buddhism) as well as its practical and moral implications on the life of human beings.

The research is important to explain the phenomenon of LGBT from the perspective of religion which has been a subject of denial among modern and liberal scholars previously. The study is also able to add to the number of existing literatures on LGBT apart from providing a fresh and new perspective from the dimension of comparative religions. Therefore, it will be able to herald discussions on LGBT between the two different religions so that we are able to see points of similarities and differences between Islam and Buddhism. Finally, the study attempts to advocate religious value in the understanding of LGBT instead of focusing merely on its physical and scientific aspects.

### **1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since the issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) is nothing new to academic discourse and discussion, there have been many literatures on the subject matter. In addition, this issue has been highlighted in a number of disciplines of