ASEAN Journal of
Religion, Education, and Society

Journal homepage: https://ejournal.bumipublikasinusantara.id/index.php/ajores

Reconciling Faith and Identity: Homosexuality, Emotional Trauma, and Religious Interpretations in Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and The Perks of Being a Wallflower

Adam Warren[*]

University of Bejaia, Algeria
Correspondence: E-mail: smithadamusa2081@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In recent decades, homosexuality has become a central topic in academic, social, and religious discourse. Many LGBTQ+ individuals experience emotional trauma because religious teachings (especially in Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism) are traditionally interpreted in ways that view same-sex attraction as morally incompatible with spiritual life. This paper explored the emotional impact of religious-based stigmatization on LGBTQ+ individuals, using Stephen Chbosky's The Perks of Being a Wallflower as a case study. A qualitative literary analysis was employed because literature often reflects real-world tensions between faith and identity. The findings show that characters struggle with internalized guilt, repression, and psychological conflict because of religious and societal expectations. These experiences mirror emotional trauma found in real-life religious environments. This study is impactful because it encourages a more empathetic understanding of identity conflict and may inform inclusive educational, spiritual, and psychological approaches to LGBTQ+ mental well-being.

© 2025 Bumi Publikasi Nusantara

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:
Submitted/Received 18 Dec 2024
First Revised 19 Jan 2025
Accepted 26 Mar 2025
First Available online 27 Mar 2025
Publication Date 01 Apr 2025

Keyword:
Adolescence,
Emotional trauma,
Homosexuality,
Identity,
Religion.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the topic of homosexuality has gained increased attention in both academic discourse and social policy debates. Despite progress in some parts of the world, stigmatization, discrimination, and emotional trauma remain persistent issues for many individuals who identify as LGBTQ+, particularly in communities where religious traditions hold strong influence over societal norms and moral frameworks. Religious teachings, whether from Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, or other belief systems, often guide ethical behavior and social conduct; however, interpretations of these teachings vary widely, particularly concerning non-heteronormative identities (Hamdi *et al*., 2017; Siraj, 2009; Olson *et al*., 2006; Dong, 2023; Banwari *et al*., 2015).

The relationship between religious beliefs and homosexuality is complex and often emotionally charged. In many traditional interpretations, homosexuality is viewed as incompatible with spiritual values, which can lead to social exclusion or self-repression among adherents. This tension frequently manifests as emotional trauma, especially among youth who experience inner conflict between their sexual identity and their religious upbringing (Goodman, 2024; Bauermeister *et al*., 2007; Malcomnson *et al*., 2006). Literature and media, including The Perks of Being a Wallflower by Stephen Chbosky, have depicted these struggles vividly—illustrating how emotional repression, internalized guilt, and fear of rejection can affect mental health (Arista *et al*., 2016; Devina & Mustofa, 2019).

Recent research has attempted to address the intersection of religion, sexuality, and emotional well-being, often focusing on legal or sociological frameworks (Arli *et al*., 2019; Röder & Spierings, 2021). However, few studies adopt a psychological or literary perspective that explores how religious ideologies shape emotional trauma, especially in adolescent development. Additionally, much of the existing literature leans heavily on Western perspectives, leaving gaps in understanding how diverse religious doctrines influence individual experiences globally. Furthermore, many studies tend to emphasize condemnation or affirmation without exploring how individuals reconcile their faith with their identity (Olson *et al*., 2006; Dong, 2023).

Review papers have addressed theological responses to homosexuality, yet they often lack interdisciplinary insight, especially when it comes to analyzing narrative and emotional depth within literature that reflects lived experiences (Kamilia, 2021; Trites, 2000). There is a need for a more empathetic and balanced review that draws from both religious perspectives and the emotional realities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in faith-based communities.

This paper addresses these gaps by examining homosexuality and emotional trauma through a religious lens, using The Perks of Being a Wallflower as a case study. The purpose of this study is to provide a neutral, interdisciplinary analysis that considers how religious narratives and cultural expectations contribute to emotional conflict in LGBTQ+ individuals. It aims to explore both external pressures and internalized emotions without assigning blame, instead focusing on understanding and awareness.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of literary analysis, religious interpretation, and psychological insight to examine how characters reflect real-world conflicts between faith and identity. By focusing on emotional trauma, rather than doctrinal debate, this paper brings a human-centered perspective to a topic often framed in legal or theological terms.

Ultimately, this research hopes to contribute to greater empathy, balanced discourse, and a deeper understanding of how religious environments impact LGBTQ+ emotional well-being. It may also encourage educators, religious leaders, and mental health professionals to adopt more supportive approaches when addressing identity and spirituality among young people.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Religion plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and individual identities, including perspectives on sexuality and emotional well-being. Different religious traditions have approached the topic of homosexuality with diverse theological, cultural, and interpretive lenses. Equally, the psychological impact of trauma, especially when linked to marginalized identities, is acknowledged in various religious frameworks, often associated with compassion, healing, or moral reflection.

In Islam, traditional interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadith have generally viewed same-sex relations as contrary to Islamic teachings, referencing the story of the people of Lut (Lot) as a moral warning. However, contemporary Islamic scholars and communities have engaged in reexamining these texts, promoting more inclusive interpretations that focus on divine mercy, human dignity, and the need for emotional support for individuals experiencing trauma due to marginalization. Mental health, including trauma, is increasingly discussed within Islamic psychology, which emphasizes inner peace (nafs al-mutma'inna) and spiritual healing (Yiangou, 2019).

Christianity encompasses a broad spectrum of views, shaped by denominational teachings and cultural context. Traditional Christian doctrine, particularly within Catholicism and certain Protestant branches, has historically considered homosexual behavior as incompatible with biblical teachings. This view often references texts such as Romans 1:26-27 and Leviticus 18:22 (Lockard, 2008). However, many modern Christian denominations have taken a more affirming stance, emphasizing unconditional love, acceptance, and pastoral care (Woldemichael *et al*., 2013). Christianity also deeply addresses emotional suffering, with spiritual counseling and scripture being used to aid recovery from emotional trauma, often highlighting themes of forgiveness, restoration, and divine presence in suffering.

In Buddhism, sexual orientation is not a central doctrinal concern. The primary ethical focus lies in avoiding harm and practicing compassion. The Five Precepts guide laypeople to avoid sexual misconduct, but these guidelines are interpreted contextually rather than dogmatically. Buddhist approaches to emotional trauma emphasize mindfulness, meditation, and non-attachment, aiming to reduce suffering through insight and mental discipline. Compassion (karuṇā) is central to healing, and Buddhist-informed psychotherapy is increasingly applied to trauma recovery, including trauma related to sexual identity (Tremblay *et al*., 2024).

Hinduism reflects diverse perspectives due to its decentralized and pluralistic nature. Ancient texts such as the Kama Sutra and narratives from epics like the Mahabharata present examples of same-sex affection and gender fluidity. While certain traditions uphold heteronormative models, others accept variations in gender and sexuality as part of cosmic diversity (Willis, 2003). Emotional trauma is addressed through spiritual practices like yoga, meditation, and devotional paths (bhakti), which emphasize inner transformation and self-realization (Gooptu, 2016). The concept of karma and dharma also shapes the understanding of suffering and resilience.

Judaism holds multifaceted views depending on the denomination. Orthodox Judaism traditionally views same-sex relationships as prohibited based on Torah laws, especially Leviticus 18:22. However, Reform and Reconstructionist branches embrace more inclusive interpretations, advocating for the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ individuals (Chase *et al*., 2016). Jewish teachings on emotional trauma highlight the importance of tikkun olam

(repairing the world), community support, and psychological healing, integrating religious wisdom with contemporary mental health approaches (Ben Yair *et al*., 2024).

In summary, while doctrinal interpretations of homosexuality vary across religions, there is a shared recognition of emotional suffering and the importance of healing. Religious frameworks increasingly incorporate compassion and pastoral care in addressing emotional trauma, including that experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals. This growing intersection of theology, identity, and mental health underscores the need for inclusive and empathetic discourse within religious communities.

3. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative textual analysis approach to examine the religious dimensions embedded in Stephen Chbosky's The Perks of Being a Wallflower. The primary data source was the novel itself, while secondary sources included scholarly articles, books, and supporting literature related to religion, morality, and adolescent development (Arista *et al*., 2016). The analysis focused on how religious elements (such as guilt, forgiveness, redemption, and spiritual reflection) were portrayed through the characters' experiences, particularly those of Charlie, Sam, Patrick, and Brad.

Close reading techniques were used to interpret passages where religious symbolism and moral conflict were evident. The study also paid attention to how implicit Christian values and cultural norms influenced the characters' inner struggles and behavioral choices (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Coleman, 1982). By using a sociocultural lens, the analysis connected religious ideology with themes of trauma, identity, and healing. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of the novel's treatment of moral and spiritual ambiguity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Global Religious Influence on the Acceptance of Homosexuality

The Pew Research Center's 2019 survey on global attitudes toward homosexuality reveals significant variation across countries in terms of societal acceptance. These differences can, in part, be attributed to the cultural and religious values prevalent in each region.

As shown in **Figure 1**, countries with a strong secular tradition or where religious beliefs are generally more liberal (such as Sweden (94%), the Netherlands (92%), Canada (85%), and Germany (86%)) demonstrate high levels of acceptance. These nations often feature more progressive religious institutions or a clearer separation between religious influence and policy-making. In these contexts, individuals are more likely to encounter inclusive interpretations of religious teachings or broader human rights frameworks that support acceptance. Conversely, countries where traditional or conservative religious ideologies remain highly influential tend to show lower acceptance. For example, in Nigeria (7%), Kenya (14%), Indonesia (9%), and Russia (14%), the percentage of those who believe homosexuality should be accepted is relatively low. These countries often have strong religious identities—be it Christianity, Islam, or a blend of faiths—that influence public attitudes. Traditional interpretations of religious texts in these regions may view homosexuality as incompatible with moral or spiritual doctrine, which could contribute to reduced societal acceptance.

The median acceptance rates also reflect regional religious sentiment. For instance:

(i) Western Europe shows a strong majority in favor of acceptance (e.g., Spain 89%, France 86%).

(ii) Eastern Europe presents more divided views, likely influenced by Orthodox Christianity or Catholic teachings (e.g., Poland 47%, Hungary 49%).

(iii) Asia and the Middle East, where religious conservatism is often more pronounced, report significantly lower acceptance (e.g., India 37%, Lebanon 25%, Tunisia 9%).

This data supports the argument that religious ideology plays a considerable role in shaping public opinion toward homosexuality. While not all opposition stems solely from religion, faith-based teachings—particularly when interpreted conservatively—may reinforce societal attitudes that associate non-heteronormative identities with stigma or moral concern. In some cases, this can lead to emotional challenges, internalized guilt, or social isolation among LGBTQ+ individuals, especially in youth.

This context aligns with the experiences illustrated in The Perks of Being a Wallflower, where characters like Patrick face emotional trauma and identity suppression. These experiences are not only shaped by personal relationships but also by the broader social and moral frameworks that may be indirectly informed by religious values.

As attitudes evolve, some faith communities are re-evaluating interpretations of sacred texts and advocating for inclusive practices that consider emotional well-being and human dignity. However, the figure highlights the persistent influence of cultural-religious norms on public acceptance, indicating that religious perspectives remain a powerful force in shaping the experiences of individuals navigating issues of sexuality.

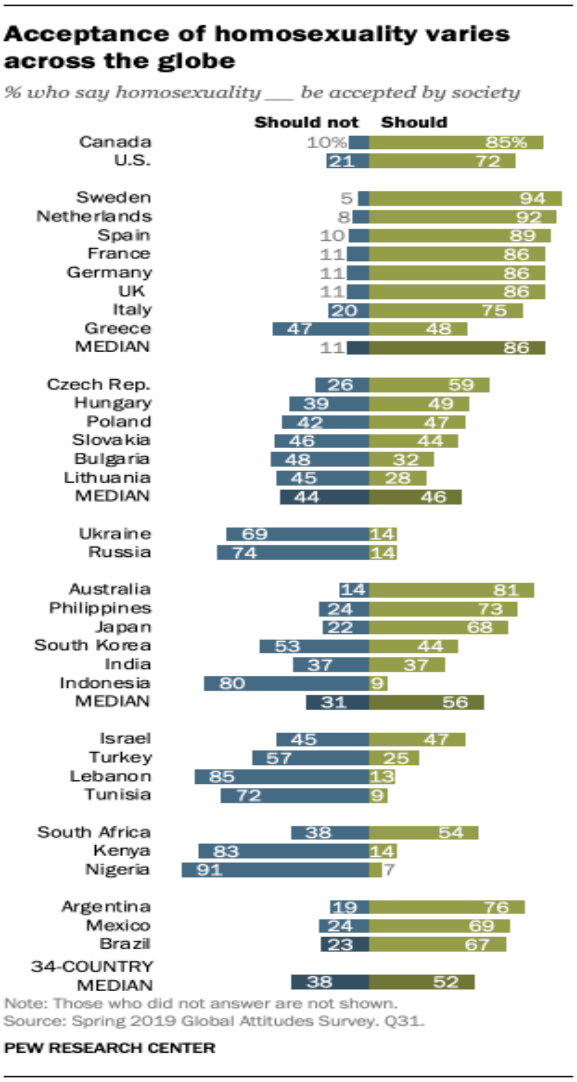


Figure 1. Acceptance of homosexuality varies across the globe based on Pew Research Center in 2019.

4.2. Analysis of Novel

The analysis of The Perks of Being a Wallflower through a religious lens reveals nuanced intersections between emotional trauma and sexual identity. The character Patrick, who grapples with his sexuality and the emotional consequences of rejection, embodies the internal conflict that arises in societies where religious traditions influence views on same-sex relationships. His experience with secrecy, isolation, and emotional vulnerability reflects a broader psychological impact that often accompanies individuals navigating sexual identity in contexts shaped by religious teachings.

In many religious communities, traditional interpretations of sacred texts have historically emphasized heterosexual unions. For instance, some branches of Christianity and Islam hold doctrinal stances that prioritize heterosexual relationships, while also urging compassion and non-judgment in personal conduct. Similar teachings can be found in Judaism and Hinduism, where scripture and commentaries often promote heteronormative structures but also stress the importance of empathy, dignity, and community support. In Buddhism, emphasis is placed on minimizing suffering, and while certain cultural interpretations may influence attitudes toward same-sex attraction, the core teaching encourages mindfulness and understanding toward all beings.

These religious frameworks, when interpreted conservatively, may contribute to emotional distress for individuals who identify as homosexual, particularly when they are faced with societal or familial expectations. Patrick's emotional breakdown following Brad's rejection, and the subsequent social fallout mirrors this conflict. The novel illustrates how emotional trauma can be intensified not solely by one's identity, but by the fear of losing acceptance or failing to meet perceived moral standards.

At the same time, some religious scholars and communities have begun to re-evaluate traditional views, advocating for more inclusive interpretations that consider the psychological well-being of individuals. This shift supports the argument that mental health and emotional support are essential components of spiritual life. It also aligns with the narrative arc in the novel, where healing and support come not from institutional judgment, but from friendships and emotional acceptance.

In this context, the psychological impact of religious expectations, particularly on LGBTQ+ individuals, becomes a crucial area of exploration. Repression, fear of judgment, and internalized guilt can lead to emotional trauma, which in extreme cases may result in depression or anxiety. Charlie's internal struggle, though distinct from Patrick's, also portrays the weight of unresolved trauma and the need for emotional validation.

Thus, the discussion reveals that while religious traditions provide moral and ethical guidance, the interpretation and application of these teachings significantly affect individuals' emotional experiences—particularly those navigating non-heteronormative identities. The exploration of emotional trauma in The Perks of Being a Wallflower underscores the need for empathetic dialogue within religious communities, recognizing that spiritual beliefs and emotional health are deeply interconnected.

5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights how religious interpretations of homosexuality can profoundly shape the emotional experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly adolescents. By examining The Perks of Being a Wallflower through a religious lens, the research illustrates how spiritual doctrine, cultural expectations, and internalized guilt intersect to create emotional trauma. Because many religious teachings continue to view homosexuality through traditional or

exclusionary frameworks, individuals often struggle with feelings of shame, rejection, and psychological distress. However, the novel also reflects moments of self-discovery and emotional healing, suggesting the possibility of reconciling faith with identity. This underscores the importance of fostering compassionate environments—whether in religious communities, schools, or families—that validate emotional experience while allowing for spiritual exploration. The study's interdisciplinary approach offers a valuable lens for educators, faith leaders, and mental health professionals aiming to support LGBTQ+ youth navigating the complex intersection of belief and belonging.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research followed the ethical considerations in conducting research. This is a product of pioneering research in elementary grade at Ianthe Christian Academy in the Philippines.

6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

7. REFERENCES

Arista, T. N., Iswalono, S, and Anggraeni, N. (2016). The traumatic experiences as the hindrance of charlie's personality development in stephen chbosky's *the perks of being a wallflower,* a psychosocial analysis. *Sastra Inggris-Quill*, *5*(1), 59-64.

Arli, D., Badejo, A., and Sutanto, N. (2019). Exploring the effect of intrinsic religiousness, extrinsic religiousness, and religious fundamentalism on people's attitudes towards lesbians and gays in Indonesia. *Journal of Religion Spirituality & Aging*, *32*(2), 118-134.

Banwari, G., Mistry, K., Soni, A., Parikh, N., and Gandhi, H. (2015). Medical students and interns' knowledge about and attitude towards homosexuality. *Journal of Postgraduate Medicine*, *61*(2), 95-100.

Bass, B. M., and Steidlmeier, P. (1999). Ethics, character, and authentic transformational leadership behavior. *The leadership quarterly*, *10*(2), 181-217.

Bauermeister, J., Morales, M., Seda, G., and Gonzalez-Rivera, M. (2007). Sexual prejudice among Puerto Rican young adults. *Journal of Homosexuality*, *53*(4), 135-161.

Ben Yair, Y., Ohayon, S., Ronel, N., and Freedman, S. (2024). Exploring forgiveness through theologically informed education: Lessons from Judaism. *Education Sciences*, *14*(9), 926.

Chase, A. T. (2016). Human rights contestations: sexual orientation and gender identity. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, *20*(6), 703-723.

Coleman, E. (1982). Developmental Stages of the Coming-Out Process. *American Behavioral Scientist, 25* (4), 469-482.

Devina, A. S., and Mustofa, A. (2019). Charlie's fear of abandonment in stephen chbosky's the perks of being a wallflower. *Litera Kultura: Journal of Literacy and Cultural Studies*, *7*(1), 1-8.

Dong, C. (2023). Perceptions of people with non-traditional gender orientation in a religious context. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, *11*(09), 171-181.

Goodman, M. (2024). Associations between religion and suicidality for lgbtq individuals: a systematic review. *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, *46*(2), 157-179.

Gooptu, N. (2016). New spirituality, politics of self-empowerment, citizenship, and democracy in contemporary India. *Modern Asian Studies*, *50*(3), 934-974.

Hamdi, N., Lachheb, M., and Anderson, E. (2017). Muslim gay men: Identity conflict and politics in a Muslim majority nation. *British Journal of Sociology*, *69*(4), 1293-1312.

Kamilia, F. (2021). Charlie's depression in *the perks of being a wallflower*. *Litera Kultura: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, *9*(3), 13-19.

Lockard, A. M. (2008). Homosexuality: legally permissible or spiritually misguided?. *Conspectus: The Journal of the South African Theological Seminary*, *5*(03), 135-167.

Malcomnson, K., Christopher, A., Franzen, T., and Keyes, B. (2006). The protestant work ethic, religious beliefs, and homonegative attitudes. *Mental Health Religion & Culture*, *9*(5), 435-447.

Olson, L., Cadge, W., and Harrison, J. (2006). Religion and public opinion about same-sex marriage*. *Social Science Quarterly*, *87*(2), 340-360.

Röder, A., and Spierings, N. (2022). What shapes attitudes toward homosexuality among European Muslims? The role of religiosity and destination hostility. *International Migration Review*, *56*(2), 533-561.

Siraj, A. (2009). The construction of the homosexual 'other' by British Muslim heterosexuals. *Contemporary Islam*, *3*(1), 41-57.

Tremblay, L., Van Gordon, W., and Elander, J. (2024). Toward greater clarity in defining and understanding nonattachment. *Mindfulness*, *15*(6), 1275-1288.

Willis, J. (2003). Heteronormativity and the deflection of male same-sex attraction among the Pitjantjatjara people of Australia's Western Desert. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *5*(2), 137-151.

Woldemichael, M. T., Broesterhuizen, M., and Liègeois, A. (2013). Christian pastoral care and psychotherapy: a need for theoretical clarity. *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, *67*(4), 1-13.

Yiangou, N. (2019). Transpersonal dimensions in Islamic spirituality. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, *38*(2), 5.