

What is love? Love from sociological perspectives and queer love in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Keywords:</i> love sociology of love queer theory queer love gay-lesbian's love</p>	<p>Love is a narrative that takes a defined form, even in lived experiences. This raises the question of whether same-sex love that follows the traditional romance narrative can be rightfully considered queer. Arab Muslims live in a society strongly tied to Islamic restrictions where the subject of homosexuality is strictly forbidden and considered taboo. The ideal of being loved and loving someone almost universally aspired to. This paper examines the definition of love, provides insight into the perspectives on love from sociologists Durkheim, Marx, Sorokin, and Parson, and analyzes queer love in Indonesia. Through four short narratives, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of love for both heterosexual and homosexual individuals. The research employs a qualitative method, and the interviews were limited to four participants aged between 35 and 45 from Jakarta. The study affords participants considerable freedom in answering the provided questions. I conduct interviews at various locations such as shopping malls, restaurants, and coffee shops, following the interviewees' preferences. For privacy reasons, pseudonyms are used for all names mentioned in this paper.</p>

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Introduction

Sociologists and literary and cultural theorists have observed that expectations about what love looks and feels like are shaped by a love plot that has its origins in literary romance genres (see Belsey, 1994; Illouz, 1997; Kipnis, 2004; Luhmann, 1986). Love, in other words, is a narrative; it takes a narrative form, even in lived experience. This is why love affairs lend themselves so well to narrative: the way people tell the stories of their loves and losses, to themselves and to others, draws on narrative tropes shaped by cultural forms such as literature and film. Lauren Berlant (2012, 6) writes that the romance plot, so central to the way we imagine love, is only "one particular version of the love story," but one that is experienced as definitive and difficult to think beyond.

The question arises whether the narrative of same-sex love's romance can be considered queer. In the early days of queer theory, Michael Warner (1993, xxvii) argued that while gay names an identity, queer does not name an identity per se but, more expansively, a "resistance to regimes of the normal." Underlying Warner's statement is the idea that norms—the practices, identities, and relations that are socially defined as "normal"—exert a coercive and even terrorizing power that determines the intelligibility and acceptability of behavior. Those who fall outside of gender norms may be labeled as "effeminate" men or "masculine" women, subjecting them to subtle and overt forms of coercion, correction, and redress - micro and macro aggressions ranging from uncomfortable glances to verbal or physical harassment to denial of housing or employment.

Social norms dictate that intimate relationships in the United States are primarily heterosexual and monogamous. Dating customs, often arranged by parents and friends, emphasize marriage for love as

the ideal (Coontz, 2006). It is believed that monogamy is a more desirable trait due to religious influences and some government support. As technology advances, dating has become more convenient and less formal, leading to changes in intimate relationships. Thus, the emergence of homosexual relationships - whether among those seeking partners or those who already have them - may not be a significant issue in large cities and metropolitan areas.

Queer theory breaks down the prohibitions that exist in standardized society. This is what Warner (1993) means by a "resistance to the regimes of the normal": queer, as the term has been used by queers themselves, names a resistance to the shaming, coercive, limiting force of the "normal". In its etymology, *queer* (from the Old German *quer*) means "oblique". Once a slur used to denigrate and humiliate those who fell outside heterosexual norms, the term has been reappropriated as a self-designation that implies a "contestation of the terms of sexual legitimacy," in the words of queer theorist Judith Butler (1993, 23).

Queer theory has devoted much energy to exploring the subversive and/or creative possibilities within non-normative sexual practices (e.g., sex outside the home and family, sex in public, cruising) (Young, 2017, 198). Sex is easy to imagine as kinky, perverse, or transgressive. Love, however, which is so resolutely tied to the traditional romance narrative, is much harder to imagine as somehow opposed to the "regimes of the normal". On the contrary, love is typically portrayed as being at the heart of normal life, as in the family. As this phrase suggests, queers have found ways to separate sex from the personal, from the domestic, and from "fidelity, devotion, sacrifice, and family" (Young, 2017, 199). Sex, political solidarity, and friendship lose their discreteness as categories in some of these practices, with queer results. But the role of love in these

practices is hard to pin down; sometimes love means something non-romantic, such as a political commitment without specificity or particular erotic intensity. But often the term love is avoided entirely, and these alternative queer intimacies are described only in terms of sex and/or friendship (Young, 2017, 200).

The research proposed in this paper wants to see how the concept of love can be interpreted by Indonesian queer through the sociology of love. It is not easy for them to interpret love because love is an absurd and abstract concept. Love has no concept of right and wrong. For them, only hate has the concept of wrong.

Method

This research was conducted from December 2022 to February 2023, with only four participants and only in Jakarta. This was informal research, but when I asked them, what love means to queer people, their answers were worthy of a paper. As I said, I only had informal interviews with four of my friends; two gay men and two lesbians.

This research was based on qualitative interviews. At the time, my interviewees were between the ages of 35 and 45, and I followed them where they went to conduct these interviews. All terms used in this paper are pseudonyms: Mike (gay), 36 years old, supervisor in a luxury hotel; Jonathan (gay), 40 years old, supervisor in a cafe in South Jakarta; Dini (lesbian), 37 years old, employee in a luxury hair salon; Tisya (lesbian), 43 years old, director in a non-governmental organization (NGO).

In this form of research, participants are given the freedom to answer questions as I guide the conversation by asking questions and clarifying when answers are unclear (Corbetta, 2003). Qualitative research aims to obtain detailed and intimate information about a small group of individuals to understand the reasons behind their actions,

rather than simply focusing on their general thoughts or behaviors (Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995). The text also adhered to conventional academic formatting and citation styles while maintaining a formal tone. Additionally, the literature review method was utilized to classify, study, and interpret physical sources while identifying their limitations. The findings were presented through narratives or stories of the key participants.

Results and Discussion

What is love?

Love is a universal human capacity or experience that unites us at the level of our common humanity (Young, 2017, p. 197). The language used is objective, value-neutral, and employs a passive tone and impersonal construction, avoiding first-person perspectives unless necessary. The language is kept formal, avoiding contractions, colloquial words, informal expressions, and unnecessary jargon. Positions on subjects are made clear through hedging, and balance is maintained, avoiding biased phrases such as "the evidence suggests" or "the results indicate." Several definitions of love exist, but it is most described as an emotional and passionate connection between two individuals (Berscheid and Walster, 1974). Biased or subjective evaluations are excluded throughout this text, and technical term abbreviations are explained upon their first usage. The writing prioritizes clarity, conciseness, and logical structure with causal connections between statements. The author adheres to common academic sections, employs a factual and unambiguous title, and maintains regular formatting for both author and institution. Standard, high-level language and consistent technical terminology are employed, unusual or ambiguous terms avoided. The text is free

from any errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and style and follows the appropriate citation and footnote style and formatting. Lastly, precise, and appropriate word choices are made where subject-specific vocabulary conveys meaning more precisely than non-technical terms. From a developmental perspective, individuals typically experience and express love towards family members early in life. This is followed by the development of friendships, in which individuals offer love and support. Finally, romantic dating relationships often result in long-term committed love towards partners and spouses (Sternberg and Grajek, 1984; Sternberg, 1986). Lee (1973/1976) identified six distinct ways in which individuals experience and express love within romantic relationships. These six basic love styles, as theorized by Lee (1973/1976), include Eros (passionate love), Ludus (playful love), Storge (friendship love), Pragma (logical love), Mania (possessive love), and Agape (all-giving love).

Lee (1973/1976) categorizes love into five styles. Eros is defined as passionate love, with individuals seeking their ideal physical type of lover. Ludus is playful love, with individuals carefully controlling their relationship involvement. Storge is friendship-based love, with individuals slowly developing affection and companionship with others. Mania is possessive love. It is often described as an emotionally intense love style that is characterized by a fixation on the beloved and may lead to obsessive and jealous behaviors. Agape, on the other hand, is a love style that entails giving selflessly without expecting anything in return. Individuals who exhibit this particular love style require consistent assurance of being loved. Those who identify with this love style view it as their responsibility to love

without expecting reciprocity. It is guided by reason rather than emotion and is gentle and nurturing in essence. On the other hand, Pragma represents a rational form of love. Individuals who adhere to this love style desire partners with specific background and lifestyle characteristics.

When I asked Dini what form of love she gets, she explained:

"I've been dating my partner for a long time. It's been going on for almost ten years. I personally think that for a lesbian, I get my eros from my partner. Why is that? It's because lesbian people use feelings more than sex. For both of us, maybe if we lived abroad, we would already be married but because we live in Indonesia where it is still very taboo to talk about this issue, we have not been able to get married. Nevertheless, we are very happy living like this. Yes, after I listened to what you explained about forms of love, our love is eros."

On the kind of love that gay men get, Mike had a very interesting thing to say. He explained:

"...[laughs]... the gay world is different from the lesbian world which is full of love although not all gays are as I will explain. The lesbian world is the same, not all lesbians are filled with love but what I know is that the gay world is a wild world [laughs and lights his cigarette]. The gay world is very wild. If I listen to what you explained about the forms of love, I can be said to be in the pragma. I really like gay people who wear uniforms like policemen, security guards, teachers, and others who wear uniforms. I'm still single and I think single is the best. I can find them anywhere. Many police officers are gay, many teachers are gay. I get excited when I see them in uniform [laughs]."

These two statements show how a lesbian and a gay person interpret the form of love. A lesbian lovingly recounts the true meaning of love, where she deeply interprets Eros

as a whole. On the other hand, a gay man interprets himself as a pragmatist, where in his opinion there is a significant difference between the form of love that a lesbian and a gay man have. The form of love that Mike interprets is a "fierce" and wild form of love. Because of his output, it is not surprising that gay people are interpreted as people with bad behavior and transmitters of HIV/AIDS, even though not all gay people have wild behavior.

Toward the sociology of love (Durkheim, Weber, Sorokin, Parson)

Love is always at the center of the thoughts and anxieties of every human being, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or religion. Even philosophy, from its beginnings, has devoted beautiful and intense pages to this subject (Montagna, 2023, 338). Let us now look at four sociological thoughts on love.

Durkheim devotes only a few pages to love. According to Durkheim, the distinction between family love and the passionate love of the couple embodies "the eternal antithesis between passion and duty" (Durkheim, 1897, 67). Family love is a moral imperative and is under the sign of duty (Rusu, 2018). It is functional for the existence of the family, since without it the institution would collapse. In contrast, passionate love is the result of "the movement of spontaneous private sentiments" (p. 61). Here, love is understood as a social force. Iorio (2015) emphasizes that "we can define it as an action, relationship or social interaction in which subjects exceed (in giving, receiving, not giving or not doing, neglecting) all their antecedents, and therefore offer more than the situation requires in order to obtain benefits".

Like Durkheim, who studied love in the sociology of the family, Weber approached the topic through his work on the historical

sociology of religion. Weber (1946) argues that the emergence of salvation-promising religions, including Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, has fundamentally changed the socio-moral foundations of the communities where they arose. He also argues that the religions of salvation transformed the community's ethic of neighborliness into a universal ethic of brotherhood, which promoted a fraternal "communism of love" (p. 330). The radical results were that every human being, regardless of friendliness, became deserving of brotherly love due to the universality of human suffering. In this regard, Weber initially outlined an ideal version of fraternal love that is marked by universality, ethical personalism, denial of the world or acosmism, tensionalism, and inner-worldly intransigence (Symonds and Pudsey, 2006).

As we all know, in the field of sociology, Durkheim and Weber are two sociologists whose research on interpersonal love was not so important at that time. Therefore, Durkheim has little to say about personal love, whereas if you look at it, he mostly expresses love towards God, not personal issues between individuals. However, issues of love between individuals can be found in the sociological literature of the nineteenth century. The issue of love between individuals developed because in that century the problems of homosexuality began to appear. Many sociologists began to see and observe that homosexual love can be said to be as complete as heterosexual love. Looking at love from a homosexual perspective is the same as looking at love from a heterosexual perspective. However, there are many who oppose this because homosexual love is a forbidden love, a sinful love, and a love that defies morality. The urge to look at love from the perspective of someone with a sexual preference for homosexuality continues to be promoted by 19th century sociologists

who are not homosexuals, such as Sorokin and Parsons, who raised the question of love that can also be used to look at the question of love in homosexuals.

Only Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968) among sociologists born in the 19th century endeavored to construct a comprehensive theory of love. In Sorokin's (1950) view, "love" indicates humankind's unselfish abilities for transcending their own selves and embracing otherness with benevolence, mindfulness, and virtue. From Rusu's (2018, 10) perspective, love is an energetic force with redemptive potential, not only in the afterlife as promised by Christianity, but also in the present, promising to redeem the social world. In his book, *Altruistic Love*, Sorokin (1950) also discusses the redemptive power of love:

"...that love-experience is true cognition; that love-experience is beautiful and beautifies anything it touches; that loves is goodness itself; that love is freedom at its loftiest; that love is fearless and is the best remedy for any fear; that love is a most creative power; that it is an accessible and effective means to a real peace of mind and supreme happiness; that it is the best therapy against hate, insanity, misery, death and destruction; that, finally, it is the only means of transcending the narrow limits of our Lilliputian egos and of making our true self coextensive with the richest Manifold infinity."

As a prophet of altruistic love, he follows in the footsteps of Comte who came to abandon his project of a positive sociology in favor of a secular Religion of Humanity (Rusu, 2018, 11).

Another nineteenth century sociologist who also studied love is Talcott Parsons. Parsons only addressed love in his functional analysis of the American kinship system and the nuclear family. In a series of studies, Parsons (1943, 1955) presented the emergence of the nuclear family in

modernity as a flexible unit. In this type of kinship-based society, kinship plays a total institution role in fulfilling the basic needs of its members and the wider community. This led to the loss of functions previously performed by the kinship system, resulting in the transformation of the total institution of kinship into the specialized modern institution of the nuclear family. Consequently, a new family unit became a functional imperative of the modern industrial sector. As Parsons (1943) stated, kinship:

"...greatly limits the scope for 'personal' emotional feeling or, at least, its direct expression in action. Any considerable range of affective spontaneity would tend to impinge on the statuses and interests of too many others, with disequilibrating consequences for the system as a whole."

(p. 31).

Another strand of Parsons's sociological thought pointed to the factors responsible for the emergence of the "romantic love complex" in modern industrial societies. In Dorothy Tennov's (1979) terms, the romantic love complex is defined by the normative expectation of the institutionalization of romantic love in marriage (Greenfield, 1965: 363-365).

Again, Sorokin and Parsons do not discuss love in homosexuals as Durkheim and Weber do, but the core of Sorokin and Parsons' thinking is very close to the question of one's feelings. Parsons does not discuss love in heterosexuals and homosexuals in detail, but Parsons does discuss an issue that also affects intimate relationships, namely love in nuclear families. Of the four sociologists I have described here, not even one raised the issue of queer love. This is because the term queer did not exist at that time, and only the term homosexuality existed. All four, however, provide very interesting and

comprehensive views of what is called love from a sociological point of view.

What is queer love and queer love in Indonesia

Queer theory is an umbrella term for critical theories that emerged from feminist theory and lesbian and gay studies in the early 1990s. The term was first coined by Theresa de Lauretis as an attempt to:

"...both to make theory queer (that is, to challenge the heterosexual underpinnings and assumptions of what conventionally passed for "theory" in academic circles) and to queer theory (to call attention to everything that is perverse about the project of theorizing sexual desire and sexual pleasure) (Halperin, 2003, 340)."

According to queer theory, categories such as sex, gender, and sexuality are seen as human products which can only be understood within a cultural, social, and historical framework (Foucault, 1998). There are two main aims of queer theory: (1) to deconstruct the everyday, taken-for-granted ideologies on which society (and psychological theory) has been based, and (2) to develop alternative theories about non-normative sexualities that acknowledge the inevitable interactions of gender, sex, and sexuality (Jagose, 1996). In other words, advocates of queer and radical theory are interested in dismantling ideologies that normalize one gender or sexual system over others (see Rubin, 1984; Warner, 1993; Ansara and Hegarty, 2012) and the discourses and performances inherent in the societal structure that maintain gender and sexuality norms and make some groups appear more natural than others (Jagose, 1996; Butler, 1990). Queer theory identifies three key discourses that maintain sex, gender, and sexual norms. First, queer and radical theorists are interested in normativity. In

terms of normativity, one group is seen as the norm and all others are seen as exceptions to that norm. For example, the androcentric norm that positions men as the standard means that the term "gender" is more often used to refer to women (Wittig, 1992). Second, queer and radical theorists make reference to the concept of diversity. Diversity refers to the idea that sex, gender, and sexuality can exist in many different forms. In this sense, there are multiple ways of knowing and multiple truths. Under the guise of offering an objective, scientific understanding of human behavior, mainstream psychology has focused on offering a single truth (Brown, 1989). As a result, multiple ways of understanding a phenomenon are silenced (Bowker and Star, 1999). Third, queer theorists focus on the notion of fluidity. Fluidity is concerned with the ways in which sex, gender, and sexuality are contextual rather than true and static identities. Kinsey (1948; 1953) set the stage for understanding the fluidity of sexual orientation. His infamous heterosexual-homosexual continuum postulated a dissolution of the concrete boundaries that police the binary poles of sexuality by demonstrating that sexual orientation seemed to fluctuate over time (De Cecco, 1981).

So, now that we have talked a little bit about what and how queer theory is, the big question that can be asked is what is queer love? Colloquially, queer love refers to love that is non-heterosexual or otherwise at odds with gendered norms—for example, love between two women, between two men, or involving genderqueer or transgender partners. Queer love is loving which challenges (rather than ratifies) existing forms of sexual and social legitimacy—love that takes an unexpected or deviant form, that occurs in unconventional contexts, that produces a shocking or scandalous outcome, that is expressed in unacceptable ways, or that compels the lover to depart from

feelings, social arrangements, or lifestyles that are considered normal (Young, 2017, 197). However, in Indonesia, the issue of queer love seems to be ignored by social scientists because the issue of queer love is (perhaps) still an unimportant issue or still a taboo issue. Psychologically, the cognition of every Indonesian has been infused with the knowledge that talking about LGBT issues is pornographic and against religious teachings.

According to Al-Bayati (2020, 966), Arab Muslims strictly forbid and consider homosexuality taboo in a society strongly bound by Islamic restrictions. Islam's rejection of homosexuality is based on the story of the people of Sodom in the Koran, who were infamous for lusting after men instead of women, leading them to persecute their prophet, Lot, and sexually harass his visitors, the angels. They were punished by a divine authority for their prohibited and immoral behavior. The term "Luti" has been commonly used in Arabic literature since the 13th century to refer to homosexual relationships between men, stemming from the mention of the Qur'anic figure Lut who was associated with such conduct. (Al-Bayati, 2020, 967).

Indonesia, as a large country, faces complex issues when it comes to understanding queer love as a relationship. Homosexuals in Indonesia are a marginalized and discriminated minority (Castañeda, 1999), as being homosexual is seen as being "less of a man" or "less of a woman" (Castañeda, 1999). Gender manifests differently for men and women in Indonesia; for men, it is associated with bravery or boldness (*berani*) and virility (*kejantanan*), while for women, it is associated with weakness (*lemah*) (Forshee, 2006). Discrimination against homosexuals is commonly observed in areas where specific religious beliefs are enforced as legal mandates, such as Islamic Sharia law (Yee, 2019). When it comes to homosexuality, there

is mainly a lack of openness. Individuals differ in their levels of openness and acceptance of homosexual persons (Adihartono & Jocson, 2020). For a multitude of reasons, rejection of the gay community is widespread in Indonesia. Many individuals believe that same-sex relationships are prohibited by their religious beliefs, leading them to conclude that protecting and empowering LGBT individuals is unnecessary. This perspective is still pervasive in both society and state policies, resulting in incidents of violence that are often deemed acceptable or necessary because the victims are perceived to be defying religious doctrine (Arivia and Boangmanalu, 2015). Second, some individuals believe that being LGBT can be avoided if one desires to do so. They view this way of life as harmful and contradictory to established norms. Activities like sodomy and the overall lifestyle of the LGBT community are perceived as unusual and abnormal. As it is perceived as a choice, LGBT issues are not commonly viewed as a transnational human rights concern, but rather as a personal choice (Arivia and Boangmanalu, 2015). Thirdly, there is a mistaken belief that the LGBT community leads a glamorous lifestyle, which leads some to assume that LGBT individuals cannot come from impoverished backgrounds. However, this undermines the necessity of state policies that aim to protect the LGBT population. Additionally, LGBT individuals tend to keep their sexual orientation concealed due to shame or familial pressure, in contrast to their heterosexual peers (Arivia and Boangmanalu, 2015). The existence of homosexuality in Indonesian society deviates from social norms. Consequently, many homosexuals in Indonesia opt to play a concealment game to escape social discrimination.

Love is considered the cornerstone of society and essential to fostering a sense of community. Wilkinson (2010) emphasizes

its significance in today's Western world. Meanwhile, Luhmann (1986) and Illouz (1997) examine love's integration into the emergence and distribution of modernity. Additionally, Karandashev characterizes love as a "complex and unpredictable concept" (2019). Throughout human history, the concept of love has undergone significant changes (Fisher, 2004; Dion and Dion, 1996; Hatfield, Mo, and Rapson, 2015; Jankowiak and Fischer, 1992; Karandashev, 2017). Luhmann (1986) argues that the passionate love that we commonly experience today results from major social transformations such as Enlightenment and industrialization, which have also influenced our perception and practice of love and relationships.

I asked Jonathan about queer love. I was initially punished when he responded with the one-liner "I don't know," but I was astonished by his answer, which touched on the academic part of my little research. I asked him what queer love is and whether it would be useful to practice queer love in Indonesia. Jonathan responded with great enthusiasm. As he poured his tea, he said:

*"When we talk about queer, first of all I would say that queer is a very large framework to refer to all kinds of homosexuality behaviors such as gay, lesbian, trans, cis, bisexual and others which are basically behaviors that are against heterosexuality. As a gay man like me, queer love is very important if it can be realized in Indonesia. How important is queer love? With queer love, those of us who are gay feel that we don't have to close ourselves off from holding hands on the street or hugging. When it comes to kissing, I don't think it's necessary, let kissing be our business when we're in private because the most important thing is that in Indonesia, holding hands or hugging for gay people is important and necessary. So that people know that the person we are holding hands with, or hugging is our partner. Now f**k lah! In our own country I can't be myself. Everything is regulated. Yes, there is a need to regulate these rights, but we*

are not allowed to hold hands or hug. That's a violation of human rights."

Tisya, on the other hand, was more cautious in answering my questions. Tisya is the director of a non-governmental organization. Because of her position as a director, she seemed to be very careful in answering questions. Tisya said:

"I will answer your question in short. Queer love in my opinion is a term that is not yet understood by Indonesians and even by homosexuals themselves. They don't understand the meaning of queer. Queer is still considered as gay even though lesbians, trans, and others who are included in the homosexual category are queer. If we talk about queer love, well that is very interesting, very necessary in the world as well as in Indonesia. With queer love we can observe that he/she is gay or lesbian or trans or anything that includes what I have just said. Queer love for me personally doesn't have to be holding hands or hugging in a public place. A look in the eyes that is full of romance for me is also queer love. That's why there is the word love behind the word queer. Their romance is very important. But don't get me wrong, queer love in the west still has its opponents. If you watch the film Brokeback Mountain, there are still people against it. I don't think any film about homosexuality is completely free from the issue of heterosexuality. Because of what? Because the issue of heterosexuality has been in people's heads for thousands of years. The issue of homosexuality has also been around for thousands of years, but the issue of people engaging in same-sex behavior is governed by religion and morals. Well, these two things are still a scourge for homosexuals."

Conclusion

Religion and moral beliefs in Indonesia condemn the LGBT community. Same-sex love is deemed unacceptable. Queer love is viewed as a forbidden act that lies in a gray area between accepted and taboo

romantic behaviors. I agree with Halperin that queer love is not a rebellion but an incompatibility - its queerness lies in its social incompatibility and its irrelevance to social norms (Halperin, 2019, p. 419). Emphasizing queer love as a relational practice reveals how affective relationships shape one's lifeworld. This process is ongoing and situational, positioning queer love as an ever-evolving experience. Redefining humanity's perspective from segregation to inclusion is necessary to combat discrimination rooted in both categorization and personal differences.

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Declaration of Ownership

This article is my original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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