RELIGIO-SPIRITUALITY AND THE COMING-OUT PROCESS

by

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B.S., Clemson University, 2001
M.Ed., Clemson University, 2004

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Special Education, Counseling, and Student Affairs
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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to describe and to understand religio-spirituality in the coming-out process for homosexual, bisexual, and transgender college students. The three research questions were as follows: (1) What have religious affiliations taught traditional college-aged lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students about homosexuality?; (2) In what ways does a person's religio-spiritual life hinder/enhance the sexual identity development process and the coming-out process for a traditional college-aged student?; and (3) In what ways does the traditional college-aged LGBT student's religio-spirituality change through the process?

Following completion of semi-structured interviews of 15 participants, the researcher acknowledged the emergence of nine categories that explain the essence of the coming-out process and its connection with religio-spirituality: (1) a noticeable societal influence on lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) beliefs, (2) an evident family influence on LGBT beliefs, (3) a direct church influence on LGBT beliefs, (4) a difficulty in merging sexuality and religio-spirituality, (5) a feeling of guilt for being an LGBT individual, (6) religio-spirituality affects when and to whom to come-out, (7) many leave the church after coming-out, (8) a feeling of need to protect family still in church after coming-out, and (9) an attempt to maintain a relationship with God or higher being without a relationship in a church or religious institution.

These nine conclusions develop the essence of the coming-out process and religio-spirituality. Individuals in the coming-out process find themselves at a divide in their lives and they must decide which path to follow or attempt to make the paths intersect. The coming-out process is often an internal debate of whether they are LGBT, whether to come-out, and whether they should leave a church or change religio-spirituality.

In student affairs, administers, counselors, and campus ministers can use data and conclusions from this research to understand the coming-out process and the overlapping nature of religio-spiritual identity and sexual identity. The researcher concludes that these professionals must have an understanding of the stages of growth for LGBT students as they attempt to come-out to friends and family as well as possibly maintain a religio-spiritual identity.

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CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Overview of the Issue

I have always felt deep down that God accepts what I am, that I would know in

my heart if [being gay] was wrong. For a long time I struggled with it. I thought it

was a sin. I thought this must be a phase or that I am going to grow out of this,

because it can't be right. As I came to realize that's what I was, I also realized that

God accepts me as that. In my personal relationship with Him and prayer I just

know. It is okay for me (as cited in Love, 1997, p. 390).

The above quote relates the feelings of one gay Catholic student who felt that he had to

resolve issues dealing with the church and religion before he could be comfortable with his

sexuality. A related view, Christian de la Huerta (2000) writes, "Angry at God and church, I

rejected anything that smacked of religion or spirituality. I wanted nothing to do with a deity that

allowed such needless pain and suffering to occur, not only in my own case but in those of the

countless millions of people--gay or straight--who have gone to their deaths feeling less than

they were or feeling like sinners or like they failed because of mistaken, misinterpreted, and

mistranslated moral teachings" (p. 9). These quotes are examples of the struggles that some

lesbian and gay individuals face when trying to reconcile religious and sexual life.

Theoretically speaking, with the exception of Cass (1979) and D'Augelli (1994), few

have researched the coming-out process or the identity development of homosexual individuals.

Love (1998) relates this lack of research to the stigma of discussing sexual orientation, society's

invisible shield to this population, and the nature of discussing the oppression of a group of

individuals. Cass's (1979) Model of Homosexual Identity Formation explains that homosexual identity varies from person to person and the stages that Cass defines are not strict stages for each person. The six stage process of identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and lastly identity synthesis talks little about how the individual's coming-out process is affected by other aspects of his or her life. Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) discuss a newer theory of sexual identity development proposed by D'Augelli. D'Augelli (1994) argues that the coming-out process and identity development are shaped by the environment around each person and his theory of development has aspects of community and familial involvement. He incorporates a six stage process including existing heterosexual identity, developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity, developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity, becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring, developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status, and entering into a lesbian/gay/bisexual community.

When examining religious organizations and communities, many have written doctrines that homosexuality is morally wrong (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001). Love (1998) relates a story of a college age student struggling with coming-out at a religiously affiliated university and his conversation with a professor, "The student almost immediately began to cry and broke down telling Quentin, 'It's horrible. I can't cut it.' Quentin responded, 'Well, maybe I can help you…Could it have something to with sexual orientation?' And the student said, 'Yes, but you don't know what it's like. You don't know. The church condemns it. It's sinful'" (as cited in Love, 1998, p. 298). Brooke (1993) explains that these church and religious doctrines force homosexual people to leave their religious backgrounds or to hide their homosexual thoughts and/or tendencies to remain active and accepted members of their religious affiliation. Buchanan et al. (2001) describes the choice that homosexual individuals must make and the

determination whether they must choose between the two (sexual identity or religious identity) or be able to integrate the two through an examination of personal spirituality.

Faith, Spirituality, Religion and Religio-Spirituality

James Fowler (1981) distinguished between faith, belief, and religion. For Fowler, faith is personal and existential. Faith is neither always religious nor spiritual. Belief for Fowler is the connection and buy-in to the doctrine of a specific religion. The concept of religion is the tradition and the doctrines and practices to act out a belief in a higher being. Shannon Parks (2000) agrees with Fowler's idea of faith being the overarching term as she states, "But faith goes far beyond religious belief, parochially understood. Faith is more adequately recognized as the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience. Faith is a broad, generic human phenomenon" (p. 7).

With faith defined as the overarching concept under which spirituality and religion fall, it is necessary to distinguish spirituality and religion as well. Although various researchers have attempted to distinguish religion and spirituality for individual purposes which will be discussed in the literature review, this study will utilize what Nash (2001) termed as religio-spiritual. Nash says, "The words religion and spirituality are interchangeable parts of the same experience" (p. 18). For college students in particular, Nash believes that religion and spirituality are complementary and by using the term religio-spirituality, students can examine "the best and the worst of what spirituality and religion have to offer them in the process of their meaning making" (p. 19). Using the term "religio-spirituality" allows the researcher to examine the "distinct, yet sometimes overlapping, nature of the phenomenon" (Moran & Curtis, 2004, p. 632).

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Purpose and Nature of the Study

Spirituality plays a large role in each person's individual development and self understanding (e.g., Tisdell, 2003; Capeheart-Meningall, 2005; Love, 2001). Although Cass' (1979) and D'Augelli's (1994) theories are based on research of the homosexual identity development "these discussions have not included the component of spirituality in relation to positive cultural or sexual identity development" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 155). If spirituality is a way to construct knowledge and understanding (Tisdell, 2003) then why is spirituality not being examined in the coming-out process? De la Huerta explains that many gays and lesbians are shunned from churches and in turn shy away from both organized religions and even spirituality. His goal is to connect gays and lesbians to an internal spirituality (De la Huerta, 2000).

The purpose of this study is to describe and to understand the religio-spirituality in the coming-out process for homosexual, bisexual, and transgender college students in a Midwest University using a phenomenological design. This public university is situated within the Bible-belt of the United States and has approximately 80% in-state undergraduate population. The researcher focuses on the basic theoretical framework of Manfred Halpern and his transitional theory which in short states that the four faces of an individual must continually work together and be strengthened for success as an entire entity. The four faces are as follows: the personal face, the historical face, the political face, and the sacred face (Halpern, 1998). The personal face is what allows an individual to reveal uniqueness and to be free to participate as what Halpern (1998) calls the "deepest source of our being" (p. 45). The political face is overall togetherness: together within oneself, with others, in history, and with the sacred. Halpern claims that every relationship is part of the political face. The historical face is the conjunction of personal and political as well as memories (both true and false) and the inheritance of ways of life that began

in the past yet continue to push through the future. These historical aspects will likely overlap into the political, personal, and sacred faces. The final face, the sacred face, is the experience of an underlying force whether one is agnostic, atheist, or any type of believer of faith (Halpern, 1998). Just as Halpern appreciates the interconnectedness of oneself including in particular the personal and sacred face so also does Capeheart-Meningall (2005) argue that one's "spiritual development involves an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development" (p. 34) thus demonstrating the interlocking of spiritual development as a key aspect of overall identity development.

Research Questions

Examining the following questions through the process will allow the researcher to thoroughly develop the understanding of religion and spirituality's roles in the coming-out process:

1. What have religious affiliations taught traditional college-aged lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students about homosexuality?

2. In what ways does a person's religio-spiritual life hinder/enhance the sexual identity development process and the coming-out process for a traditional college-aged student?

3. In what ways does the traditional college-aged lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student's religio-spirituality change through the process?

Study Limitations and Delimitations

With any study for which the data are self-reported, the results can only be as strong as the information that is shared with the researcher. The topics of this research (both coming-out and religio-spirituality) are often taboo topics of discussion. They both can be difficult for many to talk about which might limit the amount of data collected. Because the participants are volunteering to take part in the interviews, they might be more willing to share their own coming-out stories and their thoughts about religion. The researcher will not have interviews with individuals who did not see a connection of religion and coming-out or with individuals who have not explored religio-spirituality either. This study will, however, give a starting point for other research on religio-spirituality and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population.

Need and Significance

When my stepfather was younger, he was actually studying to become a priest. He told me things that were wrong – it's wrong to be gay and all kinds of stuff like that. That's how I was influenced by religion…For a little while, I was thinking, 'I can't be gay, I can't admit I'm gay, because then I will be going to Hell' (Gray, 1999, p. 79).

Very little information and research about the intersection of religio-spirituality and the coming-out process is available at this time, yet from the above quotation the intersection of sexuality and religio-spirituality created an internal dialogue for at least this one individual. This research study will examine the coming-out stories of various people and will be able to

document their perceptions of what role spirituality and religion played in their life at various points of coming-out.

Through media coverage of one man and his following for many years, it is clear that sexual identity and religio-spirituality are interconnected, yet there is disagreement on how they interact. Rev. Jerry Falwell, fundamentalist minister known for anti-gay slogans, passed away on May 15, 2007, but not before he made news several times. In 1984, Rev. Falwell's former ghost-writer Mel White admitted to Falwell that he was gay. After having helped Falwell write his autobiography, White started his own religious group, Soulforce. According to the website, "The purpose of Soulforce is freedom for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from religious and political oppression through the practice of relentless nonviolent resistance" (Soulforce, 2007). In 1999, White and Falwell came back together for a meeting of 200 members of Moral Majority (Falwell's church) and White's church. At this meeting Falwell pledged to decrease his own negativity toward the gay and lesbian population as well as his anti-gay rhetoric (Rosellini, 1999; Schwartz, 1999). Less than three years later in 2002, Rev. White wrote additional letters to Falwell and his church claiming that although Falwell did not renege his pledge to tone down his language, he did claim that the persons from Soulforce in attendance at the 1999 meeting came to renounce their sexuality and to ask for forgiveness. Falwell went so far as claiming the tragedy of September 11, 2001, was God's punishment for homosexuality leading to a weakening of spirituality (Niebuhr, 2001; White, 2002). This media coverage portrayed an either/or relationship of religio-spirituality and sexuality.

This study is designed to better understand the idea that a person cannot have a religio-spirituality identity and a non-heterosexual identity but rather the two areas of the individual's life are greatly related. The research will be beneficial to counselors of gay and lesbian persons,

religious leaders, and the gay and lesbian communities. Counselors of gays and lesbians will be able to have the knowledge that religio-spirituality does have a role in the decision to come-out and to whom. The counselors can bring the idea into discussions to assist with those working through the process. Religious leaders, in particular campus ministers, will benefit from the results of this study as they learn where their denomination falls in the continuum of full acceptance of homosexual individuals to non-acceptance. Religious leaders will also read how the doctrines of various denominations can positively and negatively affect gay and lesbian individuals.

Anthony D'Augelli (1991) states, "Although most lesbian and gay adults acknowledge their affectional orientation to themselves during adolescence, most have not come-out by the time they enter a college or university" (p. 140). D'Augelli (1991) continues by pointing out that most LGBT individuals come-out to others around them by the age of 21. Rhoads (1994) contends that for many students, gay and straight, college is a new found freedom from high school networks and family units. D'Augelli (1991) echoes these sentiments, "The intense secrecies of high school are dissipated as a result of diminished parental and peer monitoring, as well as the possibility of the creation of new networks. The 'I'll wait until college' syndrome is a powerful one" (p. 3). Both Rhoads (1994) and D'Augelli (1991) make the case for why many students do come-out during the collegiate years which leads to the need of student affairs administrators and others who work with college age individuals to be aware of the coming-out process and the challenges that an individual faces not only potentially from family and friends but from religio-spirituality as well.

Definition of Terms

For this particular research project, terms related to homosexual, bisexual, and transgender experiences, as well as religious experiences, are defined in the following manner:

Religion: Based on the interviews and participants self-reporting what religion means to them, religion will be defined as a system of shared beliefs and dogmas related to the worship of a supernatural power (Love, 2001).

Spirituality: Spirituality as defined by Parks (2000) is a personal journey seeking understanding, depth, understanding, and purpose in ones' own life which may or may not be associated with a supernatural power.

Religio-spirituality: a term to encompass the interaction of religion which "is too often seen as what we do with others" (Nash, 2001, p. 18) and spirituality which can be partially defined as "what we do within ourselves" (Nash, 2001, p. 18).

Homosexual: "of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex" (Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary)

LGBT: an acronym for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, 2007).

Gay: males who are attracted to males in a romantic, erotic, and/or emotional sense. (National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, 2007).

Lesbian: females who are attracted to females in a romantic, erotic, and/or emotional sense (National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, 2007).

Bisexual: "As a noun, an individual who may be attracted to both sexes. As an adjective, of or relating to sexual and affectional attraction to both sexes" (National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, 2007).

Transgender: an umbrella term that refers to people whose biological and gender identity or expression may not be the same. This can include preoperative, postoperative or non-operatative transsexuals, female and male cross-dressers, drag queens or kings, female or male impersonators, and intersex individuals (National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association, 2007).

Coming-out: "…complex process of moving from a heterosexual (and confused) identity, given to one in childhood, to a strong, positive and accepting sense of one's identity as gay being given to one through awareness of the gay community" (Plummer, 1981, p. 101). Lastly, the coming-out process will be defined as the process in which individuals begin to consider and later embrace their sexual identity as homosexual individuals (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998).

Researcher's Perspective

Through data collection and examination, certain lenses of thought of the researcher might play a factor in the results. From personal relationships with gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students, the researcher has often heard that religio-spirituality made coming-out difficult. The researcher also often overhears students (both homosexual students and heterosexual students) claim that another student may never come-out or may never be their true self because of religio-spirituality. Hearing these things multiple times has led the research to question whether individuals are being allowed by their religio-spirituality to be their true selves or whether the process to become their true selves to the outside world is hindered or enhanced because of religio-spirituality. The researcher acknowledges that she is entering into the research assuming that she will see a connection between religio-spirituality and the coming-out process. The researcher also understands that she brings to the analysis of interviews an awareness of development outside of sexual identity.

In the literature review to follow, the breadth of basic social identity development will be examined followed by cognitive theories including psychosocial development, cognitive development, and moral development. As the current research is situated in the collegiate population, student development theory will be discussed before examining homosexual identity theory and religious and spiritual identity development. After researching the sexual identity and religio-spirituality identity separately, the literature review will discuss the interconnection of identities through the multiple dimensions of identity and the conflicts that can occur within this connection. It is the researcher's intent to examine these conflicts not only in the literature review but through the interviews of participants. The literature review will conclude with the

relation of this research and similar research to student affairs as well as a brief synopsis of

religious views of homosexuality through a review of doctrines.

CHAPTER 2 - Review of Literature

The following literature review guides the current research. The review begins with a theoretical approach. Examining student development theory, sexual identity development theories, and faith development theories give a strong theoretical basis for the research. Following the theoretical basis, the previous research about this topic is discussed concluding with a discussion of the causes of identity overlap and conflict.

In an effort to explain the development of young adults in a variety of areas including psychosocial development, intellectual development, cognitive development, career development, and moral development, various theories have been commonly grouped together as student development theories. These theories corresponding to the traditional-aged college student can be generally divided into four main categories as follows: psychosocial, cognitive, person-environment, and typology. In relation to this research, the psychosocial, cognitive, and person-environment theories influence and help to describe the coming-out process. An individual does not develop only one identity as will be discussed in the theory of multiple identities; therefore, it is important to know and understand key theories of the three main relative categories of student development.

Psychosocial Identity

The family of psychosocial theories focuses primarily on personal growth and development. In terms of the college-aged student, the theories "examine the content of development, the important issues people face as their lives progress, such as how to define

themselves, their relationships with others, and what to do with their lives" (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 32). An overall premise for such theories is that development does occur through the life cycle as long as they successfully settle any concerns or challenges associated with various stages of development. Psychosocial theory stages are often sequential and can be age related. Two of the most widely known psychosocial theorists are Erikson and Chickering.

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson (1950) says that humans develop in stages. He also says that this development occurs through all ages of an individual beginning at infancy through late adulthood. The first psychosocial stage or crisis that Erikson says is trust versus mistrust occurs in infancy, traditionally defined as birth to 18 months. During this time, the central task that an infant must achieve is to receive care. Through that care, they will have trust in people and trust in the environment. The second psychosocial crisis is autonomy versus shame and doubt which occurs between 18 months and three years. Children at this age use imitation to learn appropriate ways of living. Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success in this stage leads to feelings of autonomy where failure could results in feelings of shame and doubt.

In early childhood (3-6 years old) the crisis that the child undertakes is initiative versus guilt. Children begin to explore during this age and attempt to identify various objects as well as identify ways of doing things, including identification of elementary sex roles. The initiative that children take in this stage comes through in asserting control and power over their immediate environment. Success in this control leads to a feeling of purpose where disapproval of the power can lead to guilt.

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The psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority occurs between 6 and 12 years old. Children learn much in this stage from their peer group and from their school environment. The child begins to develop skilled learning, friendships, and teamwork. In school tasks, the child learns how to best accomplish the task with success leading to great achievement, yet failure leads to thoughts of inferiority among peers.

In early adolescence (12-18 years old) the key psychosocial crisis is understanding group identity versus alienation. This is a time where the young person must achieve a connection in a peer group. This peer group assists the individual in developing a sense of self identity as well. As youth begin to plan for the future in this stage, there is much physical maturation, emotional development, and emergence of sexual relationships.

During the later adolescence years (18-22 years of age, traditional college students) the psychosocial crisis is one of individual identity versus identity confusion. This is a time where students engage in role experimentation to strengthen their own identity. Newfound autonomy from parents assists in the transition from connection to the family to a connection and relationships with other peers. During this stage the student also begins to develop a moral identity and prepares himself for intimate relationships.

Following the college years, early adulthood (22-34 years old) brings about the psychosocial crisis of intimacy versus isolation. Building upon the later adolescence years preparing for intimate relationships, during the early adulthood stage young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.

Ages 34-60 are considered middle adulthood where the psychosocial crisis is generativity versus stagnation. There is an underlying commitment to and concern for the family and

community and the feeling to have a lasting impression on the family or community through off-spring. During this time, adults will nurture close relationships and help the next generation through care and concern of one's own children or other children. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.

Later adulthood (60-75 years old) encompasses the psychosocial crisis of integrity versus despair. Much introspection occurs during this time to determine what sense of fulfillment one has with one's life. Success in this stage is a sense of worth, usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world. Another positive reaction in this crisis is the understanding of the wisdom the adult is leaving to the world.

Old age is considered 75 years old until death. During this time the adult's crisis is one of immortality versus extinction. It is important during this time for the older adult to have social support. Introspection and review of one's life continues from later adulthood, but the individual begins to accept death with a sense of integrity and without fear as long as the social support structure surrounds them. During this stage, the adults develop historical perspective and storytelling to leave information to the future generations.

Although each of these stages is not relevant to this research, there are several stages that will be seen in the coming-out process in particular. From age three, the child has begun to understand sex roles in society. What type of toys do boys play with and what type of toys do girls play with? The child makes that connection at a young age and for some GLBT individuals, this was a confusing thought for them at a young age. Through youth and young adulthood, sexual identity and sexual relationships emerge. The development of a person's initial sexual identity is important as the coming-out process switches what might have been developed at a young age.

Chickering's Theory of Identity Development

Chickering's (1969) theory of identity development is a psychosocial theory; however it is most commonly held as the key student development theory. Chickering's seven vectors of development are a series of tasks that students often go through. The individual vector does not necessarily have to be completed before moving to another vector. The non-sequential vectors do however build on each other and allow students to re-examine themselves in terms of the vectors multiple times. The seven vectors are as follows: developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy to interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity.

Developing competence has three intersecting spheres: intellectual competence, physical competence, and interpersonal competence. In terms of intellectual competence, Chickering discusses the students' ability to enhance their acquisition of knowledge as well as their critical thinking skills. Physical competence is managed and enhanced through athletic and recreational activity. Interpersonal competence is assisted through a student's interaction in group course work as well as communication with others in extra-curricular activities.

The vector of managing emotions allows for an increased awareness of feelings and expression of such feelings. Prior to working through this vector, individuals have little control over disruptive emotions and impulses and is not in touch with their full range of emotions. The individual gains an increased awareness of emotions, how to handle them, and appropriateness of expression. This vector also teaches consequences of acting on impulses.

Moving through autonomy to interdependence is the third of the seven vectors. This vector explains the emotional independence that individuals encounter as they break away from parental authority. Individuals learn how to be self-directive developing the instrumental

independence while also exploring interdependence as they question where they fit within the big picture.

The fourth vector is developing mature interpersonal relationships. Building upon the balance of independence and interdependence while also understanding his own self, the individual strives to create and maintain mature relationships with others. Within this vector, the individual begins to tolerate and appreciate the differences that each person brings into a relationship. The outcome of this vector is often less large group connection and more time in a smaller, intimate group of friends.

Establishing identity is the fifth vector. Individuals can either have a solid sense of who they are or a confused self-concept. The outcome of this vector is that individuals become comfortable with themselves, physically and mentally. The individual can also begin to answer the question, "Who am I?"

The sixth vector is developing purpose. Developing purpose assists individuals in having the ability to intentionally assess interests and options while also clarifying goals. Individuals in this vector are working to answer the question of "Who am I am going to be?"

The final vector in Chickering's theory is developing integrity. Integrity is the congruence between the values one has developed through life with the behavior one exhibits on a daily basis. This vector shows a movement toward responsibility for oneself and for others. The individual is able to humanize and personalize values and apply ethical principles to his life.

Chickering has predominantly focused his research on college-age students. The overlap between Chickering's vectors and many other theories is common in the life of a college student. In relation to this research, it is important to understand especially the vectors of developing

mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, and developing integrity as the students also develop their sexual identity and come-out.

Cognitive

Cognitive theories focus on what a person thinks and how one makes meaning out of situations and events (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Compared to the psychosocial theories which focus on the end thought, the cognitive theories focus on the process of thought. Development is a sequence of irreversible stages where each successive stage builds on previous stages. The main cognitive theories strive to identify universal patterns and ages associated with particular modes of thinking. In cognitive theories, individuals encounter problems when they have cognitive conflict and individuals must change their way of thinking. Some common cognitive theorists are Piaget, Kohlberg, and Perry.

Piagetian Stages of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget (1972), child psychologist, describes through four stages in the way that the mind processes new information. All individuals have their own view of the world and any new information that the person encounters is meshed into the established world view. Conflict occurs when the information does not easily fit within the world view. At this time of conflict, the individuals must adjust something for resolution. The ability to understand and assimilate information is summarized through life in Piaget's four stages of cognitive development.

From birth until approximately age two, the individual is in sensorimotor stage. It is during this stage that the child begins to learn about the environment through learning and

practicing motor and reflex actions. A common example of growth in this stage is the understanding that children develop that their parents or toys still exist even though the children may not see them at various points of time.

From the time a child begins to talk until about age seven, the individual is in the stage called preoperational. During this stage, the child begins to develop and use symbols to represent objects. In the early process, this may or may not be common symbols, but they are symbols for the child which the parents often learn and use as well. Although at this stage the individual can think of events not in the present, the child does have difficulty understanding time. Cognitively, the child will change information he gathers to fit into his ideas. He understands that he does have a viewpoint, but that this viewpoint is the same viewpoint that all persons have as well.

First grade through early adolescence encompasses the concrete stage. During this stage, children begin to develop abstract thinking ability. They can also begin to make rational judgments about either concrete or observed occurrences. In the past, children had to manipulate these occurrences physically to understand them. Cognitively, the child looks for opportunities to ask questions and needs the ability to explain information back to a leader, teacher, or peer to mentally manipulate occurrences for full understanding.

The adolescence time of formal operation is the final stage in Piaget's cognitive development theory. At this point, the individual has the ability to make rational judgments without assistance from manipulating concrete objections. Hypothetical and deductive reasoning skills are developed. The young adult has gained the ability to consider a wide range of possibilities and various perspectives before concluding on a final decision or view point.

The final stage just discussed is the predominate stage which is of importance in this research. This time of adolescence is also when many LGBT individuals begin to question their

own sexuality as well. Having the cognitive ability to make rational decisions and judgments without the concrete objects is necessary in developing a sexual identity. This stage also allows for the individual to review and examine a variety of possibilities which can be seen in coming-out as individuals seek to determine their sexuality from the range of heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, etc.

Kohlberg's Six Stages of Moral Development

Kohlberg (1986) seeks to discover the sequences of changes in individuals' cognitive structures and rules for processing information on the basis of which moral judgments are made. His focus is not on content but on modes of reasoning. Within Kohlberg's theory, the various stages are universal, sequential, and hierarchical, yet not everyone moves through the stages at the same rate. Moral development through the stages occurs through social interaction while cognitive conflict assists in growth. Overall, the theory has three levels, each with two stages.

The first level is pre-conventional. The traditional age of a person in this level is elementary school or adolescence. Stage one is obedience and punishment orientation. In this stage, individuals understand the severity of punishment. There is an inability to see or consider other perspectives. Individuals in this stage might not do something wrong because they might get caught, not because it is wrong. Stage two in this first level is instrumental relativist orientation. This stage marks the beginning of reciprocity and the individual begins to act in his own interest. Decisions are made based on any personal reward or benefit, understanding that everyone has his or her own interest to pursue.

The second level is the conventional level. Within this level, group norms are supreme. Traditionally the individual is past adolescence in this level, and according to Kohlberg most

adults in society are at this level. The first stage in this level is interpersonal concordance orientation also known as good boy or good girl stage. For persons in this stage, good is equal to nice. The person seeks approval and acceptance by authority figures while also gaining approval from others by being nice. Through this stage shared items take over individual interests and the perspective is focused on the local community. Moving into the next stage of this level, maintenance of social order orientation, the person upholds social order and status quo. The individual believes that laws are absolute and authority must be respected. There is an obligation of duty and obligation to obey laws within this stage.

The third level is the post conventional level. This level allows an individual to make a deliberate effort to clarify moral rules and principles and to arrive at self-defined notions of good and evil. There is an understanding that abstract personal principles may or may not be defined by society. In this level, laws and rules are necessary for order, but the individual might reject uniform application of such rules. The first stage in this level is the social contract orientation and legalistic stage. Very few persons are in this stage where the idea is that rules are agreed upon by a group and there is an understanding that different societies have different views of right or wrong. The final stage in the theory is universal ethical principles orientation. This last level is marking the theoretical endpoint. For a person in this level moral judgment is equal to reasoning which is equal to ethical fairness as well as moral laws. Laws in this stage are continually evaluated for basic fairness.

In relation to the current research, it is important to understand the moral development of the student who may be coming-out. If individuals were in the pre-conventional stage, they may not come-out because they may not see a benefit or reward for doing so. Within level two, the

status quo of religion and social order may adjust what the decision of an individual is who is in the process of coming-out.

Perry's Theory of Intellectual and Ethical Development

William Perry (1970) began working with white male students at Harvard University in early 1960s to develop his theory of intellectual and ethical development. He understands that development occurs at an irregular rate with no set time for remaining in a certain position. Similar to Piaget, Perry thinks that development of an individual is a product of interaction between the student and the environment. Although there is no time limit for each stage, Perry's stages are hierarchical, sequential, and concerned overall with how one thinks rather than what one thinks. Within each of the stages, an individual can retreat (go back to another stage), escape (set a personal time out to get into a comfort zone), or temporize (set an individual time element on the situation).

The first of the three stages is dualism. The dualist perspective is one of either/or. There is no grey area, but rather right or wrong. Within this stage, the student views all knowledge as something to know. The instructor always gives the correct answer and the student's job is to receive the answer. A dualistic thinker does not look at peers as a source of knowledge. Dualistic thinkers resist thinking independently, drawing their own conclusions, stating their own points of view, and discussing ideas with peers. In the classroom, the dualistic thinking believes that learning involves taking notes, memorizing facts, and later placing facts on exams.

The second stage for an individual is multiplicity. In early multiplicity most the individual thinks that most knowledge of the world is known and what is not known yet will be known soon. Students in this stage are questioning how they learn. They do believe that

knowledge is an opinion and there can be a variety of opinions. Peers offer some legitimate

learning opportunities, but the student is more concerned with fairness between all peers.

Multiplistic thinkers appreciate comparing and contrasting while also questioning implications of

a decision or answer. Toward the end of this stage, the multiplistic thinker enjoys debates yet is

challenged by the permanent uncertainty of so many things.

The third stage is relativism where there is no concept of absolute truth. Relativism

allows for an individual to experience a diverse learning environment with diverse views and

opinions. The relativistic student recognizes that opinions are based on values, experiences, and

knowledge. They are able to consider the merit of alternative perspectives by evaluation.

Through experience and reflection, the student gains knowledge. The individual in this stage is

content with a large variety of opinions and thoughts and continually relates one context to

another.

This theory is important to this research as it shows especially the transition from dualism

to multiplicity. In looking at religion and the coming-out process, a dualistic thinker will accept

the church's teaching as fact because of the authority of the church. When examining the reasons

why individuals choose to come-out or not to come-out at a certain point depends on what

knowledge of sexuality and religious teachings they accrued through the years and the stage of

understanding that knowledge they might be in.

Person-Environment

The family of person-environment theories seeks to understand how the environment

influences the development of an individual. Behavior is shown in these theories as an

interaction of the person and the environment. In relation to the current research, these theories

give a basis for whether an individual may or may not leave a particular church or feel safe coming-out to various individuals. As will be examined in more detail, a basic need for an individual based on Maslow's (1943) research is personal safety. If the individuals do not feel safe in their current environment religious, family, or school, their coming-out process is altered to allow them to continue to feel safe. The second theory discussed is Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory which also meshes with the coming-out process as a transition. The individual's coming-out and transition rely on situation of when to come-out, self, support, and strategies for coming-out.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs has been a key theory since its conception reflecting the person-environment interaction. Often depicted as a pyramid, the needs at the lower level of the pyramid represent those needs that are required by the individual to be addressed before any need higher on the pyramid can be addressed. This five-level pyramid addresses various ways that the person and environment interact. Maslow calls the first four layers of the pyramid deficiency needs which means that if the needs are not met within those layers, the person might feel anxious about meeting them.

The lowest level on the pyramid is the physiological level. The needs within this level are breathing, food, water, sleep, and other biological functions. These are the basic animal needs. If some needs are not fulfilled, the physiological needs of the individual take the highest priority. The second level is safety needs which include security of body, safety in employment, family security, health security, and safety of one's property. When an individual's physiological needs are met, the individual's safety needs dominate. After the bottom levels are fulfilled, the third

level of love, belonging, and social needs is added. This level includes friendship and intimacy. Humans want a sense of belonging, but only after they have taken care of themselves and know that they are safe. The fourth level of the pyramid, and last deficiency need, is esteem needs. The esteem needs relate to self-esteem and confidence as well as achievement and respect of and by others.

The top level of the pyramid which allows growth for the individual is self-actualization. Self-actualization is the need of humans to make the most of their abilities and to strive to be the best that they can. The self-actualization also encompasses creativity, problem solving skills, acceptance of diversity, and moral development. Again, without any of the support from below on the pyramid, self-actualization cannot occur.

In terms of developing a sexual identity as a homosexual or bisexual individual, it is important for the person coming-out to also conduct a needs assessment. Should the safety of coming-out not be apparent to the individual or should the person have a negative physical reaction when coming-out, the remainder of their needs are compromised until resolution of safety occurs.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

Nancy Schlossberg's (1981) transition theory provides insight into factors related to the transition of the individual and the environment that are likely to determine the degree of impact of the transition. For Schlossberg, a transition is defined as "any event, or nonevent, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Schlossberg, N.K, Water, E.B., & Goodman, J., 1995, p. 27). Originally developed as an adult development theory, the framework of the transition can be broadened to any significant life transition. Three main types of

transitions could occur. First is the anticipated transition that occurs predictably. These transitions allow for planning and preparation. The second type of transition is unanticipated, ones that are not predictable or scheduled. The final type of transition is the nonevents transition that was expected but did not occur. Through all three types of transitions, Schlossberg's four S's help the individual in the transition understand and make sense of the transition: situation, self, support, and strategies.

Situation allows the person to assess the circumstances. What is the transition that is occurring? Within situation, the individual can assess the trigger (what caused the transition to occur), the timing (is the transition occurring at a good or bad time), control (what aspect of the transition is under a person's control), role change (if another person is involved in the transition, what is their change?), duration (what is the permanence of the situation?), previous experiences, concurrent stress (what else is going on that could be adding to stress of transition?), and assessment (who or what is responsible for the transition?). The points mentioned above for the situation can begin to give the individual in transition a strong feel for the transition itself.

Self refers to the personal and demographic characteristics that can affect how an individual views one's life as well as the psychological resources one has to help aid in coping in the transition. The personal and demographic characteristics are not limited to state of health, ethnicity, gender, age, or socio-economic status. Psychological resources are dependant on maturity and cognitive development. Examples are an enhanced view of optimism, commitment, ego development, or self-efficacy.

Support is the assessment of what type of resources are available outside of the internal psychological resources discussed in self. Support refers to social support where affect, affirmation, aid and honest feedback can function as support. This support can come from family

units, friends, communities, or other relationships. A key question to reflect on in support is whether external supports were disrupted by the transition.

The final aspect of the theory is strategies. The strategies refer to the ability to cope effectively by demonstrating flexibility and use of multiple coping methods. In searching out multiple modalities of coping, the coping responses should be ones that could modify the situation, could control the meaning of the problems, and those that aid in stress-management after the transition.

The coming-out process is a transition for all LGBT individuals. For each process, Schlossberg's theory shows the various aspects that affect the transition both positively and negatively depending on how much examination and assessment is done in each of the four aspects.

Beyond the four families of student development theories previously discussed, emerging theories are beginning to complete the picture of a holistic individual. Such examples of these theories include racial identity development, gender identity development, sexual identity development, and faith development. With the exception of faith development, the other theories are in considered as social identity theories. Faith development is considered a cognitive identity theory. In relation to this research the theories of sexual identity development and faith development will be discussed.

Sexual Identity and The Coming-Out Process

Sexual Identity Theories

Few theorists have examined the lives and identity of homosexual individuals, attempting to create a generalized theory for their development. One of the earliest theorists on Homosexual Identity Formation was Vivienne Cass (1979). Cass explained the identity change as a process which might change from individual to another, yet the six predominant stages remain the same.

Stage one is identity confusion. Within identity confusion, the individual begins to say that his or her own actions may be called homosexual. The individual begins to questions if his or her actions may be labeled homosexual and whether that makes them homosexual. This thought brings about incongruence in the person's mind, differing on the reaction of the individual from acceptance to attempting to restore ones previous thoughts and feelings.

Stage two is identity comparison as the individual accepts that he or she may be homosexual. Stage two examines much of the social comparisons of homosexuals and heterosexuals. It is common for individuals at this stage to feel isolated and alienated because of the differences that he or she feels within. To combat this isolation, some might compartmentalize thoughts on sexuality by agreeing that individual actions are homosexual but as an entire being, the person is heterosexual.

Stage three, identity tolerance, is where individuals have begun to accept their identity as a homosexual. He or she understands that they are not alone as a homosexual and the individuals begin to seek out other homosexuals. In this stage, positive encounters with other homosexuals encourage the movement in the stage yet a negative interaction will hinder continuation of the development. At the transition to stage four, the individual can say to oneself that he or she is a homosexual.

Stage four is identity acceptance. Within acceptance, the individual continues to acknowledge that he or she is homosexual. Connection with other homosexuals continues and there is less contact with the heterosexual community. The individual attempts to fit into the homosexual culture and groups. It is during this stage that individuals begin coming-out to others.

Identity pride, stage five, portrays the world as two groups, homosexuals and heterosexuals. Within this stage the individuals say they must let the world know who they are and what homosexuality is. Homosexuality is equated with being good and heterosexuality is equated with bad. The combination of anger toward heterosexuals as well as the acceptance and pride of being a homosexual creates the role of an activist for the homosexual community within this stage.

The final stage, identity synthesis, allows the individuals to realize that being homosexual is not the only part of who they are. Individuals continue to accept that they are homosexual, and others are heterosexual, but that their sexual identity is only a small part of who they are. Following the previous stages of separation from heterosexuals, individuals in stage six begin to socialize with both homosexuals and heterosexuals.

Building from the work that Cass created in 1979, Anthony D'Augelli (1994) proposed a theory of sexual identity development which considers "the complex factors that influence the development of people in context over historical time" (p. 317). Looking at life span theories as a guide, D'Augelli proposed six processes instead of stages in the identity development of homosexuals.

The first process is exiting heterosexual identity. This process is a time for individuals to recognize their own homosexual feelings. D'Augelli adds that within this process is when individuals begin to come-out to others, telling them about their homosexual identity.

Developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity is the second process an individual encounters. D'Augelli states it is a "sense of personal socio-affectional stability that effectively summarizes thoughts, feelings, and desires" (p. 325). According to D'Augelli, this process must be done with others affirming and validating homosexuality. This process is a time of challenging pre-conceived myths about gays, lesbians, or bisexuals.

The third process is developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity. The creation of this social identity requires connection with persons who know and accept the individual's sexual identity. This support network often takes place in a homosexual/ally group.

Becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring is the fourth process. D'Augelli differentiates coming-out to friends and peers with coming-out to family members as this process is the defining period of a new relationship with parents and family members. For many, this process is a difficult one as family members financially support many students as shared in the following quote:

> One time, my mother was cleaning my room and she read a couple of letters that I
> wrote to friends about guys I had crushes on in high school. When my parents
> confronted me about this, they suggested therapy, to change myself. But instead
> of telling them that they were wrong about being gay that I couldn't just change
> myself, I freaked out. I told them it was just a phase. They believed me and left it
> at that. I don't know what I'm going to do about telling my parents. They're

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currently supporting me financially through college, so I do not want to come-out

to them just yet (Gray, 1999, p. 51).

The fifth process is developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual intimacy status. More complex

than a heterosexual intimate relationship, the lesbian, gay, or bisexual intimate relationship is

often invisible in current society. D'Augelli (1994) states, "The lack of cultural scripts directly

applicable to lesbian/gay/bisexual people leads to ambiguity and uncertainty, but it also forces

the emergence of personal, couple-specific, and community norms, which should be more

personally adaptive" (p. 327).

Entering a lesbian/gay/bisexual community is the final process in the development for

D'Augelli. This process is one of community action (both social and political), being an advocate

for the homosexual community. For many, this process does not occur because it could cause

great risks such as losing jobs, losing housing, or other hate crimes.

These theories of sexual identity development are important to the understanding of how

an individual begins a new life as an LGBT individual. In this current research, the participants

are at various stages of their sexual identity development and resolution. In combination with the

theories of development discussed previously, the sexual identity theories give the researcher

guidance to the experiences of the participants.

Coming-out Process

Most of the time I felt like an outsider. Because I didn't really get along with the

people at my school, I looked to the church for support and soon found a group of

Christian friends who went to my church. Finally, these were some people who

accepted me for who I was, and I didn't feel like such an outsider anymore – of

course, I didn't tell them I was gay: then they wouldn't like me anymore. During

high school, I told three people in my church group. One girl took it very well,

while the other two guys accepted me as a friend, but condemned 'my sin' and

didn't want to talk about the feelings I had. It was okay at first, but it ended up

hurting me because I couldn't tell my closest friends how I felt toward other

people (Gray, 1999, p. 67).

Coleman (1982) proposed five stages that would describe the development seen in

homosexual individuals. The first stage is pre-coming-out. Often this pre-coming-out occurs

young in life, paralleling the developmental process of a child. At either a conscious or

preconscious level, the individual feels different about his or her sexual identity. For many at this

stage, they are not aware of any same-sex feelings and cannot describe what they are feeling. The

individual turns thoughts inward and enters into a depressive state. Others explore those thoughts

and feelings and move to stage two.

The second stage is coming-out. The first part of this stage is an acknowledgement of

being homosexual to oneself. Coleman compares this stage to Cass' (1979) stage of identity

confusion. When the individual's same-sex feelings have been identified and confirmed, a part of

this stage is telling others. Coleman states that for men, the average age was 13-14 and for

women this occurred around age 18. Working with others, individuals in this stage learn what it

means to be accepted as a homosexual.

Exploration is the third stage of the theory. During this stage, the individual begins to

develop social skills to interact with other homosexuals. Many will also begin to develop a

feeling of personal attraction and competence for sexual relationships. This competence builds

into the fourth stage of the theory, first relationships.

First relationships signify the conclusion of experimentation with homosexuality and a yearning for a more committed, serious relationship. Within this stage, the individual must examine society and learn how he or she with his or her partner will be together in a society with a heterosexual norm. Coleman explains that for many, the first relationships can end poorly as the relationships are created prior to individuals knowing themselves well as a homosexual individual.

The final stage is integration where "individuals incorporate their public and private identities into one self-image" (Coleman, 1982, p. 39). The integration stage does not have a set concluding time or event; rather, it continues to be an examination of oneself in society for the remainder of the individual's life. Relationships are describes as ones with trust and respect. Individuals in this stage can incorporate their sexual identity with the remainder of their own life span development.

Plummer (1981) acknowledges that a very specific internal crisis and turning point in the homosexual's development is coming-out. For many, heterosexuality has been defined as society's norm. The development prior to coming-out has challenged that norm to coming-out where the individual is more sure of oneself, his or her feelings, and acceptance of individuality. Plummer says, "Experiencing it will be dramatically reshape one's life-route: life will never be the same again" (p. 101). Plummer summarizes the coming-out into three stages.

An individual must first come-out to oneself, seeing oneself as a homosexual individual. As a difficult move because it is often examined alone, without support of others, this stage allows individuals to break down societal views and critically examine ones own life. Through a sometimes depressing time period, individuals counterbalance society's views of homosexuality with individuals' thoughts and feelings. These debates and balancing acts continue until an

unpredictable break through occurs where the individual admits to oneself that he or she is a homosexual and will move from that decision.

Following coming-out to oneself, a typically safe environment for the second stage is to come-out to other homosexuals. As more relationships are developed with other homosexual individuals, the hostility of being a homosexual and the guilt many have of being different from societal norms begin to fade as one sees and interacts with others who seem happy to be homosexual. Plummer (1981) states, "The gay bar is extremely important in this 'meeting' process, and more recently the development of smaller, more intimate groups of gays have strengthened this supportive process in coming-out" (p. 102).

Following the connection to other homosexuals, the final stage of the coming-out process is the decision of coming-out to the heterosexual world, often including life long friends and family or to keep it a secret. Although initial concern of reaction and trauma does occur when coming-out, Plummer relates that acceptance usually follows. Coming-out to the heterosexual world can be a scary time for the individual, unsure of any reaction or different treatment which may occur following the conversation.

As mentioned by Plummer, the coming-out process can be a difficult one. This process changes for each person and for each person or group of people to whom the individual comes-out. For many family and friends are told separately depending on the potential reaction to the information.

My parents know nothing of my 'gayness.' As far as I know, they think I'm totally straight. I have always 'played it straight' everywhere I've gone. Never have I said anything about being gay or even discussed other gay people with them. I have always defended gay rights if a current issue comes up, but because I

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am such a 'straight-looking' guy, never has anyone suggested that I am gay myself. My parents would probably be the last people I would tell about being gay. This is not to say that my parents don't have open minds and wouldn't be accepting of me, but they would be the hardest people to tell (Gray, 1999, p. 55).

A sixteen year old said the following about her coming-out to her parents and the relationship that the Christian religion has had on her coming-out process: "My parents (my dad doesn't live with my mum) totally freaked out, especially my mum who yelled, screamed, threw stuff at me, cried, said I was going to hell, told my dad who said I wasn't his daughter any more and I said, 'yeah well fuck you I never was anyway' and mum threw me out of the house saying I couldn't come back to her house til I changed my evil ways and gave my heart to Jesus. Well fuck them" (Hillier, 2002, p. 84).

Monteflores and Schultz (1978) explain that often coming-out followed a "covert-overt dimension, from the most private to the most public" (p. 61). With whom and whether to come-out to anyone is a process of choice as defined by Monteflores and Schultz (1978). Monteflores and Schultz quotes Goffman as saying, "To display, or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when, and where" (p. 63). With each person a homosexual individual encounters and meets, the choice of coming-out to them is present. Although each person has choices of what to share with new and old friends, "few of these hidden facts carry with them social penalties as extreme as those imposed for being gay, and few affect as many dimensions of one's personal life" (Monteflores and Schultz, 1978, p. 63). Monteflores and Schultz continue to examine the impact of coming-out for a homosexual individual through psychological theories of identity formation, self-disclosure and self-validation, and socialization.

Coming-out causes a redefining of oneself into a new identity and further into self-acceptance. Monteflores and Schultz contend that cognitive transformation, recasting the past, and self-labeling are crucial to the new identity. Cognitive transformation is the elimination or adjustment of any previously heard, believed, or embodied thoughts of negativity associated with homosexuality. Recasting the past allows individuals to examine what they might have heard in the past about heterosexual relationships and past behavior. Lastly, self-labeling is the synthesis of events in one's life, labeling oneself as a homosexual.

Monteflores and Schultz (1978) reference Jourard in discussing self-disclosure and self-validation. According to Monteflores and Schultz, Jourard views self-disclosure as "an act in which a person establishes contact with his real self and makes his public self congruent with this real self" (p. 65). With this public display (the self-disclosure), the next step of the coming-out process relies on the validation that an individual receives from society and the validation from within.

The final aspect of coming-out is socialization. Monteflores and Schultz (1978) write, "Socialization is the process by which society molds individual identity to perpetuate itself; coming-out is the process through which individual identity asserts itself to create social change" (p. 66). This socialization bridges the individual and society while being aware of the inherent concerns for a homosexual when coming-out.

However, even with the inherent concerns Grov, Bimbi, Nanin, and Parsons (2006) conclude that both men and women are coming-out at an earlier age possibly due to a slight change is cultural stigma of homosexuals. Minorities tend to come-out later in life though, choosing (either consciously or not) to progress through racial identity prior to sexual identity (Grov, et al., 2006). Hillier (2002) compares homosexuals with other racial minorities and

concludes that youth who embrace their cultural or minority identity are often praised and

recognized for learning their true self and their identity; yet, when a homosexual youth comes

out to their parents, that same praise for learning their true self and identity is not visible. Instead

disapproval or hatred could ensue. The youth understand that as a twenty year-old states, "I come

from an extremely Catholic background and my family is very well known in the area. This

makes it completely impossible to tell my parents. The worst thing of all is the guilt. Not the

guilt of being gay, but the guilt at lying to your family and friends. That is where the shame

comes for me. Most of the time, it is unbearable. I sneak and I hide and I lie" (Hillier, 2002, pp.

81-82). The coming-out process can be joined with the guilt, self-hate, depression, and rejection

from family, friends, and society (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001).

O'Neill and Ritter (1992) examine the coming-out process for lesbian and gay individuals

using a model of loss of transformation. Focusing first on the various aspects of an individual's

life, O'Neill and Ritter acknowledge the different meanings of coming-out in each environment

(family, work, health and safety, religion, and community) and the losses that one may obtain in

each as well. O'Neill and Ritter claim that family losses can often be the most difficult for an

individual to face. These losses can take two paths, loss from their family of origin or loss of the

family one has dreamt of having. In their family of origin, the gay or lesbian son or daughter can

become the black sheep of the family. For some, the families cast them out or make them feel

second-class while others have more of a subtle loss when a parent might say, "I want you to be

happy, but I don't want you to be happy as a homosexual" (p. 8-9). O'Neill and Ritter state that it

is natural to have a desire to be with another person and also for that person to be accepted and

loved by one's own family. When bringing a partner home to meet the family is not allowed or

does not have the desired outcome, intense feelings of loss occur. Just as individuals seek to be

loved by their family, they also have dreams of a future family. For many gay and lesbian individuals, as they come-out, they must also lose their dream of the societal family – husband, wife, 2 to 3 children. Through the coming-out process, the gay or lesbian individual alters his or her family goals and dreams.

The second arena of life where gay and lesbian individuals may suffer loss is in work. Similarly to losing the dreams of the traditional family, O'Neill and Ritter say that sometimes gay and lesbian individuals will lack the dream of a career, they fail to "develop a life image that contains any vocational identity" (p. 18). Still others see the homophobia of many workplaces and many see the glass ceilings of their identity similarly to the glass ceilings for females in the corporate environment. The employee's realistic view of the situation allows them to recognize that they will not be recognized nor rewarded for actions in turn leading to underachievement. Within the work setting, other gay and lesbian individuals strive to keep their sexual identity closeted. They may even alter their dream job or a job which would focus on their talents and passion to a job which is easier for their identity to remain a secret. Whether the gay or lesbian individual creates a vocational image of themselves, the struggle in coming-out at the workplace leads to many questions and potential loss.

The third potential area for loss for LGBT individuals is within health and safety. Homophobic acts are often portrayed as violent attacks on individuals. Often these crimes do go unreported, but the numbers of attacks on gays and lesbians in increasing in America. It is not a surprise that in the health scene, gay and lesbian individuals are associated with the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) even though AIDS has spread to homosexuals and heterosexuals. AIDS is still rampant especially among gay males and the disease is the epitome of loss.

O'Neill and Ritter do also discuss the loss that occurs for gay and lesbian individuals in terms of religion. The intolerance and homophobia of many churches has made many gay and lesbian individuals, "come to feel like abandoned children" (p. 35). O'Neill and Ritter explain that for these gay and lesbian individuals, they struggle with the thought that they were created in an image of God, yet they are being asked to repent for how they were made. This disconnection causes much loss for the gay and lesbian person.

The final area of loss for gay and lesbian individuals according to O'Neill and Ritter is in the community. It is a basic human need to belong to part of a societal group. As all individuals mature, they each become part of a sub-culture. When coming-out, the gay and lesbian individuals are often faced with deep grief when they realize that the image their sub-culture is portraying is only a perceived image for them at their current stage. They see the prejudice within their own sub-culture and lose the connection and bond with many parts of the community. Throughout this community loss as well as the losses in other areas of life, the key aspect is the loss of belonging, yet O'Neill and Ritter continue to explain how these losses can be turned into a "spiritual awakening" (p. 49) for gay and lesbian individuals. This transition is accomplished by using John Schneider's model of loss and transformation as found in O'Neill and Ritter's writing which includes the following stages: initial awareness, holding on, letting go, awareness of loss, gaining perspective, integrating loss, reformulating loss, and transforming loss.

Faith Development

Fowler's Theory of Faith Development

When beginning a discussion about religious, faith, or spiritual development, James Fowler's 1981 theory of faith development is often discussed in relevance to each (Tisdell, 2003). James Fowler's father was a Methodist minister and through adolescence, Fowler worked at a Christian retreat camp. After high school, Fowler attended Duke University for his bachelor's degree, followed by his masters in divinity from Drew and his doctorate in theological ethics from Harvard. Through each of these experiences, Fowler began to develop his own ideas about people and how they begin to develop faith for themselves (Straughn, 2007). His faith development theory of 1981 is based on the assumption that faith is the way we go about making and maintaining meaning in life. Fowler (1981) believes that faith is a human universal and although deeply personal is also very interactive and social. Other assumptions that this theory is based upon are the following (as cited in Moore, 1996):

We are created to strive towards an ever deepening and evolving understanding and communion with the Divine.

We live with freedom of choice, thus this capacity for communion with God, may also be thwarted and used to draw our focus and actions away from Deity.

Our faith and identity is always formed within the context of our communities and their symbols, languages, rituals and liturgies.

Our faith evolves and emerges gradually through difficult sequences of developmental construction. We begin as creatures unconsciously embedded in and defined by the environments in which we dwell, only through time do

we become conscious of our separate identities as beings with the capacity to differentiate.

Fowler's (1981) theory is based on 6 stages of faith which begin at birth and can continue through the lifetime of an individual. The first stage is intuitive/projective faith. Fowler says that traditionally a child of two years old to six or seven is in this stage. During this stage, children begins to use their imagination and they are uninhibited by logic which often leads to questioning in the future. This is a time of faith growing and faith changing for the child.

Stage two, mythic/literal faith is often found in school age children. This stage is characterized by the children beginning to criticize some of their imagination and fantasy. The children focus on the narrative story telling of faith, but also hold close a strong belief in justice. The child in this stage still does take the meanings of symbols and myths as what their superiors have told them.

Synthetic/conventional faith is the third faith development stage. Beginning around 12 or 13 years of age, children begin to think about their thoughts. People's faith begins to extend beyond their own nuclear family to peers, school, organizations, etc. and faith must be able to connect all of these compartments of one's life. More so than even in stage 2, authority is respected in this stage. For some in this stage, images of God transform into an image of a friend or personal companion. Although this stage begins at approximately age 13, some adults often remain in this stage for the remainder of their lives.

The fourth stage, individuative/projective faith, is a stage of turmoil. The individual may be pushed out of step out of the interpersonal relationships that they have had up to this point. Usually happening between mid-twenties to early forties, individuals in this stage realize an

enhanced complexity of the world and begin to feel a personal responsibility for their beliefs. Transitions to this stage and to stage five often require some relationship changes with others as well.

The fifth stage is conjunctive faith, often occurring in the mid-forties. During this stage, the individual not only focuses on the conscious aspect of one's being, but also the unconscious. There is an awareness of the big picture of one's life. This stage can bring about a struggle to integrate the various dimensions after seeing this big picture, which is often overwhelming with possibilities. For individuals in this stage, there is a deepened readiness for a relationship to God.

The final stage of Fowler's theory is one which few persons achieve. The universalizing stage is a movement beyond seeing one self as the center of one's faith. Individuals truly look beyond religious identity to a faith identity as a believer of something outside themselves and has respect for others who have this belief even when the God might not appear to be the same. Fowler considers people who have been in this stage include: Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

Parks Model of Faith Development

Since Fowler's theory in 1981, more research and writing has been done about faith development. Another prominent, newer theorist on faith development is Sharon Daloz Parks. Parks (2000) published *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* to discuss her three component model of faith development. Parks explains that the components (forms of knowing, forms of dependence, and forms of community) are all interacting components in the various stages of life: adolescent, young adult, tested adult and mature adult. The forms of knowing are the cognitive aspects of faith development. Grounded in the theories by Perry and Fowler, this cognitive component for

Parks is what a person thinks about faith and how a decision is made about what to believe. The forms of dependence focus on how people feel in faith development. Parks focuses on relationships with others as a means of growth in faith in this component. The final component of forms of community is the person-environment interaction which portrays the interpersonal and social context of development.

Adolescence is the first stage for Parks' model of faith development. During this time of adolescence, Parks views a person's faith as dependent on the context of a community. Building from Perry, cognitively, the individual at this stage is very dualistic and authority-bound. This authority can be parental units, teachers, clergy, or documents such as the Bible. During adolescence, the individual begins with simple answers to the big questions such as why am I here? They are answered through authority figures and a shared community. It is when the authority figures are found to be in error that an adolescent is in conflict and with resolution moves to the young adult stage.

Most traditional college students are in the young adult stage. As new things are presented to the student, Parks says that the young adult may regress into some authority bound position, yet there is a commitment to understanding and questioning in this stage. As Parks focuses on the community aspect of faith development, it is during this stage that a mentoring community assists the young adult rather than an individual mentoring figure. A strong culture in this community assists in the commitment one will have in the community.

Following guidance in those mentoring communities, postgraduates and graduate students move into the tested adult stage and into the final mature adult stage. Working together these two stages build on the knowledge and probing questions from the young adult stage. There is affirmation of oneself and one's beliefs in this stage. In essence, the beliefs and ideas

have been tested through the years and now fit the individual and the community of which they are a part. Faith does become more internally focused through these stages. As a tested adult, the community reinforces values that are more traditionally similar to one's own beliefs; however, as one moves to the mature adult stage, the community becomes more diverse, similar to Fowler's final stage of faith development as well.

Both Fowler and Parks have built upon cognitive theories to assist in understanding faith development. As both mentioned, key movement in the faith development occurs during the traditional college years. It is that same time as mentioned previously that the struggle to come-out for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals is also apparent. It is important to recognize the conflict that can occur as shifts in stages of faith development occur while coinciding with the conflict of sexuality formation. Research of multiple dimensions of identity seeks to show that intersection of various aspects of a person.

Spiritual and Religious Conceptualization

As mentioned previously, the working definition for spirituality in this research will be as a personal journey seeking understanding, depth, understanding, and purpose in one's own life; however, literature has been unable to settle upon one definition. Speck (2005) attempted to define it through literature, but instead developed three categories the multiple definitions could be associated with. Some of the definitions in the literature are as follows:

- …it [spirituality] is our drive for meaning, authenticity, purpose, wholeness, and self-transcendence. It is involves our self-awareness and the desire to connect to others (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005, p. 197).

- Spirituality is the eternal human yearning to be connected with something larger than our own egos (Palmer, 2003, p. 377).

- Spirituality can be understood as the ability to experience connections and to create meaning in one's life (Fried, 2001, p. 268).

- Being spiritual suggests a personal commitment to a process of inner development that engages us in our totality…Spirituality is a way of life that affects and includes every moment of existence (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006, p. 7).

- Spirituality refers to that noncorporal aspect of each human being that is separate from the mind (Clark, 2001, p. 38).

- Spirituality is the experience of the transcendent, or the quality of transcendence, something that welcomes, but does not require, religious beliefs (Bento, 2000, p. 653).

With the wide range of definitions, it is easy to see that spirituality can be found in all aspects of an individual's daily world, not only in religious involvement or traditional spiritual rituals. As a potential quest of meaning, involvement in community service, leadership, or volunteerism may for some be a spiritual experience (Love, 2001). Love and Talbot (1999) present five processes to show the inter-relatedness of spirituality, religion, and daily life:

1. Spiritual development involved an internal process of seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development.

2. Spiritual development involves the process of continually transcending one's current locus of centricity.

3. Spiritual development involves developing a greater connectedness to self and others through relationships and union with community.

4. Spiritual development involves deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one's life.

5. Spiritual development involves increasing openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power or essence that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing (p. 364-367).

Alicia Chavez (2001) confirms the thought of spirituality being outside a religion with the quote she often heard from her mother, "Go out and walk by the river and think about life. Consider your place in the world" (p. 69). She speaks in her writings of becoming a whole, authentic human being with a spiritual sense of herself and the connection to her community around her.

Through her attempts to be this authentic human being, Chavez (2001) developed several principles of a spiritual being. First is to live a reflective life. Reflection allows her and others to make conscious choices and decisions that parallel beliefs and values. The second is to practice balance, as a healthy relationship between work, play, and other aspects of one life are in balance. The third is to embody compassion taken from the works persons such as Mother Teresa and the Dalai Lama. Holding relationships as sacred responsibility is the fourth principle. This principle teaches to respect the relationships one has and to learn to develop relationships where each involves learning and growing from being a part of it. The fifth principle is to maintain connectedness. This connectedness can come in various forms connecting either to a higher being, spiritual energy, Mother earth, or at least overall listening to all five senses on a daily

basis. The sixth principle is to sustain openness. Openness allows for life long learning and respect for differences in others, even spiritual differences. The seventh principle is to be a steward, working to make a difference in the world and living a purposeful life. Radiating hopefulness is the next principle followed by living simply. Coming from many spiritual traditions, living simply is honoring your place, respecting the people around you, and sharing together with others in the same environment. The final principle is to give thanks, a pillar in many spiritual teachings. Through these nine principles it can be seen that spirituality is not always associated the religious doctrines, but can be the way people interact with the world.

"[S]pirituality is one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 20). Although the spirituality differs from religion, overlaps still occur. These overlaps are ones of how religious doctrines and often religious ceremonies enhance the spirituality of the participant. Religious rituals "provide comfort at times of sorrow or a way of ritualizing and celebrating profound and significant events in their lives" (Tisdell, 2003, p. 49). For many the religious icons, images, and rituals are the bridge to the sacred or spiritual. The differences of the two are seen though as individuals construct their own views, an outlook on society, and a connection with the world around them. Tisdell (2003) reports that many individuals leave the religious affiliation of their childhood partially because the newfound internal beliefs and values seem to no longer be congruent with the doctrines and guidelines of the religion. She continues to report that this congruence is determined by each individual person based on the perception one has of the religion which may or may not what the religion intended.

Homosexual and Religio-Spiritual Development

When I was a freshman in high school and first figuring things out, the reason I was very suicidal was because I was raised Southern Baptist. Southern Baptists strictly believe that if you're gay, you're going to Hell. I spent a couple of years thinking, 'I am going to burn in Hell.' I was very suicidal. I just wanted to be out of that pain. That was my freshman year. I had made some cuts on my wrist and stuff. Some of them were rather deep. I cut both ways. When I was in the ninth grade, a freshman, I wanted to kill myself because I didn't want to let my family down, but also because I didn't want to let myself down in the eyes of God. So that was a big issue for me. When I overcame those feelings, it got a little easier, but it took me a very long time before I would sit down and think about my beliefs. I had a hard time with religion because it fucked me over (Gray, 1999, p. 79).

Spiritual Experiences of Homosexuals

Few researchers have examined the spiritual experiences of homosexual individuals; however, those that have done so stress the spiritual experiences of homosexuals as well as the challenges they might face within a religious group. Tan (2005) explains the need of spiritual nourishment in the homosexual's life "given their generally stigmatized status" (p. 136). Tan attempts to better understand homosexual spirituality and the impact on homosexual individuals' lives by looking at religious well-being and existential well-being. Using an instrument created to examine the spiritual, an index of self esteem, an internalized homophobia scale, and a social provision scale, Tan surveyed 93 participants. Tan concluded that the sample had a high level of religious well-being as well as a high level of existential well-being, contradicting his original

hypothesis that homosexuals were spiritually impoverished. Although Tan found that the religious and existential well-beings were strong, he did not make any speculation on how these well-beings influenced the daily life of a homosexual.

Sullivan-Blum (2004) also examined the balance of faith among homosexuals, drag queens to be precise. One of the drag queens interviewed states, "One of my friends, he was homeless and he went down to stay in the Pentecostal church. They found out he was hanging with drag queens and locked him out the church…He was homeless. You can't live here because you're hanging with drag queens? So? We praise God the same way you do. I stand up to go pee the same way you do" (p. 196). Sullivan-Blum reports than these drag queens as well as many other homosexual Christians "discursively naturalize homosexuality in an effort to claim that it is ordained by God" (p. 199). For some this means that homosexuality is not a sin, they do not need to be forgiven, nor refused entrance into a church community. The participants reported that in order to have a sexual relationship congruent with that which God would want, their relationship would be long-term monogamous. Sullivan-Blum's participants spanned the views of religious involvement. One hides his gay life and drag queen identity from the church in efforts to help him feel connected to God. Another is out and follows a Christian belief structure, but does not attend a church as he says, "I believe I'm a Christian because I believe in the teaching of Jesus Christ. But what I can't espouse is all the dogma, all the rules mainline denominational Christianity says you have to do in order to be a Christian" (p. 204).

Barret and Barzan (1996) also examined the spiritual experiences of gays and lesbians. Just as Sullivan-Blum (2004) reported the concern that homosexuality is a sin, Barret and Barzan interject that the sinful message translates into a message of being neither welcome at church nor welcome to participate in religious activities. As a guide to counselors, Barret and Barzan add

that "While most Moslems, Jews, and Christians join in the condemnation of homosexuality, other spiritual expressions that are closely connected to nature frequently see homosexuals as special spiritual beings whose powers are reflected in their sexual orientation" (p. 7). They also touched on the topic of this research that suggests that many homosexuals abandon all spiritual activities because of the pain from previous religious struggles. This comment opens the doors for the research to examine the role that religion played on the homosexual individual in the development period.

As another resource for counselors of homosexual individuals, Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) attempted to explain the affirming experiences that homosexual people encounter and their connection to their psychological health. An expanding body of research has directly linked spirituality and religion to mental and physical health, yet with the non-affirming response from some churches, the question is raised as to whether there is a positive link for homosexuals as well. Lease et al. suggest that counselors work with their homosexual clients in talking through the internalized homonegativity, as it was found to be a strong interviewing confounding variable hindering spiritual and psychological health. Finding affirming spiritual and religious groups for support will assist the homosexual individual in the spiritual struggle and identity struggle.

Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, and Hecker (2001) also examined these struggles for homosexuals who are simultaneously spiritual and/or religious. Based upon the work of Wagner in 1994 and Helminiak in 1986, Buchanan et al. explained that struggle that one has with the combination of religion and sexual identity depends upon the intrinsic and extrinsic orientation to religion that one has. As an additional guide for counselors of homosexual individuals, Buchanan et al. defended a narrative approach to counseling. It guides the counselor to

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deconstruct the intrinsic and extrinsic religious and spiritual beliefs and externalize the problem that the church might have about their identity. At that point, the counselor may then begin searching for welcoming space for the client, examine the clients own preference in identity, and assist the client to make meaning for the struggles in his or her life into the future. Through the narrative dialogue, the client and counselor will have the opportunity to explore the relationship of religion or spirituality and homosexuality.

For some, removing themselves either from the church or from religiously affiliated institutions is difficult as they attend or work at faith based institutions. Love (1997, 1998) describes the cultural barriers of homosexual students as well as the changes an institution can make to change the culture of a Catholic college. For some heterosexual faculty and staff, it was impossible to understand or accept that a homosexual might have been hired as a professor. Love recounts another incident when at a diversity forum the area of the room with the sign reading students against homophobia was taken away. For some students, they knew that their president would support them in private, but they knew he could not publicly lead them to equity. One professor at another Catholic institution says, "The unwritten code is: 'Don't let us hear about it. Don't embarrass us. Don't let this be a subject of controversy'" (Bartlett, 2005). Love (1997) encourages members of these faith based institutions and other institutions to examine the culture and discover any paradoxes that might exist, and then work to change the culture, homophobia and negativity of homosexuality.

Depolarizing Religion and Sexuality

Religion and sexuality, especially homosexuality, are often considered taboo topics individually. To begin a discussion of two individually taboo topics for many, sexuality must be

polarized from religion. Researchers attempt to suggest ways to depolarize this dichotomy (Morrow, Beckstead, Hayes, & Haldeman, 2004, Phillips, 2004). The dichotomy is often seen through hate speech or negativity. The following poem by Rhianne Paz Bergado (2002) discusses that negativity and hatred.

Hush, Hush

Hush hush keep it down now

voices carry it's not that I'm ashamed of you

But I have cause to be wary, instinctively thoughts roll off my tongue

Don't you know two rights only make one wrong

You're just young and mistaken, Leviticus Abomination

You don't know any better then to face the degradation

Just take the cash settlement, less hassle then a trial

Just walk this Kilometer sounds shorter then a mile,

It must be so hard not to know who you are

But we know what better to do with you by far

After all we invented it along with the Internet,

Along with Missionaries and colonization for the sinners and

Everytime I turn around you're on that Jerry Springer show

Sleepin' with your sister and pimpin somebody's ho, man,

sometimes you people make me sick

And I think you belong in Wyoming on a fence post crucifix

You should just stay in the closet

and everything that could possibly cause it

I've set out to destroy

Words of hatred I deploy in my rap lyrics

and don't act like you don't hear it

when I say "That's Gay"

it's to remind you everyday

that you're wrong and I'm right

despite your struggles and your strife

I'm gonna be here laugh at you

cause I'm leading a normal life

I dare you implore you inform you

There is a resistance ready to conform you

and I dare you to show me

what you find true in this world

and I dare you to show me

are you a boy or are you a girl

and I dare you once more to justify

hate in the name of God

injustice in the name of Allah

and Bigotry written into our laws

and I dare you once more

what have you found true in this world

this world that hates and fears me

When I'm just another girl.

Hush, hush, keep it down now

voices carry, it's not that I'm ashamed of you.

Hush, hush, keep it down now

voices carry, it's not that I'm ashamed of you.

Hush, hush, keep it down now

voices carry, it's not that I'm ashamed of you.

Grant and Epp (1998) attempt to answer the question, "Does God Mind?" to determine if religion and spirituality must be kept separate from sexual identity. As with any identity one might claim, each identity is woven into another. The weave of religion with sexual identity fosters, "either self-esteem or self-negation, depending on how carefully one conforms to religious doctrine and the expectations of his or her community of believers" (Grant & Epp, 1998, p. 28).

Tozer and Hayes (2004) identify the polarization and ascertain that the polarization might be the reason for some individuals to seek conversion therapy with counselors in an attempt to change his or her sexual orientation. Religious orientation was measured by intrinsic religion, extrinsic religion, and quest for religion. Following a survey of more than 200 individuals, Tozer and Hayes conclude that a significant direct relationship exists between intrinsic religiosity and seeking conversion therapy. Additionally, participants with an intrinsic orientation to religion tended to internalize negative stereotypes of homosexuals. Based on the controversy of conversion therapy, Tozer and Hayes suggest future research on the biases which lead to conversion therapy.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Evolving from a grounded theory study of collegiate women by Susan Jones (1997), Jones and Marylu McEwen (2000) develop a conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity. Following results from Abes and Jones's (2004) study on lesbian women, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) reconceptualized the 2000 model of multiple dimensions of identity. As have been mentioned previously, a wide range of identity development models and theories have been introduced to fill any voids in student development literature and theories, yet each of these theories address a single dimension of identity.

Through Jones and McEwen's 2004 research, a conceptual model of multiple dimensions focuses on the core of what the participants view as the influence on the construction of identity. This center is the core sense of self. For many this center can be the inner identity or the identity that people outside very close friends or family may never see. This core sense of self encompasses core values of the individual which potentially include intelligence, kindness, or compassion.

The model portrays multiple intersecting circles of identity which represent significant identity dimensions of an individual person. For each person, these intersecting circles will vary. For example, if all were a similar gender, gender identity may be the same, yet, as that circle intersects with race or socio-economic status each gender identity adapts as it becomes, for example, an Asian woman or an upper-class woman. The model does also take into account that various aspects of identity might play a larger role than others. Within the model, the identity which may not play a large role in the overall identity is still present; yet, the recognition that others have a strong pull one way or another is apparent.

As the model was revisited and revised in 2007, Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) added the filter of meaning making to the model. The reconceptualized model takes into account the contextual influences that each person has on his or her life. These contextual influences include peers, family influence, stereotypes, societal norms, or sociopolitical conditions. The addition of contextual influences filters into the self-perceptions of identity, and it "provides a richer portrayal of not only what relationships students perceive among their personal and social identities, but also how they come to perceive them as they do" (Abes, Jones, McEwen, 2007, p. 13).

In relation to this current research, the connection between various aspects of identity development has been mentioned several times previously. This research pulls together information from students' spiritual development as well as their sexuality identity development; however, according to Jones (1997), it is also important to recognize that the cognitive development and other identity development that occur as well play a role on each other. The addition of the meaning making filter to the model also recognizes that each student has a past history or societal or family influence that affects identity. In this research, these influences could be what religious organizations have told individuals about sexuality or how they have each been treated through their coming-out process.

Student Affairs

Jennifer Capeheart-Meningall (2005) states, "College is a critical time when students search for meaning in life and examine their spiritual beliefs and values" (p. 31). Student affairs administrators are point persons for many of the college students who struggle with identity development and the overlap of multiple identities. Administrators strive to create an open and

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affirming community for growth and development for each student that might be on their individual campus. Student affairs administrators as well as others that this research affects such as religious life leaders and ally organization representatives should be aware of the atmospheres and communities they create to assist students.

Love (2001) gives the following five implications for student affairs professionals to have an understanding of faith development for the students that they work with. Within spiritual development and religious practice, the student affairs professional must recognize that for some students the various organizations or activities they might be involved in are all components of creating one's individual search for meaning and faith development. Love says that in this case, it is important to remember that faith development can be enhanced not only by traditional spiritual activities. The second implication works with the conjunction of multiple identities. Faith development intersects with other cognitive development as well as the identity development that the college-aged student is going through (such as sexual identity development). Thirdly, based on Parks' notion of community in faith development, it is important for the student affairs professional to enhance the communities of which the students are a part. Love encourages them to be truly mentoring communities. His fourth implication is to continue the development through the graduate school years of the student as well. Neither Fowler's nor Parks' theories are not applicable after the collegiate years. Student affairs administrators can continue to support the graduate students at their particular institution by creating the community for them and assisting them in finding ways to enhance their faith. Lastly, Love encourages student affairs administrators to have conversations about faith development with the students. He encourages the topic to be discussed in the academy and around student affairs practitioners.

Collegiate students are in a time of growth and development (Chickering, 1969; Capeheart-Meningall, 2005). Alexander Astin (2004) notes from the "National Study of College Students' Search for Meaning and Purpose-Summary of Findings" that some initial outcomes are positively associated with spirituality at the collegiate level:

- Physical and psychological health, including self-esteem

- Optimism and a sense of personal empowerment

- Civic responsibility, including charitable involvement and social activism

- Empathy, understanding and caring for others, including the importance of promoting racial understanding, attending racial or cultural awareness workshops, the ability to get along with people of different race or cultures, and growth in tolerance during college

- Academic performance, including graduate-level degree aspiration and intellectual self-confidence

- Satisfaction with college, including a sense of community on campus, the amount of contact with faculty, interaction with other students, and over-all college experience

- Religiousness, including religious commitment and involvement (pp. 10-12)

Student affairs professionals are often some of the first people to whom individuals come-out. The previous research has shown the development of college-age students and the need for support through this time. The student affairs professionals seek to help students at their time of transition in any identity development and overlapping identity development.

Religious Doctrine

From the most recent United States census information, nearly 76% of United State

citizens claim Christianity as their religion (United States Census Bureau). Because of this,

Christianity is the predominant religion in discussion when controversy of sexuality and religion

are in the media. Melton (1991) claims that 72% of Christian religious organizations condemn

homosexuals and believe that homosexuality is an abomination. These Christian religions will

often use six passages from the Bible to support the idea that homosexuality is a sin (Meeks,

1989). These six passages are Genesis 19:1-28, Leviticus 18:22, Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26,

27, I Corinthians 6:9, and I Timothy 1:10.

Perry (1990) explains his own journey as a gay man and also a minister. From trying to

determine what the Bible said as well as what Jesus really said about homosexuality, Perry was

confused. The first sermon he preached to a congregation was partially for him, and it was

entitled "Be True to You" (p. 38) where Perry says to all, "If you believe in yourself, then God

will help you. God cares about you. He created you. He wants you to survive. I found out the

hard way, but now I know – and I want you to know! And I don't want you to ever forget: God

really cares!" (p. 38). The mixed messages Perry heard even through seminary was that gays and

lesbians were unnatural and wrong, yet he also learned that God was love and man was created

in God's own image. Englund (1991) makes note of these dichotomous messages which causes

confusion and some despair in gay, lesbian, or bisexual persons seeking to live a religious life as

well as being honest about their sexuality.

As Perry and others experience, the message being taught by the religious groups through

doctrines contradicts what the person feels internally. Research has begun to seek to understand

those causes of identity conflict as the various identities work to come together for the core identity of the individual.

Causes of Identity Conflict, Anxiety, and Cognitive Dissonance

From the messages that gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons are hearing from society and the feeling they have internally, conflict and anxiety are destined to arise. Researchers have begun to examine some of the causes of this identity conflict and anxiety and have broken it into extrinsic forces and intrinsic forces (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, and Hecker, 2001).

As would be expected, the extrinsic causes are coming from outside the individual in conflict. They are often dependent on a feeling of acceptance by others. The LGBT individual feels pressure to maintain strict adherence to established Christian tenets (Birkin, 1997; Grant & Epp, 1998; Rodrigues & Oulette, 2000) which condone minimally the actions of homosexuality. A second extrinsic factor is the overall acceptance by religious groups and religious individuals of anti-gay Christine doctrines (Yip, 1997). A third extrinsic factor is related to other LGBT individuals where the individual in conflict accepts the stories and negative outlook and experiences with religious groups as their own (Rodrigues & Oulette, 2000; Shallenberger, 1996, 1998). The final extrinsic factor which is often a factor when an individual comes out is the contradiction with religious beliefs of family and friends which may cause fear (Mahaffy, 1996; Clark, 1979).

Intrinsic factors as opposed to extrinsic ones are internally composed and analyzed. They can be in the form of moral or ethical ideals or strong internal beliefs. Ritter and O'Neill (1992) as well as Rodriguez and Oulette (2000) mention the factor of fear of retribution from God or

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other divine being. Potentially for years, the individual has sought to go to heaven and the fear of not going to heaven or not being divinely loved is a strong intrinsic factor. The final area of intrinsic conflict that has been mentioned previously is that the identities of being a religious being and being a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person are not compatible in the same core identity (Mahaffy, 1996, Barret and Barzan, 1996).

Summary

Through the literature review above, the researcher has given examples of various student development theories that explain the development of the individual while coming-out to themselves and other persons. Through the understanding of the development theories as well as the theories of sexuality development and faith development, it can be concluded and supported by Jones and McEwen (2007) that these identities do overlap and influence each other. From the understanding of the religious doctrines and teachings of primarily the Christian faith, it is clear that there is a conflict that occurs in the resolution of maintaining a religious identity while also clarifying a sexual identity.

The current research will attempt to uncover various themes from collegiate-aged students who have struggled with or are currently in this very conflict. The remainder of this paper will address the methodology of said research, the data collected through the interviews, and finally the implications, discussions, and conclusions that can be drawn from the various comments made by the individuals.

CHAPTER 3 - Methodology

Research Design and Rationale

Little research has been conducted on sexual identity, even less research has examined the intersection of religio-spirituality with the sexual identity development process. This phenomenological research will serve as a foundation for other research to build upon. Literature does show that all aspects of an individual's life are interconnected through the faces described by Halpern (1998) and through interaction of multiple dimensions of identity proposed by Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2000). The sexuality identity theories (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; D'Augelli, 1994) also confirm that the coming-out process affects a person's life as well. This research will seek to understand how the coming-out process interacts with a individual's religio-spirituality identity.

Qualitative Design

Qualitative research is the type of research for this study. Little research has been conducted on this topic and no recognized theory has been developed relevant to the topic. The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the role of religio-spirituality in the coming-out process for homosexual individuals in the Midwest using a phenomenological design resulting in a picture of the coming-out process and the role religio-spirituality plays in it. The qualitative, investigative approach allows the researcher to examine the individual experiences of the participants through semi-structured interviews.

Creswell (1998) describes qualitative research as having the following characteristics: located in natural setting, researcher is key instrument of data collection, data are collected through words and phrases, data are analyzed inductively, and there is a focus on participants' perceptions and meaning. The research questions as listed in chapter one are best suited to be answered through the qualitative method based on the characteristics listed above. Qualitative research allows for the researcher to discover rather than validate previous research. Qualitative research does not have a pre-determined number of participants needed for a study to occur, although Creswell (1998) suggests 10 individuals for a phenomenological study. Other researchers also agree that qualitative methods focus on small samples of in depth purposeful interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1980).

This project's phenomenological design allows the researcher the ability to interact individually with each participant and to have them speak candidly about their experiences coming-out. The phenomenological design, first used by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl examines how people use their senses to experience things and describe things (Patton, 1990). The overall focus of phenomenology is the description of "the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Following rationale from Moustakas (1994), results and conclusions of the phenomenology describe and give readers an understanding of the essential structure of the experience and how the coming-out process exists in each participant.

Participants

Research took place through semi-structured interviews of multiple self-identified lesbian and gay individuals who had also had interaction with a religious affiliation prior-to or during

their coming-out process. Participants were recruited through purposeful sampling via various

organizations on the university campus. These organizations include the gay straight alliance, the

progressive fraternity, a progressive organization for women, and the local PFLAG (parents and

friends of lesbians and gays) chapter. Participants also took part in the research through snow-

ball sampling by participants. Snowball sampling is when participants informed others about the

research and encouraged them to participate. Through listservs of the various organizations,

interested participants were instructed to contact the researcher if interested in being interviewed.

Fifteen persons participated. Ten were males, and five were female. Nine were gay, three were

lesbians, two were bisexual, and one was a transgender individual. In their childhood, three

participants were Methodist, two were Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, six were

Catholic, one was Presbyterian and non-denominational Christian, one was Nazarene, one was

Unificationist, and one was Mormon (see Appendix A for more information on research

participants).

All participants were associated with a Midwest institution for higher education so that

counseling at the institution's counseling center was available for the participants should any

individual wish to discuss the topics from the interview with a professional. The students at this

Midwest institution may receive up to four sessions with a counselor for free each fiscal year

they are enrolled.

Data Collection

Each of the final participants contacted the researcher via email indicating interest in

being interviewed for the study. Interviews were individually scheduled at the convenience of the

participant. The research participants were sent an email confirming a time and location of the interview.

Creswell (1998) stated, "For a phenomenological study, the process of collecting information involves primarily in-depth interviews…" (p. 122), data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Each interview was approximately one hour in length, beginning with an introduction of the research study and consent documentation. The researcher explained the purpose of the study as well as the confidentiality of the participant's responses. Each participant signed the consent form (Appendix B) and also had a copy for their records. Each participant was also given a copy of the letter to participants (Appendix C) and resource sheet (Appendix D).

The semi-structured interview method allows the researcher to probe the participants to initiate conversation, yet it also allows the participant to openly share about various aspects of his situation. Through the interview, the participants were asked a series of questions to explain their own story of the coming-out process and how religio-spirituality did or did not play a role in the process. The researcher had a list of guiding questions and was able to ask clarifying and follow-up questions throughout the interview. These questions are presented in Appendix E. The interview process for collection of the data was selected as a means to hear the stories of the individuals. All interviews were conducted face-to-face between September 17, 2007, and October 24, 2007.

The interviews were conducted in a neutral location for the participant and researcher. Each of the interviews was digitally recorded (audio only) and transcribed verbatim following the interview. The researcher also documented any field notes regarding the participants' actions,

hesitations, excitement, or non verbal cues that were not present on the audio recording. These field notes were used with the transcribed interviews in developing themes.

It is understandable that the role of the researcher will be one to guide the participants by asking specific and follow up questions. As discussed in Chapter 1, researcher bias was examined through the process of data collection and data analysis. Through a counseling background, the researcher built rapport with the participants to ease their comfort in discussing their individual situation. The researcher's education enhanced the participants experience in the process. The researcher's background played a role in the qualitative research; however, this background was not acknowledged to the participants. Christian faith is important to the researcher having been associated with both the Catholic and United Methodist traditions. The researcher understands that she comes to the data collection with a belief that the doctrines of many organized religions have a negative impact on the sexual identity development of students who are connected in some way with a religious group. The researcher also believes that an individual can have a strong religio-spirituality with or without an organized church no matter what sexual orientation the individual might have.

Data Analysis

As mentioned previously, each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed. Data saturation was obtained through the interview process of the 15 individuals as the researcher heard repetitive comments and themes emerge in the interviews. To enhance trustworthiness and authenticity, the interviews were fully transcribed and returned to the participant for verification. All fifteen participants verified the accuracy of their interview transcript. Qualitative methods

frequently have a simultaneous data collection and data analysis process. In this research, each transcription was analyzed as data collection continued with other participants.

Following transcription, review of the transcriptions brought forth various themes and common stories from the participants. Following a structure discussed by Creswell (1998), the first step in data analysis was horizontalization of the data where relevant statements about the experience of coming-out and religio-spirituality were noted and worked into a list of non-repetitive and non-overlapping comments. Each comment made by the participant was examined. During review of the transcripts, relevant comments were underlined, highlighted, or noted in the margin. Relevance of comments was determined by the information within. Comments that were background information or filler information were not coded. The relevant comments were then grouped into collective units where Creswell stated the "textural description" (Creswell, 1998, p. 150) is included. These categories emerged from the data and as will be discussed later, they relate back to the theories for this research. These collective units were the following nine categories (with coding categories) which describe the essence of the coming-out process: (1) societal influence on LGBT beliefs (S); (2) direct family influence on LGBT beliefs (F); (3) direct church influence on LGBT beliefs (C); (4) difficulty to merge sexuality and religio-spirituality (M); (5) feeling of guilt for being an LGBT individual (G); (6) religio-spirituality affecting when and to whom to come-out (W); (7) leaving the church after coming-out (L); (8) feeling a need to protect family still in church after coming-out (P); and (9) maintaining a relationship with God or higher being without a relationship in a church or religious institution (R). The coding categories can be seen in Appendix F. For some of the collective units or major themes, sub-categories appeared through the research.

When the participants were asked about what they had heard about LGBT persons or lifestyle while growing up, several responses were coded as S, F, or C as to where they might have heard these things. For those responses coded as S, society through government, politics, or media for example played a factor in LGBT beliefs. An example of a comment coded S was the following from Sam, "They may have never said blatantly that they were against it, but I just got the feeling and I began to see people in the church who were active in the community on different issues against gays and lesbians and so I associated that everyone in the church was."

Responses coded as F showed an influence on LGBT beliefs from family members. An example of a statement coded F from Alex is what his grandparents would say to him, "We are praying for you. You are not going to make it to heaven. We want to see you when you die. We don't want you to go to hell."

The responses coded as C show a relationship of the church and how the church influences LGBT beliefs. In the category of direct church influence on LGBT beliefs, three sub-categories emerged (with codes): doctrines from the church influencing LGBT beliefs (C-D), ministerial teaching influencing LGBT beliefs (C-M), and Biblical text influencing LGBT beliefs (C-B). Each participant was asked to discuss what they had heard from religious figures or religious institutions about homosexuality and transgender. An example of a response coded as C-D signifying influence from church doctrines in LGBT beliefs is the following from Jason, "I can't be gay, but I have to be basically a celibate priest and live a priest life and be by myself and be miserable, and I don't understand that." An example of a response coded as C-M signifying influence from a minister or priest in terms of defining LGBT beliefs comes from Alex as he stated, "I know exactly how my pastor feels because of all the sermons that I have sat through my entire life." The final code in this category was C-B code identifying those statements that

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focused on participants allowing Biblical literature influence their LBGT beliefs. Peter's statement, "There are some people that claim that homosexuality is mentioned in the Bible 18 times and condemned" was coded as C-B in analysis.

When participants discussed how they viewed their religio-spirituality in connection with their sexuality, many participants responded in ways leading to the category of a difficulty to merge religio-spirituality and sexuality. These comments were coded as M. Alex's remark is a good example, "Religion is the last thing that I have tried to deal with. I believe in God. It is so engrained in me, how I grew up, it's just hard for me think about it." Within this category, some sub-categories also emerged. M-L was used to code comments discussing lying to oneself or to an institution in an attempt to merge religio-spirituality and sexuality. An example of a comment coded M-L was from Sarah, "I am actually in the church right now, but they do not know we are gay." A second sub-category was coded M-B signifying the participants turning to Biblical passages or Biblical literature in an attempt to merge religio-spirituality and sexuality. An example of a comment coded M-B comes from Jason in describing his need to understand his sexuality, "I went there, grabbed the Bible, and got back in the car and drove north." A third sub-category was the attempt to strengthen an individual's religio-spirituality to merge it with one's sexuality. This sub-category coded as M-S was found from Kelly as she stated about her religio-spirituality, "It's different; I guess I'm more aware of my religion…Now I've actually made it a point to know what is the thing that I profess to believe in." The final sub-category under a difficulty to merge religio-spirituality and sexuality is M-R, recognizing an attempt to maintain respect for the institution of the church when there is a difficulty in merging religio-spirituality and sexuality. Jason's view of gay marriage was coded M-R, "That's probably why

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my views on gay marriage don't actually support gay marriage. Civil unions are fine; marriage to me is a religious term."

As participants discussed their feelings about being an LGBT individual, several expressed feeling of guilt. For those expressions, the statements were labeled as G. An example of this code was Jill's comment, "Occasionally I will feel really guilty about the way I live and I don't think that feeling would be there if I hadn't been told that since I was little." Three sub-categories also emerged under the theme of feeling guilt for being an LGBT individual. The first was a feeling of discomfort for being an LGBT individual. Responses such as from Sam, "I don't think I would feel comfortable, I would not feel comfortable going back after this and if I had a partner, taking him and introducing…" were coded for this sub-category as G-U. The second sub-category was a feeling of no guilt for being and LGBT individual. These responses were coded G-N and included Kyle's statement, "I don't think I ever had any guilt. I think I always felt that being gay was something that was out of my control." The final sub-category was a feeling of stress and anxiety for being an LGBT individual coded as G-S. Peter's discussion about his depression was coded as such, "I got really depressed about myself all the time, didn't want to participate in any school activities."

Through the interviews some of the participants discussed their decision of to whom to come-out and when to come-out. Many of these responses were categorized into the theme of religio-spirituality affecting when and to whom to come-out. Each response in this category was coded as W. Sarah discussed living in the residence halls her freshman year and not telling those living around her that she was a lesbian. The following statement was coded as W, "…but I knew it would not be acceptable for me to say anything so I just kind of kept quiet."

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The responses coded as L signified the category of the individual leaving the church after coming-out. This leaving of the church could be disassociating oneself from the church entirely or the participant choosing not to participate in church services. A clear example of the L code comes from Peter's transcript when he stated, "I don't consider myself Catholic anymore."

The next category to emerge was coded as P which was feeling a need to protect family still in the church after the participant had come-out. This code included protecting friends and family from embarrassment if they or their other friends knew the participants was an LGBT individual or if the church knew that they were an LGBT individual. As Jason talked about his family knowing about his sexuality, the following comment he made was coded P, "They don't want it publicly, like on Facebook, because my brother's still at home."

The final coding category was R, signifying the theme of maintaining a relationship with God or higher being without a relationship in a church or religious institution. Related to, yet independent of the theme of a difficulty to merge religio-spirituality and sexuality, the comments within this theme focus on the relationship or search for relationship with a higher being rather than a relationship with the institution. Mike's comment, "It kind of goes on my personal hierarchy of what it comes to as far as what is important to me and that is God is first, but it's not God and the church, it's God" was an example of a statement coded as R.

These collective units including the textural description will be discussed further in chapters four and five. In phenomenological research, the researcher seeks to find the essence of the experience. From the textural descriptions, the researcher will create the overall description, the essence of the coming-out process as related to the religio-spirituality of the participants.

Trustworthiness

Krathwohl (1998) defines *trustworthiness* as "[t]he judged credibility of a qualitative research study based upon the appropriateness of the data gathering and analytical processes and their resulting interpretations" (p. 694). For Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of a qualitative research study is determined by transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability. The four individual areas are discussed to demonstrate the trustworthiness of this research study.

Transferability

Creswell (1998) writes "[r]ich, thick description allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability" (p. 203). This rich description includes information about the participants and their comments in the study. Information in this research study included their age and academic classification, their religious affiliation while growing up, their sexuality, and their current religious affiliation. The researcher has given rich descriptions of the themes and categories of data through direct quotes from the participants.

Credibility

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). Member checking occurs when the researcher asks for the participants' input regarding the study, data, and results. Member checking occurred in this research study to verify credibility as participants verified their own transcribed interview. Each participant had the ability to alter and accept any or the entire transcribed interview prior to the coding process. Each of the fifteen participants accepted the transcription with no changes.

Some participants also gave positive feedback on themes that were emerging through the analysis process. Participants confirmed those themes. A final aspect of member checking occurred when trained researchers reviewed coding categories.

Dependability

When researchers can provide evidence of the appropriateness of research analysis, the study has gained a satisfactory level of dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For this study, the dependability is validated by the number of participants, the thoroughness of the interviews of each participant, participant member checking as discussed previously, and the in-depth analysis of each transcription by the researcher. Each of the fifteen participants interviewed had interviews of at least 25 minutes to 60 minutes in length. The participants then reviewed their transcripts for accuracy and over a 3 month period of time, the researcher reviewed and analyzed the transcripts.

Confirmability

The confirmability of qualitative research study shows that the data and the conclusions drawn from the study are logical. Audit trails held by the researcher lead to this confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). For this research, the raw data in digitally recorded audio form have been saved on a thumb drive. Other raw data such as completed consent forms and completed field notes are filed for each participant as well. Copies of each original transcript and coding transcripts have been kept. Finally, all notes and revisions of data analysis have been kept. Confirmability is also achieved through peer debriefing which "provides an external check of the research process" (Creswell, 1998, p. 202).

Documentation of Findings

At the conclusion of the research, the findings will be shared and distributed by use of narrative and charts based upon the themes of the interviews and examples from each interview. The following chapter will be a presentation of the data followed by a chapter with in-depth discussion about the results and findings of the interviews and the themes that were or were not generated. The final chapter will explain any conclusions and implications as well as the need for additional research.

CHAPTER 4 - Presentation of Data

As discussed in the methodology, following transcription of each interview, the comments made by each individual were categorized into themes based first around the three research questions and followed by sub-themes which assisted in responding to each question. This chapter seeks to first describe the participants individually while also portray the overall themes determined by the comments of the participants. Although not every participant responded to each theme, as one will be able to see, a wide range of participants responded which in turn justified the theme. Some participant quotes have been edited for clarity and readability.

Participant Profiles

Although the focus of this research is on the religio-spiritual aspects in relation to the participant's coming-out process, profiles of each participant are presented to understand the context of some life events and life history of each participant. Names of each participant have been changed to protect confidentiality. A total of 15 people were interviewed. A summary table of each participant including age, religio-spirituality affiliation when growing up and current religio-spirituality is presented in Appendix A.

Sam

Sam is a 31-year-old Caucasian gay male. Although he began to know something was different about him internally at about age 3, he began coming-out to friends during his

sophomore year of college and came-out to his family when he was 22. Coming-out for Sam was when he told his parents he was gay. For this event, he gathered the family together after a college football game and told them in one group. The response was fairly positive; however his mother did cry. Sam grew up United Methodist where his mother was a Sunday school teacher. He is currently not attending a church, but still considers himself Christian.

Kelly

Kelly is a 22-year-old Caucasian transgender taking hormone therapy for the transition from male to female. Sexually and intimately, Kelly is interested in females. Kelly came-out to her family the summer before college. She is the father to (and has custody for) her two-year old daughter. When Kelly came-out to her family, they did not understand what being transgender meant. Kelly attended an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) church as a child and young adult. When she came to college, she sought out a religious family and currently does participate in the Lutheran campus ministry.

Jill

Jill is a 21-year-old Caucasian bisexual female. She had her first lesbian experience when she was 19, but knew since she was in second grade that she was attracted to women. Jill grew up in the Unificationist Church where her parents would have traditionally arranged marriage for her. Due to losing her virginity prior to marriage, Jill was removed from the church. Currently, Jill is dating a male, yet she says that she traditionally has a much more emotional connection with a female. Since being removed from the Unificationist church, she says she is "anti-religion" and "anti-dogma." She said, "I have been taking in the whole hippie-culture thing,

where there is a love energy around and my logic is if God is a loving God, he knows where I

came from and accepts me; if he is an asshole, then I am fucked anyway."

Kyle

Kyle is a 24-year-old Caucasian gay male. Kyle first came-out to himself when he was

16, but he would often play games to convince himself he was going through a phase. He stated,

"I would flip a coin and I'd say if it was heads, I'm not gay and if it was tails, then I was, but it

was never anything consistent, obviously." Kyle was raised Catholic, yet was not confirmed. He

spoke often about the language that people use (e.g. "that's so gay") that turns him off from

coming-out to them. Currently, Kyle views himself as a believer in God, but he is unsure of a

church affiliation.

Sarah

Sarah is a 22-year-old Caucasian lesbian female. Sarah did not come-out willingly; rather

her sister read her diary and gave the diary to her parents during her freshman year of high

school. Having grown up Methodist, Sarah's parents sent her to a boarding school following her

coming-out. Sarah is very interested in learning about religion, but views herself as non-religious

at this point. She has taken many classes to understand world religions and is currently a member

of the Mormon Church (although they do not know that she is a lesbian) to help her learn about

Mormonism. She appreciates the community feel of a church and religious organization, yet, she

does not believe anything unless there is direct proof.

Leslie

Leslie is a 22-year-old Caucasian lesbian female. Leslie was born, raised, and married in the Mormon Church. She came-out when she was 20 years old – while married. While growing up, Leslie dedicated much of her time and energy to the church and the Mormon community, yet when she moved out of her house, she gained a new understanding of the world which opened her eyes to many things that she had been sheltered from in her youth. Even though the term "gay" had been engrained as a disgusting word through her life, Leslie realized that she was gay when another young woman expressed having a crush on her and Leslie was happy about it. Leslie's father informed her that she had been excommunicated from the church based on her sexuality, but formal paperwork has not been completed. Leslie currently attends a Mormon church as a community member but does not believe in the teachings of the church. The church is not aware that she is a lesbian.

Brett

Brett is a 25-year-old African American gay male. Brett first began to come-out at age 14 when he had his first gay experience. Although he has not officially told his mother, she knows and is beginning to support him even though initially she would send him "scathing e-mails about God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve." Brett grew up in the Presbyterian Church and while coming-out talked to his pastor about his feelings for help and consultation. Currently, Brett views himself as non-religious, but he does believe in a higher power.

Julie

Julie is a 23-year-old Caucasian bisexual female. While attending a Catholic high school, she came-out to some of her friends when they were making fun of another individual who they thought was gay. Julie was never confirmed Catholic and if one would ask her why, she would say because she does not believe in the teachings of the Catholic Church. However, her mother believes that Julie was never confirmed because she lacked one hour of community service that was necessary to be confirmed. Julie said that in eighth grade she "blatantly rejected Catholicism because I knew that my lifestyle was different than what they suggested." Currently, Julie has rejected many man-made philosophies and religious views, especially Christianity.

Tony

Tony is a 21-year-old Caucasian gay male. Tony first came-out to some of his friends, including his brother, while in college. Although he had not planned on telling his father until after college, two years ago his dad asked him about it. Tony's father wanted him to go to therapy, but Tony refused. Tony grew up going to a Methodist church which he views as a more liberal church. Although his particular church did not push any beliefs on him about homosexuality, he definitely sees how religion as a whole "pushed me into a corner." Currently, Tony sporadically attends a Methodist church, but the members there do not know that he is gay.

Mike

Mike, a 20-year-old Caucasian gay male, grew up attending a Catholic church. He viewed his own family as not necessarily strict with religious ideals, but stricter based on values. Mike actually came-out to his priest before coming-out to his parents. He explained that coming-

out to his priest helped him understand the church's position on homosexuality and formulate his idea that the sin of homosexuality is a warning that a homosexual relationship is very difficult. Although Mike does not necessarily agree with all of the teachings of the Catholic Church, he has a deep respect for the church. For example, Mike says that he would not bring a significant other to church with him because it would be disrespectful of the church and the people in the church. Currently, Mike does view himself as Catholic, but he knows that if the church were to go to an even more aggressive anti-gay stance, then he might have to change.

Peter

As a 19-year-old part African American and part Native American gay male, Peter first came-out as a junior in high school when he transferred from a Catholic high school to a public high school. While being in the Catholic high school prior to coming-out, Peter was very depressed and resorted to cutting himself. As he came-out to his friends, his mood became more positive, he stopped cutting, and his depression ceased. Although Peter did grow up with both Catholic and Baptist influences from his parents, he would predominantly attend the Catholic services on a weekly basis. When coming-out, he explains that a favorable reaction he received from one of his friends allowed him to go "from I am ashamed to maybe this is not that bad." Currently, Peter views himself as agnostic. He is unsure if there is a god or not, but he still attends church services with his parents when he goes home as to not disrespect them.

Amanda

Amanda, a 19-year-old white bisexual female, attended an Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) church while growing up. Her family always had a stance that it did not necessarily matter where you went to church on Sunday morning, but you had to go to church. During her high school years, she and her parents actually did attend different churches which allowed Amanda to rebel somewhat on her beliefs and actions in the church. Until high school, Amanda was active in the Lutheran church, but during her junior and senior year, she began to question an existence of God. She came to college as an atheist. Amanda first came-out in college partially because she was uncomfortable with herself as well as reading in the Bible that "homosexuality is condemned." When she changed her religious beliefs, the Bible did not matter to her and she began to come-out to close friends. Currently, her family does not know, and although she is atheist, she will attend her home church when she goes home to visit.

Alex

Alex is a 22-year-old Caucasian gay male who first came-out to himself during his freshman year of high school. As his parents were going through a divorce while he was in high school, Alex built a relationship with a counselor who became the first person he came-out to during his sophomore year of college. Alex would often deny to his friends and family being gay, but after spending some time overseas, he was more comfortable with himself and being a gay male. As he told some of his friends, the word of him coming-out made it back to his parents before Alex could come-out to them. Alex grew up in the Nazarene church and he views his grandparents as very strict religiously. In order to be both gay and understand the church, Alex says he compartmentalized his thoughts and had two sides: the church-going straight male and

the non-religious gay male. He came to realization that it did not work long term though. Currently, Alex does believe in God, but he has not had the energy to work to determine his religious stance.

Jason

Jason is a 21-year-old gay male. He first came-out as a sophomore in college after having dated a female for four years, including his freshman year of college. While he was coming-out to himself, Jason was depressed and turned to the Bible for help. In the Bible, he found a verse that in his own words meant, "No matter how alone you may feel, you will never be alone because God's love is always with you and he will always be with you, no matter what." For Jason, hearing the "no matter what" was the permission he was searching for to be gay yet still be accepted and loved by God. Jason grew up in the Catholic Church and was confirmed in high school. Currently, Jason does still attend a Catholic Church, but his priest does not know that he is gay because he does have deep respect for the Catholic Church as an institution.

Benjamin

Benjamin is a 21-year-old Caucasian gay male. Benjamin's family was the last group of people to whom he came-out. He started dating another male and he felt that he had the support he needed to be able to tell them. Benjamin was raised Catholic and his family still attends a Catholic church. His family was supportive of his coming-out and has met and enjoys spending time with his boyfriend; yet, Benjamin has left the Catholic Church since coming-out. He said of the Catholic Church, "I don't think they can judge on something that I personally think is

genetic, not a genetic disorder, but genetic, something you were born with." In respect to his family, he does attend church with them when he returns home.

Research Question 1

The first research question is as follows: What have religious affiliations taught traditional college-aged LGBT students about homosexuality? Nearly all participants made some comment about what they had heard or learned about homosexuality through their years. The theories by Maslow (1943) and Schlossberg (1981) confirm that an individual is influenced by the environment of which they are a part. The religious affiliations taught the participants information about homosexuality. These comments can be grouped into three main themes. The first is what the participants learned about sexual identity from society through societal norms, media, or politics. Although not directly related to religious affiliations, the influence from society was often seen by the participants as having been influenced from religious affiliations. The second is through what family members told them either prior to coming-out or in response to the participant coming-out, often based on the family members' religious preferences. The final theme is the information that the participants heard or associated with coming directly from a church or religion through religious doctrines or from ministers. Table 4.1 shows the themes as well as the participants mentioning each theme and subcategory of theme.

Table 4.1 Themes for Research Question One

Theme	Coding	Participants Mentioning Theme
Societal Influence on LGBT beliefs	S	Sam, Kelly, Julie, Brett, and Kyle
Direct Family Influence on LGBT beliefs	F	Alex, Tony, Sarah, Brett, Jason, Sam, Leslie, and Kelly
Direct Church Influence on LGBT beliefs	C	Peter, Tony, Jason, Mike, Leslie, Jill, Amanda, Alex, Sarah, and Kelly
Doctrines from the Church Influencing LGBT Beliefs	C-D	Peter, Tony, Jason, Mike, Leslie, and Jill
Ministerial Teaching Influencing LGBT Beliefs	C-M	Amanda, Sarah, Alex, Peter, Mike, and Tony
Biblical Text Influencing LGBT Beliefs	C-B	Peter, Kelly, and Tony

Theme: Societal Influence on LGBT beliefs

The theme of societal influence on LGBT beliefs encompasses what each individual may have heard about being homosexual from politics, government, media, or even assumptions concluded with an unknown origin. For many of the participants, society is related to the institution of religion and participants linked the institution of a church with the societal views that were instilled prior to coming-out. Even at a young age, society began to have an influence on the participants by encouraging various sex roles (Erickson, 1950) or by shaping an individual's world view (Piaget, 1972). As society influences the individual, the participant has to also manage relationships and adjust to interpersonal connections who may not share the same beliefs that they individually have (Chickering, 1969).

Sam recognized that a portion of the cause in the change of his religious identity was based on the comments made by persons at his church. He stated,

The church I went to in Manhattan wasn't political but they said things about

needing to pray to elect the right leaders to make the right decisions and the right

moral compass for our life. I think in my head I associated it. They may have

never said blatantly that they were against it, but I just got the feeling [that they

were]. I began to see people in the church who were active in the community on

different issues against gays and lesbians and so I associated that everyone in the

church was. I decided that it probably was not a good place for me to be and I

never went back to go to any other type of church.

Kelly, Julie, and Brett heard about sexuality through society although they were unable to

determine the exact place they heard it originally. Kelly said,

The main thing that I've gotten is that homosexuality is wrong. Most people tend

to lump transgender into homosexuality. In high school, my family went to a

Lutheran church, ELCA, if that matters. There are two different breeds of

Lutheran. I guess in that, there really wasn't any really mention of the fact of

transgender. I guess at that point of time I had sort of lumped the whole

homosexuality and transgender thing together in my brain. It's just, it's kind of

basically, it wasn't ever really talked about. It was, and I guess I got it in my head,

that you know, religion, my religion Christianity, says being homosexual is

wrong, an abomination in God's sight is the religious text or something like that.

Julie assumed that all Christians would be against her lifestyle based on what she heard from

some Christians. She said,

I think that for a long time I thought that anyone that I had come into contact with

that was religious would hate me purely based on that fact, but then, I feel like

going to college and meeting people from a bunch of different Christian

backgrounds that they separate the two, like "Hate the sin, don't hate the person."

So I think that by just associating people who knew my situation, but were still a

Christian lifestyle helped me understand a little bit more. I guess, up until a

couple of years ago, I didn't know that there were actual Christian churches that

are based on sexual orientation. They're accepting of every different kind of

lifestyle.

When Brett was asked what he had heard from society, he was quick with his response about

what he often heard his mom say. Brett recalled,

My mom's classic. I don't know where she got it from but God made Adam and

Eve, not Adam and Steve. Other things like we're all going to hell, we're the

reason the world is the way it is. I have even heard, and I know this is a joke, but

we've caused the extinction of the dinosaurs. Every negative aspect in society I

feel they lay the blame on us. Where in all actuality, I doubt things are ever going

to be any better.

Kyle discussed how he would often pick on what others might say even in passing which

influence him and his coming-out. He stated,

I think with anything, even before I was 16, before I had come-out to myself,

knowing that there was something different about me, I think we've become so

critical, and listening. It's like we're constantly listening to either conversations

people are having, or comments that are brought up, and making judgments based

on those. Before I was 16 even if I heard somebody say "that's gay," I would

immediately be turned off to that person, and so I think that going through CCD

[Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Catholic religious education classes] was a little frustrating for me.

As the researcher was closing the interview with Kelly and discussing the interaction of churches and sexual identity, Kelly responded, "At least in this society it makes me very angry that there's the fact that religion has become that GLBT issue. Basically gays and lesbians and bisexuals are basically ostracized from the church completely. And one I would say they are failing of that, I guess I would say the liberal Christian church needs to be noisier." The participants' initial beliefs about LGBT individuals were influenced by societal views of homosexuality as demonstrated by the responses. Some discussed messages engrained in them, even when they were not able to know when they first learned or heard that homosexuality was wrong.

Theme: Direct Family Influence on LGBT beliefs

For many of the participants, coming-out was not finalized until they told members of their family that they were homosexual, bisexual, or transgender. During the coming-out time for the participants, typically in late adolescent, individuals began to make the transition from a focus on family members to a focus on peers. The family influence allows for a shift in developing a personal moral identity and prepared the individual for intimate relationships (Erikson, 1950). Although this transition is necessary for development, coming-out to the family often led to negative remarks from these loving family members. The following participants sought to explain what members of their family told them prior to, during, and after their coming-out process.

Alex was taught from his family "that homosexuality is wrong. Not living this one way is wrong." His response towards many of his family members was, "I have no choice in my attraction to men." Tony has also been defensive in response to his dad's comments to him. He related,

My dad wants me to go into therapy and so I was like, "No, I'm not going to." And he was like, "Well at least consider it." And I was like, "Well let me tell Mom first." And then I haven't had the chance to so he's like pulled up to wait for me to tell her and he's like, "You know what, once we tell her we're going to have to sit down and talk about it and go into therapy." And then finally I told him, "I'm not going. This is retarded. I'm not going." And he told me that if I didn't go my soul was going to die and then I'd just be a walking corpse because I wouldn't have God's love or whatever so.

Sarah talked much about how her coming-out affected her family structure. She stated, "It caused a lot of chaos in my home and they actually sent me away to get help. And I think an underlying thing was that they wanted me to become straight." Sarah continued to talk about her mom and her reaction to Sarah's coming-out. Sarah said about her mother, "She gets drunk and says, 'Don't you want to go to heaven with me,' and 'you can't get into heaven' and basically asks if I believe in that. So she brings it up a lot. She is the main person in my life who tells me it's a sin." Looking beyond just her mother, when Sarah was asked about how her coming-out affected her family, she said,

On a whole I would say somewhat negatively because it put a stigma on my family that what I am doing is wrong and that I have a girlfriend is wrong. Actually that's hurtful to me, not supporting what I am doing and being weird

when I am around, being really weird when both my girlfriend and I are around

them. I think we would have been a better family if the church was more

accepting of homosexuals.

Brett also had a negative reaction from his mother when he came-out to her as seen in his

comment,

She would send me scathing e-mails about God made Adam and Eve, not Adam

and Steve, all this eternal damnation yada yada. It hurt, a lot. Because I was

expecting that she was my mother and she would understand if no one else did. So

we're slowly coming to terms with each other. I am hoping one of these days

maybe we'll go to a pride festival somewhere, but that's stretching it. One can

have hopes and dreams.

He explained that their relationship has improved now, but he still said,

It has taken years and years. I still have all those e-mails she sent me. I should

delete them but I just can't bring myself to because those e-mails made me who I

am today, made my skin a little thicker. Maybe one day I'll get around to deleting

them. My boyfriend still asks me why I have them and I don't know. I'm just

holding on to them.

For several participants, family members would often lift prayers up for them in order to

help them through their coming-out process or to help make them straight. When Tony discussed

his father saying he would pray for him, Tony would respond sarcastically, "Ok, that's great."

Alex, on the other hand, worked to get his message across that prayer would not change the way

he was. Alex said the following:

I really thought that I would never tell my dad; I just really thought it would be

bad. He didn't get nearly as upset as I thought he would. Last Christmas we had a

conversation about it. I was out there helping him on the farm and we had an

hour-long conversation that night. I got out that I was this way and I wasn't going

to change. He always said on the phone, 'I am praying for you.' I finally got it

across that I am not going to change. This is the way I am going to be; I am not

choosing this.

Alex not only received the prayers from his father, but from his conservative grandparents as

well. Alex described his grandparents as, "Anything they don't like they try to fix. It stems from

their religious beliefs so they could tie everything back to it somehow." He said that each call

from his grandparents had the following lines in it, "We are praying for you. You are not going

to make it to heaven. We want to see you when you die. We don't want you to go to hell." He

remembered one phone call in particular from his grandmother which in turn led to him not

talking to them for several months. He explained,

I got a five minute phone message, she actually got cut off, berating me for

drinking and how it was going to ruin my future and that I was going to become a

nobody and a lowlife and 'if you don't change your lifestyle choices then we are

not going to see you when you die. Nothing is going to work out for you.'

Basically telling me that if I didn't change, my life is worthless and that I would

end up a nobody.

For Jason, his father did not necessarily say he would pray for Jason; but rather he

suggested Jason turn towards God and pray for himself. Jason said,

My dad was the first one that first went on the crazy path I guess you could say.

He used to send me a lot of text messages implying that he didn't believe that I

was this way and that I just needed to search within myself and God would give

me the answer that I was not this way.

As Jason's father directed him to pray, a family cleaning lady directed Benjamin to read passages in the Bible even before he came-out, and in this way played a role in hindering his coming-out. He said,

Our cleaning lady was a Jehovah's Witness and she told me to read passages in

the bible that says homosexuality is not okay and stuff. I don't know what she was

getting out of that because I didn't talk to her about anything. This was before I

came-out and the next day she would come over and ask me if I read the passages.

Of course I hadn't. It didn't scare me, but it made me think. It played along with

me in not coming-out right away.

After discussing a common thought of hate the sin, but love the sinner as well as not acting on the homosexual tendencies with Alex, Alex concluded that his father would probably disagree with that idea. Alex said,

I would venture to say that even the thoughts are wrong. My dad always told me

that lust was a sin. I have always been told that thinking about something is just as

bad as doing it. I was always told that if you think about murdering someone, it is

just as bad in God's eyes as if you really had. If you want to murder someone it is

just as bad. That is what I was told. I am pretty sure that thinking about doing

anything sexual with another man is just as bad as doing it.

Alex did have some basic support from his mom, even though she thinks what he is doing is wrong. He continued,

> We just generally leave sexuality out of the conversation. I know that she believes that it is wrong too. She believes that the life that I am living is wrong, but she is able to, as of recently, look at the sinner, not the sin. It's amazing how my whole family can't do that. They can only focus on the sin that I have versus just looking and accepting me. It's just kind of funny that she is able to do that in her eyes and the way she thinks she loves me for who I am. She realizes that no one is perfect; she can accept me for who I am. We just don't discuss sexuality.

Sam had mixed recollections of comments made from his family. Although he says that there was no direct negativity, he does recall not wanting to associate with a gay son of a member of his church at home. Sam said,

> Well, I never heard anything negative, surprisingly, from any of my groups so I don't think they affected me negatively during my coming-out or not. I don't think at all. I mean we had, we have someone in our church who had a son who came-out and I can remember not wanting to be associated with him because I didn't want them to think I was like him or anything. I mean my mom would talk about well, we have a gay friend who goes to K-State and blah, blah, blah. He would bring his partner to church and I can always remember trying to distance myself and not talk to him so I would not be identified with him.

Later in the interview, Sam did remember direct comments from both his mother and his brother prior to his coming-out about homosexuality. He continued by saying,

Well I think just my mom, being the Sunday school teacher and things like that. I

mean she would say things like it being wrong. One event that I can remember, I

went to my brother's church at Northwestern and they said to be weary of

churches that had rainbow stickers. My brother even said that he went to one and

so he told me my freshman year to make sure I didn't go to any church with a

rainbow sticker on it. He said, "You know that means they are accepting of gay

and lesbians and that's just not ok." He said that he knew I had not found a

church home at K-State but to be aware of the rainbow sticker. I remember that.

Leslie's family made it very clear to her that being homosexual was wrong. Many of

these ideas were clarified before Leslie even thought that she may be a lesbian. Through her

comments, she noted how the comments from her family were so engrained into her that she

could not fathom the word *gay*. She stated,

I heard so many things. Well, my parents were not necessarily racist but very

judgmental. You know we go shopping and they are rich snobby people and they

would say, "Oh my gosh you see those people over there, I think they are gay."

And then my mom would continue to go on and say you know what gay people

do. She would go on and continue to describe sexuality and what they would do,

but she said it more of a disgusting, embarrassing sort of way to make it sound

like it was really bad and she would just go off on it. The term gay to me was

despicable and seriously I thought at that time that people were just confused and

not happy so I never thought gay was a real thing….My cousin is gay and when

he came-out I thought there was something wrong with him and he was

depressed. I was thinking, "What is wrong with these people?" It kind of brought

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me down because I thought they weren't happy in life so they were gay because

nothing was making them happy.

When asked how hearing that from her family and learning that the term gay was a despicable

word affected her life, she replied, "Tragedy in my life. My brother's gay, and in fact when I was

a kid and when I found out he was gay I was so mad because he was one of my biggest role

models." Leslie's parents had such engrained the negative connotation of being gay or

homosexual that she was not able to continue to respect her brother until much later in her own

life.

As the only transgender in the participant group Kelly explained her experience with her

family after she had her daughter. Kelly said, "I got some pressure from my family of 'okay you

know you have a kid now so now it's time to get over this gender issue stuff and be a man for

your child,' which sucks, but basically I made them realize that it's not going to go away because

I'm a parent now, it's not going to go away."

Family members are often the most loving persons in a coming-out story, yet family for

some of the participants was also an area of challenge or struggle. For the above participants,

they heard the negativity of homosexuality for many years which hindered their ability to come-

out to their family immediately. Several participants discussed briefly during their interviews

about building or re-building relationships with parents or other family members.

Theme: Direct Church Influence on LGBT beliefs

Comments about homosexuality came not only from family members, but also directly

from the church. Both Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) recognize a time in faith development

where the church is viewed as an authority figure. During these stages, individuals connect their

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individual faith with the teachings of the church with little concern for self-reflection or debate. Kohlberg (1986) also describes the conventional level individual as one who seeks the approval of the authority figure. For many participants, the authority figure was the church. This theme of the church influencing the beliefs the participants had about the LGBT lifestyle connects to these stages in an individual's faith development. Several of the participants had either read doctrines or guidelines for their church or had heard through their ministers either in direct communication or through teachings on Sunday morning the religion's stance on homosexuality. Overall, the participants had three main experiences in obtaining viewpoints on homosexuality from a church. First, the participants knew the doctrines of the church. Second, participants talked to ministers or listened to sermons preaching about homosexuality. Lastly, participants referenced the Bible in conjunction with balancing homosexuality and the church.

Sub-theme: Doctrines from the Church Influencing LGBT Beliefs

Some participants used the information that they had heard from the various doctrines of churches and religions to compare one religion to another. Peter made a comment that he was happy that although he struggled coming-out and religion placed a certain stress on him, that he grew up in a Christian household. He said, "I would have had a much harder time if I had grown up in a Muslim home or Hindu home rather than a Christian home. That is one thing I do like about Christianity, it teaches love. It teaches love thy enemy that a lot of religions do not teach."

Rather than compare Christianity with another religion, Tony used the doctrines to compare Christian sects internally. He said,

> I mean luckily for me I was already in the position that I would be accepted. I
> mean if I was a Catholic, whew…I don't know what they'd do. As long as I grew
> up in the right religion (go Methodist) I was pretty lucky in that I didn't have to

make a decision of where I fit in because I already kind of did. It was just more or

less if I want to continue being a Christian or not. I definitely chose to be a

Christian because I do think it's important and hopefully we all go to heaven

some day.

Jason also compared internal beliefs to the Christian faith when he made the following fearful

statement:

The only other church that I have heard about being gay in is a very Southern

Baptist church. I would be afraid to be lynched. I'm not going to lie. Other than

that, I look around the world. My roommates are Methodist and they were very

accepting of it. I completely believe that God did not put me here to condemn me.

I was a good person and that's all that matters and that's interesting too.

Lutherans are not as bad as Catholics. They're more into the touchy feely type of

thing.

Six of the participants interviewed grew up in the Catholic faith, so it was not surprising

to have participants cite examples from Catholic doctrine when questioned about what they had

heard about sexuality and the church. Mike explained,

And the Catholic position, is that it's not a condemnation, well, it is sort of, but

it's not of the person, it's of the act itself which has also helped me with the

church, because if it wasn't the complete person then I think I would have a lot

more trouble with it. Not that I agree with the church's position still, but it is

principles that applies to everyone, heterosexual or homosexual.

Jason echoed some of the same comments with the following statement:

I'm technically okay as long as I don't engage in any kind of activity, homosexual

activity. I can't be gay, but I have to be basically a celibate priest and live a priest

life and be by myself and be miserable, and I don't understand that. I think

everybody deserves to spend their life with somebody. I know, I'm such a

romantic.

For both Mike and Jason, they understood the Catholic position to be one of disliking the act of

homosexuality rather than the person who is homosexual, yet both still disagreed with the

church's position.

In comparison to Mike and Jason's view of the Catholic Church, two participants

discussed how their church said homosexuality was completely wrong. When Leslie was asked

about the beliefs of the Mormon Church, she said, "Oh, they are completely against gays. Sure,

they are accepting Christians so they will love you no matter what, but you cannot be Mormon

and be gay." Jill had the following comments about the Unification Church, "Not only that it is

wrong, in the Unification church there is no idea that it is biological; it is completely because

your parents raised you wrong."

Following hearing the various churches' doctrines on homosexuality, Peter explained

how hearing them made him feel, "That's one of the reasons I hated myself so much. From what

I knew, I knew it was wrong. From what others were telling me, it is was the environment that

made me hate myself so much."

Sub-theme: Ministerial Teaching Influencing LGBT Beliefs

Six of the participants gained information about homosexuality from ministers of various

churches. Amanda, Sarah, and Alex did not have direct conversations with their ministers, but

the ministers' influence came through in other ways. Amanda related the story of talking to one of her friends who was a minister's son. She stated,

> One of my friends who is a pastor's kid is very hard core into Christianity. He says that he doesn't think it is a sin, but he doesn't think you should do it. And even if you are that way, you shouldn't be actively seeking that out. If you are gay you should not seek out other males. If you are lesbian you should not seek out other females. If you are bi, you should only seek out the opposite sex. Essentially he said that while it may not be a problem and God created us differently, we should not seek out what is sinful is essentially what he said. What he says is that God created us each differently and put before us different challenges. Someone who is an LGBT individual, part of their religious expectations is that even though they feel that way, they will not commit that life of sin and that act of sin. They would just deny that part of themselves. It would be what God put before them to the test them.

Sarah decided that she did not need to talk to her minister either. She said, "I never really had the need to bring it up since I knew what the answer would be. So I just felt like I am this way and there is no need to be around people who say that it is not allowed or I should choose something else because basically any other path I am not happy." Alex echoed the feeling that he already knew his minister's beliefs. Alex recalled,

> I know exactly how my pastor feels because of all the sermons that I have sat through my entire life. Our pastor has definitely spoken to homosexuality in more that one of his sermons while I was present. I don't know about each individual

belief, but I know that the church body as a whole believes that homosexuality is wrong and does not fit.

Peter, Mike, and Tony decided to talk with ministers regarding their coming-out. Peter talked of meeting once with a priest in confession. He said,

I talked to a priest once during confession. I never sat down with a priest and just talked. I always used the box and sat in the corner so they never saw my face. It was during the time of thinking. I knew I hated myself. It was very deep seated. It was when I was starting to accept if for myself that I asked during confession the church's stance on homosexuality. Granted the priest who was doing the confession was a relatively liberal priest. He was young. He was a very good guy. He had a very comforting way of condemning it. It was still wrong. He said homosexuality itself wasn't wrong, it was engaging in acts of homosexuality was wrong. Having a relationship is what the church deemed as wrong.

Peter did comment though that he had good experiences when talking with a priest about sexuality. "The priests never said something horrible. One thing that Catholic Church teaches is hate the sin, love the sinner, which is one thing that is lost in a lot of other Christian churches. They are all firm believers of that. They will say homosexuality is a disease, you can cure it."

After talking with a priest for confession, Mike explained that the priest explained the Catholic Church's view of homosexuality as a warning. He said,

So explaining it in terms of a warning that I can accept that yes, especially as our society is right now, a gay relationship is in many ways more difficult than heterosexual relationship which can lead to a falling away from the church and from God because of the stress that it can add on to it. I can accept that. That the

church identifies sin is warning, and being in a homosexual relationship is not

easy. That day I went into confession, I wanted to have reconciliation, but before

we began, I made a point to say that I'm not going to apologize for the fact that I

disagree with the church and I'm not going to confess anything that I don't feel

should be specifically confessed. Especially in terms of gender terms, as to any

acts have occurred, who they've occurred with. I don't feel like it should be. So, I

didn't say it in that exact way, but he said he's not there to judge.

For Sarah, it was not necessarily her own minister from whom she gained information,

but from media ministers. She speaks of her interest in learning about Fred Phelps and how

hearing Phelps speak caused her to seek out more answers. She stated,

I hear that all the time on TV and I was very interested in hearing that he has this

idea about how homosexuality is completely wrong and we are going to hell. I

watched a lot of videos and listened to him speak. It actually really interested me

about religion and how you are not supposed to be homosexual so I took a

religion and culture class to study more about religion to find out if what I was

doing was really wrong because I felt guilt about it. I studied up on religion and I

figured out that my beliefs don't coincide with it. I just took it [the class] to see

the truth and just to see if what I am doing is really wrong.

Through individual meetings with ministers, hearing sermons, or the religious influence on the

media, research participants had an understanding of the church's stance on sexual identity.

Some of the participants learned what their minister might say about sexuality even without

talking directly to them. The ministers represented themselves but also the church. Those who

had a positive interaction with ministers seemed to have a more open and continued dialogue with that same or other ministers later in life as well.

Sub-Theme: Biblical Text Influencing LGBT Beliefs

The final way that some of the participants heard about homosexuality in the religious setting was through the Bible. For some it caused them to seek answers in the Bible or try to understand why the Bible was being used against their lifestyle. Peter was adamant about many people taking verses of the Bible out of context. He said,

It boggles my mind. There are some people that claim that homosexuality is mentioned in the Bible 18 times and condemned. It is condemned twice, no three times. It is in Romans, Exodus, and a book that Paul wrote. Some will say a man shall lay with a woman, but that is just for monogamy, not necessarily polygamy, but sleeping with other people's wives. That really bothers me. It is like they are taking something out of context that is already out of context. The Bible written in English is already out of context. You would have to read the Bible in the language it was originally written in and be fluent in it. Because the people who translated it, translated it to their own agenda and from that agenda, it is translated to another agenda.

Kelly had a similar argument of Biblical verses being taken out of context as she stated, "One thing that I'm not is that I'm not a biblical literalist and particularly around here there's a lot of people who are literalists." Kelly continued when asked if she had done research about the verses being used against her. Kelly said,

Yeah, yeah, I have done research. I've done research on what they first meant. Let's take it into context, what were they talking about in Leviticus as a whole?

And generally why were these laws put into effect? When were they put into

effect and who put them into effect?

In comparison, Tony sought out the Bible to try to find answers, but did not seem to find

the answers he was looking for. He said,

I guess it's taught that any homosexual contact is immoral whether it is emotional

or physical whatsoever. I mean they see that as immoral and wrong, but I really

don't know why. I mean I go back and read the Bible when I see where it says

certain things like that but then I read it and like there's no explanation given; it's

not telling you why.

Growing up in a Christian church leads many people to turn to the Bible when in times of

struggle or challenge. For Peter, Tony, and Kelly, they did turn to the Bible to assist them in the

struggle to manage coming-out and having a strong religio-spiritual identity. Although not all

found the answers that they wanted or needed at that time, they still attempted to seek the

guidance of the Christian holy book because it was what they had grown up with and was

respected in their family.

Research Question 2

The second research question presented is as follows: In what ways did a person's

religio-spiritual life hinder/enhance the sexual identity development process and the coming-out

process for a traditional college-aged student? This question yielded several themes. The first

and strongest theme is the idea that it was very difficult to merge religio-spirituality and the

coming-out process. The second theme is a feeling of guilt when coming-out brought on mostly

by beliefs instilled by religious institutions. Leaving the church was the third theme. A fourth

theme emerged from discussing to whom participants came-out as well as why they decided to

come-out. The final theme is pressure from their family. Table 4.2 shows the themes related to

the second research question.

Table 4.2 Themes for Research Question Two

Theme	Coding	Participants Mentioning Theme
Difficulty to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality	M	Kelly, Tony, Jill, Kyle, Leslie, Brett, Peter, Amanda, Alex, Jason, Mike, Sarah, and Kelly
Lying in order to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality	M-L	Sarah
Turning to the Bible for Assistance to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality	M-B	Jason
Strengthening Religio-Spirituality in order to Merge with Sexuality	M-S	Mike and Kelly
Maintaining Respect for the Institution of the Church when Unable to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality	M-R	Jason, Sarah, Mike, and Kyle
Feeling of Guilt for being an LGBT student	G	Jill, Sarah, Amanda, Leslie, Julie, Peter, Sam, Brett, Tony, Kyle, and Mike
Feeling of Discomfort for Being an LGBT Individual	G-U	Sarah, Brett, and Amanda
Feeling of No Guilt for Being an LGBT Individual	G-N	Tony and Kyle
Feeling of Stress and Anxiety for Being an LGBT Individual	G-S	Leslie, Brett, Peter, and Mike
Religio-Spirituality Affecting When and To Whom to Come-out	W	Kyle, Sarah, Brett, Leslie, Alex, Amanda, and Peter

Theme: Difficulty to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality

The theme that emerged as difficulty to merge religio-spirituality and the coming-out process seemed to have influence on nearly all the participants. Twelve of the fifteen participants cited some difficulty. Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007) recognized the multiple dimensions of identities interacting; however the amount of overlap between identities for individuals varies. For some dualistic thinkers (Perry, 1970), having multiple identities was a difficult concept and the challenge to merge their identities was apparent. Eleven participants explained generalized difficulty while one participant chose to lie to the church and others to help merge the two identities. One participant turned to the Bible for support while two others chose to become more religious through the process. Four participants discussed that although it was difficult to merge the ideas of the church, they still maintained a respect for the institution.

Kelly was able to thoroughly discuss how she struggled with an internal fight in her mind between what she had been taught or heard through society and what she felt in her heart. She stated,

> And so basically there was a lot of wrestling with myself and it was almost a
> wrestling with this amorphous thing because I really didn't know. It wasn't
> anybody really telling me it was wrong or anybody telling me it was okay either.
> And so I just assumed it was wrong and I thought it was okay, kind of. I mean it
> kind of seemed to me that it should be okay and there shouldn't be anything
> wrong with it. But nobody ever said that and it was one of those things, that I had
> the feeling that it should be okay but then I had all of these Bible verses and all
> this stuff that said 'No, it's wrong.' So, there's that over here that says no, but

then I have the feeling that it should be yes. And it had me fighting back and forth with that.

After finding a church home while at college, Kelly continued by saying,

While I was there [at church] I basically thought the here are some reasons why to back up your feelings of 'hey, this isn't wrong.' So basically through that it's been a growing process and then I found other things, other places to look such as my own readings of the Bible. Basically I've decided that God doesn't see anything wrong with this. Basically I'm not going to go to Hell because of this. Basically, initially it boils down to, you know, I didn't choose this; it is not something I can choose or that I could choose and there's no reason why I would choose this. So if I didn't choose it then I must have been made this way. And if I was made this way and it's wrong then that means God made me damned which makes no sense. So the only logical conclusion to me is that this must be something that God wanted me to be. Basically if sin is bad, therefore don't sin. So then what is sin and if that [homosexuality or transgender] falls under the category of sin then you're supposed to stop it. But if it's a part of you that you are born with, that you are created with, then how can you stop it? And so then maybe if you try to go on with your life doing the whole, you know, trying to fake being heterosexual you're there making yourself miserable. And that's not, I think that's not what God wanted us to do.

Tony echoed some of the same statements and conclusions of what God would want of a person. He said,

It's [homosexuality] definitely not a lifestyle and so I don't think that God would

create anyone gay and in turn consider it a sin. I think that a lot of people consider

gay people promiscuous and I think that in any relationship heterosexual or

homosexual that can be a sin. I think that promiscuity is bad and immoral, but I

don't think that what kind of partner you choose has any reflection on that.

Jill discussed how hearing that homosexuality was wrong from the church affected her coming-out. She struggled growing up because the pressure put onto her by the church. She said,

I think that I probably would be completely lesbian and not bi if it wasn't for the

church. But then again, it seems that if being in the church and not being allowed

to think of guys that way maybe that is what directed my attention toward women.

You have a mental block that guys are not like that, but it is an even bigger step to

be with a girl. I think that religion definitely shapes the way it happened. If I had

parents that were, 'Okay! That's great! You do whatever you feel,' then I

probably would have explored it a lot sooner. I didn't date anybody in high

school, male or female. I probably would have explored that a lot more in high

school and would be a little more certain now. I think that religion definitely has a

huge influence on the way it turns out.

Kyle was in search of answers from religion. He searched while coming-out as well as through

discussions with a friend who is seminary. He recognized that he is torn in discussing his

sexuality with her and her beliefs. Kyle said,

I think that in terms of my coming-out process, religion absolutely didn't answer

the questions that I had. I think maybe something so overarching as I'm growing

up, religion is supposed to be the thing that everybody lives for, and everything

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sums up, back up to religion. I felt a little bit disappointed, I guess, that my needs

weren't really being met; that this was something that I couldn't explain, that I

knew what was engrained within me, that it was a part of me. Yet really the

answers that my church gave me weren't sufficient. So I think maybe that's why I

never really pursued confirmation since. I've gone to Mass a few times, maybe a

handful of times since high school; it's been very few and far between. I know my

friend Kelly; she's going through seminary. So, that's been kind of frustrating on

my end a little bit, because I know she feels a little bit torn, at a certain level. She

views my lifestyle as not ideal and so it's been a little bit frustrating having to

explain myself in that sense.

Kyle saw that religion made his life more difficult and made it difficult for him to even come-out

to himself. He stated,

I still have so many Catholic tendencies, and I still consider myself religious. I

think that it made it a little more difficult, definitely, coming to realize it myself;

maybe some of those tossing of the coin type of things when I was trying to really

work with it, trying to get some external help, and I just didn't feel like I was

getting that from either my priest, or people at church, or from that whole avenue.

I don't know if it had a humongous affect on me, but I'm sure it instilled some

hesitancies, in terms of coming to terms with it myself, and even coming-out to

myself, and coming-out in general, I think that it probably did.

Kyle continued to also discuss the struggle that he has found in religion to determine where his

life is taking him and what he really believes. He continued by saying,

I feel like for me personally it's just that religion, I want to tackle this part of my

life and find where exactly I fit. Because I don't feel like I've reached that point.

Am I Catholic? I don't know. Am I Baptist? I don't know. Am I Atheist? I don't

know. I feel like I hadn't really tackled that part of my life. And it's not

something that I feel confident believing just what I have been raised on. I feel

like I really want to investigate on my own and find my niche and figure out, and

in doing so, that just feels so overwhelming - especially not knowing or feeling

intimidated about the resistance that I could encounter. I guess I don't really know

necessarily in terms of other religions, but I know that within myself there exists

the angst of dealing with the resistance. I think that religion is probably something

that sometimes I guess people may feel overwhelmed like me and not want to

confront it. I think at some point in my life, I don't know when that is, it could be

tomorrow, it could be two years from not, hopefully not ten years from now, but

soon, I definitely want to confront this mess and really resolve it.

Leslie discussed with the researcher how religion held her back. Leslie does not view her

religious background as a positive experience which helped her to be the person that she is today.

She could not have her former religio-spiritual identity co-exist with her homosexual identity.

She stated,

I think it [religion] kept me from growing up. It kept me in a world of fantasy that

does not exist as far a religion goes. It says that this is how the world should be

and this is how the world really is. So you have to be a good person with good

morals and respect these things and these people. It gave me a completely

distorted view of the world when I came-out into the world; I was unprepared for

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a lot of the influences out there because I didn't know how different it really was and what religion teaches you. I thought slowly that religion really wasn't helping me but it was making me depressed and making me feel guilty and it was controlling my life in such a way where not the whole world worships religion and you can't base your life off of religion and if you do, it can destroy you, because not everyone believed in religion. Then I realized that religion isn't true because if the world was honestly about God then the world would be about God, you know. Then I started thinking, "What do I really believe in?" because I have always believed whatever everyone has told me. So I started experimenting more, not necessarily experimenting but observing the world and going out to clubs more and meeting more diverse people rather than just Mormon people because that is what I was secluded to.

Although Brett shared that he also had many struggles and challenges, unlike Leslie, Brett says that he has grown through them and learned much from the experiences he has had. He said,

I definitely learned a lot... At that age you only take things at face value. I thought to myself, "God, I am a horrible person. Why am I feeling this way?" I used to have lots of issues like any other teenager in that position. The worst part was when one night, I would have maybe been fifteen, when I was about to talk to my mom about coming-out, about to bring it up. What happened? I know I ended up in front of the church somehow, during one of the come in as you are. It was tough. I thought the whole world was looking at me, I was being judged. I just got up there and I professed myself to being saved. I renounced everything. I put my feelings aside and said, "Ok, I'm going to live the Christian lifestyle. I am going

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to be heterosexual. I am going to deny everything. I am going to deny my

feelings." And that was the worst thing I think I could ever do. That sent me in

more turmoil no matter how hard I tried. I tried reading the Bible every day; I

tried praying. It wasn't working for me as a teenager. It felt like to me that other

people had a direct line to God. He would just talk to them and everything. I felt

like when I prayed and when I read, nothing happened. I was just reading a book

and talking to myself. And back when I was maybe seventeen that was when it

was falling apart because it wasn't working anymore. I had these feelings inside

of me.

Brett went to discuss his sexuality with his pastor where she discreetly gave him some tapes to

listen to which were similar to sermons about not being homosexual. When asked about how this

struggle between his two identities affected him, he said the following:

It influenced me a lot because I didn't want to be labeled as fag. I didn't want to

be labeled as a degenerate in church or society, as a dirty individual. To me when

I was really young, when I first coming through to myself, I saw myself as an

individual, a male, a young man who liked other guys. As I got older, my

innocence slowly taken away and I began seeing and hearing the things in society

and what people thought about us. When you don't want to be labeled as

something you don't want to be associated with it, and that didn't help the

coming-out process.

Peter also questioned his religion. Through his high school, Peter said that he joined the

crowd who was always questioning things, including religion. He said that being a part of this

questioning group, "probably helped me come to grips with my homosexuality because that was

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really the only thing that was telling me that it was wrong. Granted it was a huge thing telling me

it was wrong, it was only one thing. And once I started realizing the ridiculousness I began to

think that I can't believe in something I don't agree with so I decided I can't be confirmed into

this religion."

Rather than seeking out answers, Amanda attempted to not deal with the struggle to

merge her sexuality and her religio-spirituality. It was not until she turned away from religion

that she then accepted her sexuality. Amanda said,

> I had a gay Catholic friend in high school and I would discuss with him about
>
> how Catholicism is one of the ones that is usually really really strict and does not
>
> accept anything that is away from the norm. He said that he understands that God
>
> will love me no matter what even though he prescribed to the Catholicism beliefs.
>
> People may be discriminatory about that, that doesn't necessarily mean that God
>
> is. So I ignored it and tried to get over it because you know you even though have
>
> been told by religious people that it is ok, you always have in the back of your
>
> mind that it is not ok because if you read the Bible for instance. It does say
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> homosexuality is condemned. So I wanted to act like it didn't matter because I
>
> was highly religious at the time and so I acted like I wasn't that way. And then
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> when I started to change my religious beliefs I determined it doesn't matter that I
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> am this way and if people don't like it, they can get over it and not talk to me.
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> When I made that decision and distinction that I am not Christian any more then I
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> felt more comfortable coming-out because the Christianity faith is sometimes very
>
> discriminatory against that. When I didn't identify myself as a Christian it was
>
> easier for me to convince myself I was that way and to tell others.

Alex explained the way he attempted to manage his religio-spirituality and his sexual identity. He claimed to be able to have two individual identities (a religio-spiritual identity and a homosexual identity) that did not connect at all. He explained,

I developed this ability to…I have always referred to it as shutting a door in my head. On one side of the door was the straight me that went to church all of the time. I was a really good kid in high school. I wasn't rowdy. I wasn't bad. I was involved in everything; all of the sports, all of the activities. It was a small high school so it was easy to do that. On this side of the door I was really outstanding; a really good high school kid that, in society's eyes, did everything right.... I was that person. I went to church. I went to youth group and did all of those things. On the other side of the door when I would hang out with the other gay kid in high school and do things; it was on the other side. I could just shut that door and I would just be that other person. There would be times in church when the guilt that played on you for something. I don't know how to describe it. The whole invitation deal, when they call for invitation and they say that all of the bad things in your life you need to get rid of. I didn't feel that when I was in church because they would be talking about and comparing the things that I had done to living outside of the Christian life. It was difficult there. There were times when I thought if I could control self pleasure techniques that maybe everything would go away. For awhile I would not do anything like that, and I would stop so I would just try to not do the gay side of me and shut that door. Obviously it didn't work. I felt a lot of back and forth and tug and pull going to church on a regular basis.

Alex continued to discuss his struggle with religion when he realized that he could not continue to close one door or the other. He said, "Religion is the last thing that I have tried to deal with. I believe in God. It is so ingrained in me, how I grew up, it's just hard for me to think about it." He also stated, "It's hard to take that training out of my head that I got through birth. It's really, really hard to fight that. I just, a lot of time, tend not to deal with it." When asked where he thinks he is currently in the merging, he still said that he struggles having them together but he is working on it with assistance from his counselor. Alex said,

> I hadn't put religion and homosexuality back together again but before that point.
> I was still thinking that I was damned at that point before I started talking to him.
> He [the counselor] helped me at least separate them so that I could be okay with
> me as a homosexual and as a gay man. I would have been pretty bleak the last
> couple of years I can tell you that much. I had to work out the pieces but if I
> hadn't separated them I would not be who I am. I would not be at the same point
> in my life it had not been for him. I wonder what is going to happen when I die. I
> wonder where I stand. Those are things that I think about. I would like to get a
> resolution to that so I don't fear that.

Jason was the one participant who discussed how he has been able to work through the merge. He does know that the merge was difficult, but he explains how he examines his beliefs and his feelings and adjusts them accordingly to make sure they fit together. Jason explained,

> I definitely did a lot of the merging of my beliefs. I will take the beliefs and take
> them as far as they go with me and I just merge them into what I think. I still think
> that I should be a moral person. I still think that I should not go out and sleep
> around. I still think that I have an obligation to God to be a good person and to

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treat others with the respect and dignity that I have; I should turn the other cheek, the golden rule. All of that I completely identify with. I don't have to be the stereotypical, gay asshole. I don't have to be so engrossed in the world and so into fashion and the secular assets of the world. I was kind of concerned with my balance of religion and how I am still able to be a religious person who defines their life upon it. I feel like I took a road less traveled in a way, but in no way am I any better than any other person on this planet. I am no better than anybody. I'm a sinner. I am not great all the time. I have made my share of big, big mistakes, but you learn and I think as long as you keep that faith through that it is a big test.

Mike tried to segment his thoughts and hide his feelings for other males, especially while in high school. Mike explained,

Ever since I've been attracted to anyone, it has been to men. I would say that was probably around 11, pre-pubescent or whatever that time period is for most people. I tried as hard as I could to dissociate that from the rest of me. So I was very involved in junior high and high school, especially high school. I think through that that's what kind of really allowed me to really box that into one part of my life that no one else would see and then the rest of the time just being as busy as I was so there wasn't really time to think about it. I think kind of at the end of my senior year in high school I was thinking, I'm going to make the sacrifice to just ignore this but after high school things are going to change. … But I wasn't completely able to do that so I still had to wait and still had to kind of hold off for a while.

For Mike, his struggle to merge both religio-spirituality and sexuality also came-out in a conversation with his priest at home. Mike was very nervous about meeting with the minister; therefore, he drafted a letter in summer of 2006 which he gave to his priest rather than having to talk about everything. The letter for Mike was a spring board to begin what Mike viewed to be a difficult conversation. A copy of the letter which Mike gave the researcher permission to include is found in Appendix G.

The multiple participants above discussed the difficulty they had with merging their religio-spiritual identity and their sexual identity. They each struggled in individual ways and confronted this struggle differently, yet for each, they recognized the challenge and strive for some resolution even if that resolution may be abandoning one identity.

Sub-theme: Lying in order to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality

Sarah saw the difficulty in saying that she was a homosexual when she wanted to join the Mormon Church. She discussed with the researcher that she has lied to the church in order to become a member and learn about the Mormon Church. Sarah said,

> I am actually in the church right now, but they do not know we [she and her
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> girlfriend] are gay. My girlfriend grew up in the Mormon Church and we are
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> going to the Mormon Church in town. We are actually in a church which is
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> somewhat good for me in some ways and in some ways it takes up too much of
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> my time. We have been involved a lot in the church now, …but I did have to lie
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> about being homosexual once and then having to hide it is another story. They did
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> ask me when I was being baptized and being a member of the church and then I
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> had to sign another thing. They did ask me in the interview process if I was a
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> homosexual and I said no, but that was when I was researching the church and

was not really a member. But now I am pretty much a member even though I am

gay. It probably won't last forever. I probably won't be a Mormon forever, but I

am right now.

For now, Sarah has overcome her struggle to merge her sexual identity with her religio-spiritual

identity by keeping her sexual identity secret. As she mentioned in her comments, this situation

will most likely not last forever, but she appreciates being able to be a part of the congregation

and the social aspect of the church without them knowing that she is gay. To the church, she and

her girlfriend are just roommates.

Sub-theme: Turning to the Bible for Assistance to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality

Jason knew that he was struggling to have the religio-spiritual identity that he originally

grew up with and that he appreciated while being gay as well. He explained the day that he

came-out to one of his friends but also struggled to understand who he was. He said,

She still is one of my good friends, and I chose her as the first person to come-out

to. She had to swear to secrecy she wouldn't tell anybody because I wasn't really

sure where I was at either. I had just admitted to myself probably the week before.

I got off work one day in the afternoon on a Saturday and I was pretty miserable. I

was pretty down; I mean I couldn't figure out exactly where I wanted to go. I

knew I had these feelings, but I just didn't feel like I could accept them. And I

remember going back to my house after work, and I went inside and didn't even

say hi to my roommates. I went there, grabbed the Bible, and got back in the car

and drove north…And I remember finding a verse that stated, "No matter how

alone you may feel, you will never be alone because God's love is always with

you and he will always be with you; no matter what." The "No matter what" just

kind of like hit me that I no longer had to say, "I can't be gay because I believe in

God. I can't be gay because people who believe in God say it's wrong." It

occurred to me at that point in time that I could be myself, and I could be happy

and not be a miserable person. I could still have God I my life, and he would still

love me. And that was probably the point where I admitted it to myself.

By turning to the Bible, Jason was able to find the verse to help him resolve the idea of being

loved by God and being homosexual as well.

Sub-theme: Strengthening Religio-Spirituality in order to Merge with Sexuality

Although many of the previously mentioned participants turned away from a church

when they struggled to merge their identities, Mike and Kelly discussed with the researcher ways

that the struggle to merge their identities yielded a strengthened religio-spirituality. Mike

discussed how he would often disagree with a church, but he maintained a close relationship with

God. Mike said,

I was confirmed I think the summer before my junior or senior year… that was a

period that I was really looking at my religion more, but not quite yet through the

lens of what it means to be gay and Catholic. Still very dedicated, I disagreed with

the church on a lot of things for a long time…but that didn't stop me from,

through the church, developing a closer relationship with God in what ways that I

could. I guess it kind of comes down to the fact that, while the disagreement that I

have with the church has been difficult at times, especially since college when I

have possibly applied it to myself more than just in a general political self of just,

'oh I disagree.' I did come to that conclusion a year or two ago, where it was

harder for me because while I had disagreed with the church for a while, to think

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that the church disagreed with me, personally kind of put it on another level. It did

put stress on my relationship with the church and God, only so much in their

relationship and that I was able to come back to my relationship with God, just

kind of having to dissociate the two. I would say it is part of growing up for me,

but have I been forced to grow up faster? Yes. And I think that's really what it is.

Would I have realized it had I been straight? I think I would have but I think it

would've taken a lot longer. And definitely probably with other gay men that are

not out yet, it is more difficult for them to come to accept or to realize and some

never do.

For Kelly, she was very direct in saying that being transgender made her examine all of her

beliefs and ideas to deepen her thoughts on religion. She compares her religio-spirituality

growing up to where she is currently. She said,

It's different; I guess I'm more aware of my religion. I mean back then, it was just

Jesus loves me and the things you learn in Bible school. Now I've actually made

it a point to know what is this thing that I profess to believe in. In many ways my

transgender has helped me become deeper in my religion because it has forced me

to say: 'Okay,' it has forced me to question my beliefs, it has forced me to say:

'Okay, well what is this thing I believe in?' Look up this and look up why I

believe these things; look up why Jesus did something, why does he want me to

be kind to my neighbors, what is this whole God thing. So I think it has helped me

become stronger in my religion overtime.

As will be discussed in the third research question, several of the participants did mention that

they have separated the doctrines from their relationship with a higher being. Mike and Kelly

were able to strengthen their religio-spirituality and have also potentially separated the relationship with God through attempting to merge sexual identity and religio-spiritual identity.

Sub-theme: Maintaining Respect for the Institution of the Church when Unable to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality

In attempting to merge religio-spirituality and sexual identity, Jason, Sarah, and Mike made reference to striving to maintain a certain level of respect for the institution of the church. Jason explained his view on the respect, even disagreeing with gay marriage because of respect of the church. Jason said,

> Granted, I still go to church and when I show up I'm sure my priest doesn't know that I am gay. I'm a complex person. I don't feel that it is right because I don't feel like I need to hide who I am to do something but at the same time I am very respectful because that's how I was raised. I do have very interesting views and ideas. That's probably why my views on gay marriage don't actually support gay marriage. Civil unions are fine; marriage to me is a religious term.

For Sarah, she did not tell her church that she was gay. She said, "My family and I were Methodist so I still went to church after they found out my sexuality but we did not talk about it at all. The church never found out that I was gay and I was still welcomed to go." Mike tried to explain his thoughts on going into a church and talking with ministers in the church. He said,

> I guess I don't really come in expecting them to be extremely opening and welcoming, and I know where the church is right now, so I don't expect more of them than what would put them in disagreement with what's not only their faith but their career. I would say no, and that is most likely due to the experience that I have had with the people of the church. That's where I'm coming more and more

around to now. I do still respect much of the structure and institution of the church itself because I think that it is human made, and god-inspired. So while there are flaws, there is a lot of truth as well.

Unlike the above three participants, Kyle explained how he went to Mass with a friend of his and during the Mass, his friend told him that in respect of the church, he could not take communion even though Kyle was Catholic. Kyle explained,

In Mass, you go up and you receive the Eucharist and I'd gone through my first communion and it was just kind of hurtful I guess the way that he said that I shouldn't go up and receive it because I have so many sins and I have to confess. He was referring to I guess my sexuality, and so it was just really hurtful. I remember having a really intense conversation with him and I think that's been what's been most frustrating for me in terms of my coming-out is when I come-out and I don't have to explain it, it's so much easier than if I have to really articulate where I'm coming from, or my process, or being the spokesperson because I don't feel adequate. So I end up just getting really upset because I feel like I didn't do a very good job of really representing.

Kyle's friend agreed with the Catholic position of the act of homosexuality being a sin and wanted Kyle to respect that and not take Communion. Although Kyle and the others mentioned above did show respect for the institution of the church, they still portrayed the difficulty to merge the sexual identity and the religio-spiritual identity.

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Theme: Feeling of Guilt for Being an LGBT Student

Cass's (1979) identity comparison, Coleman's (1982) pre-coming-out, and D'Augelli's (1994) stage of developing a personal lesbian/gay/bisexual identity focus on the time of development that LGBT individuals struggle with the idea that they are not heterosexual. These theorists explained that this time of challenging myths and pre-conceived notions can also lead to a feeling of isolation, depression, or guilt. The idea of feeling guilty about being a certain sexual orientation came-out through several participants' interviews. For some this guilt was described as an overall guilt while few described it more as a feeling of discomfort, stress and anxiety. Only two people said that they definitely did not feel guilt for their sexual identity.

Jill said that "religion definitely adds to the guilt factor." She explained how she currently feels guilty about her sexual identity and how her religio-spirituality is the source of such guilt. Jill said,

> I probably wouldn't feel guilty about the way I live. Occasionally I will feel really guilty about the way I live and I don't think that feeling would be there if I hadn't been told that since I was little. Even having a boyfriend is a huge step for me. Even the word *boyfriend* is a dirty word to me.

She continued to explain how the institution of the church and members in the church make her feel guilty as well. She stated,

> So if you are doing things that are wrong, they don't think that God is going to hate you, but they will think you are putting God through so much pain. "Can't you feel how much you are hurting God?" They give you a guilt trip to not do bad things because you don't want to hurt the Supreme Being who loves you. There is no, you are going to go to hell if you do bad things. There is a "you are

going to feel like you belong in hell because you are such a bad person if you do

bad things."

When the researcher was curious as to whether the guilt had gotten easier to manage or

decreased since coming-out, Jill responded explaining that the guilt has even caused her to

question what her true sexual orientation is. She said,

Yeah. It has definitely gotten easier because it is more habitual. When I go back

to my parents I am reminded of all of that and that is really painful. It was a really

painful transition. That is why I am not sure if I am a lesbian or bi. I am bi

because I am with a guy and I am still attracted to women, but I don't know if I

would ever make the switch to just being a lesbian because I have grown up with

the idea you need a man in your life pretty strong. I feel like when I am with a

chick I want somebody there to comfort me and do the whole protector kind of

thing. I haven't found a girl who can do that for me yet. The feeling of guilt has a

huge impact because it sets up what you feel and what you are thinking for what

you want.

Sarah discussed with the researcher the guilt she felt about being homosexual. She stated,

Well, beside all of society not portraying lesbians but just portraying straight and

gay couples, the church adds to the guilt. I did read in one of their pamphlets

about homosexuality about how homosexuals are going to hell. I feel like it is

authority figures who are telling me this so I think that there must be some truth to

it, and there might be, but it makes me feel extremely guilty for being gay, and

there is nothing I can do about it.

Amanda also knew that there was nothing she could do about it. She said, "I had guilt that even though I thought God accepted it, the Bible had said that it was not accepted. And so I did have guilt because of the fact I felt that way." For Mike, his guilt was associated with the church. He said, "I definitely have had Catholic guilt. I'm not sure when the first time I heard the Catholic position on homosexuality, but I think for quite a long time I've known the distinction between the act and the person."

Leslie was very confused when she felt the guilt of being gay. She felt this guilt before coming-out to her or others. She now recognizes this guilt, but at the time, she thought it was something all youth go through. Leslie said,

> I was a virgin up until marriage so I didn't know much about sexuality in general
>
> or what I wanted, but I did notice the female a lot. I really do think that I was born
>
> that way. I actually noticed women more than men. Dating in general was
>
> something that was exciting for me because I was not able to do it. It was a rule
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> religiously you couldn't date until you were older so it was fun for me in general.
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> But I was attracted to women and I did have a lot of thoughts and I did feel guilty
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> about them but I figured that it was something normal that every kid does. It was
>
> just part of growing up and normal.

Julie and Peter discussed the guilt that they felt in terms of shame. Peter said that in working with a counselor, he was "able go from I am ashamed to maybe this is not that bad." When the researcher asked for clarification of shame, Peter stated, "Shame and guilt are the same word for me. They go hand in hand." For Julie, she noticed the shame of being the minority. She said,

I think at various points throughout my life I've felt, I wouldn't necessarily say it

was ever guilt, like I don't think that I ever felt guilt, because I think that I've

always felt like whatever makes me happy should be ok. I've never necessarily

felt guilt, but I think there were various times when I felt shamed by it, just that

you have the majority of people believing this way, and then you're over here

saying "Ok, so how do I connect with those people, knowing that they don't know

this about me yet?"

Sub-theme: Feeling of Discomfort for Being an LGBT Individual

Several participants explained the feeling of guilt as a feeling of being uncomfortable

either with who they are on a daily basis but also uncomfortable when or if they were to go into a

church. Sam talked about being uncomfortable taking a partner to church with him. He said,

I think that I have the feeling that religion does not accept me or accept who I am

and accept my beliefs. I don't think I would feel comfortable, I would not feel

comfortable going back after this and if I had a partner, taking him and

introducing, I would not feel comfortable in doing that or be active with the youth

groups because I would be afraid that they would think you wanted to be with the

youth group for sexual reasons, you know.

Brett also talked about the discomfort of going into the church when he said,

It slowly became uncomfortable because you know you walk through the door

people turn around and see. I'll never forget the first time I got my left ear

pierced. One night a couple of friends and I came into the city to go watch a

movie, so we all just got it done on a whim. My mom got freaked out, and that

next Sunday we went to church, and I could see people. Their eyes just widened a

little bit. I always dressed nice anyway. The earring was the icing on the cake.

For Amanda, she was more uncomfortable having to think about telling her parents her sexuality

because of what has been engrained into her since she was a child. She stated, "Even though I

validated the fact that it is ok from the beliefs I have, it is always in the back of my mind that I

was taught as a child, engrained in my head that there was a god and homosexuality is bad and

all those other things that I am probably not going to tell many people. I will probably never

come-out to my parents because of their beliefs of it." Amanda put it very simply when she said,

"No matter what religion, the topic of homosexuality makes people uncomfortable."

Sub-theme: Feeling of No Guilt for Being an LGBT Individual

Only two of the participants said that they did not feel guilt. Tony was very self-confident

and this confidence came across in his response to the discussion of guilt. Tony explained,

Nope, never once felt guilt just because it's really who I am and again I didn't

choose this so it's like at this point you know this is the way I am, I'm not going

to change just because of how you feel because I can't change. It's not really

guilt. Yeah, no I've never felt guilt, which is nice. I just have a very relaxed

attitude I don't get worked up about things. I know people do. Then they get

concerned about how other people see them, but I'm very weird that I just really

don't care. Really I don't, I don't care what you think. If you don't want to be my

friend because I'm gay, that's fine. I don't want to be your friend either then if

you're not going to accept people. You know what I'm saying like, if you don't

want to be my friend or if you don't love me because of that, well I wouldn't say

love me but I'd still love you if you didn't love me but it's just like whatever.

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Although Kyle also said that he had not felt guilt, his response was not as quick or as confident as Tony's. Kyle seemed to be almost unsure if he had felt guilt or not. He said,

I don't think I ever had any guilt. I think I always felt that being gay was something that was out of my control. I think I confirmed it though. I dated in eighth grade, trying so hard to try and work through the phase that I thought it was. It was just very persistent. It never changed, and I think just that experience for me never really allowed me to have much guilt. Well I don't know, maybe it did, but initially I want to say no. I never really felt guilty. If I did feel guilty, it was when I should come-out, or when I did come-out, how it would affect other people. But not necessarily how it would affect me. But that's another area. I think that in terms of my coming-out process, absolutely religion didn't answer the questions that I had. I think maybe something so overarching as I'm growing up, religion is supposed to be the thing that everybody lives for, and everything sums up, back up to religion.

Sub-theme: Feeling of Stress and Anxiety for Being an LGBT Individual

Similar to the feeling of discomfort that some participants felt, four of the participants verbalized the stress, anxiety, or depression that they felt due to the struggle to merge their two identities. Leslie discussed with the researcher how she worked through understanding that the religion was causing her to be depressed and how she resolved the struggle. She said,

I thought slowly that religion really wasn't helping me but it was making me depressed and making me feel guilty and it was controlling my life in such a way where not the whole world worships religion and you can't base your life off of religion and if you do, it can destroy you, because not everyone believed in

religion. Then I realized that religion isn't true because if the world was honestly

about God then the world would be about God, you know. Then I started thinking,

"What do I really believe in?" because I have always believed whatever everyone

has told me. So I started experimenting more, not necessarily experimenting but

observing the world and going out to clubs more and meeting more diverse people

rather than just Mormon people because that is what I was secluded to.

Brett's story overlaps with the overall guilt that many other participants felt, but Brett

continued his story by going into the depressed state. He said,

I felt guilty so much. I was always so depressed because I like guys, but I'm going

to hell. When I had sex with someone in the back of my mind, I thought, God is

watching me. What would this person think about me? This constant guilt. But

over time if you don't think about the guilt from religion, it slowly fades away. I

think that's what really helped me comes to terms with myself. There's no guilt,

there's no pressure. Guilt is a very bad thing, and a person shouldn't be made to

feel like that for who they are.

Along with Brett, Peter also discussed how he became depressed as he describes a dark

time of his life where even his clothing reflected his dark feelings. Peter said,

I kind of hated myself. I took on this very dark role. You know how there are

always those Goth kids, well I kind of became like that. I got really depressed

about myself all the time, didn't want to participate in any school activities, I

didn't want to do anything that related to other people because I hated myself so

much. I didn't want to be a part of it. Eventually I became a cutter and I hurt

myself.

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For Peter, the environment that he was in and the comments he constantly heard about homosexuality hindered his coming-out. He said, "It was an incredibly unsafe environment for me."

Mike explained his guilt more as stress and anxiety. He was unsure though if it was because of his sexual orientation or more because of a strict religion. He said, "I don't think I felt guilt. I felt stress and I felt anxiety because of it, but sexually I have felt guilt. Would I have felt the same guilt if I was straight though? I think that is very possible. I think it's Catholic guilt. It revolves around the act and not so much the person for me, and that's something that I have slowly come-out of."

Theme: Religio-Spirituality Affecting When and To Whom to Come-out

Cass's (1979) identity acceptance, Coleman's (1982) coming-out, and D'Augelli's (1994) processes of developing a lesbian/gay/bisexual social identity and becoming a lesbian/gay/bisexual offspring discuss the challenge that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals face in when and to whom to come-out. For seven of the participants their religio-spirituality affected the choice of to whom they decided to come-out, why they wanted to come-out, and when to come-out. As has been mentioned in the theme of what the participants heard from society, Kyle discussed how he takes notice of what people might say such as "that's so gay" and is cautious in coming-out to them. Kyle also stated, "If I'm in a coffee shop and I hear somebody talking a lot about the Bible or Jesus, immediately I'm like hmmm maybe I won't come-out to them. I don't know if we'd be great friends." Sarah had a similar experience as she discussed how she did not feel a comfort level to talk to girls who were discussing Christian beliefs. She said,

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I was pretty much a loner my freshman year in the dorms because I did not think

anyone would have supported it in the dorms because they were really religious

on my floor and they had like Christian meetings and stuff and they actually

invited me to them and I went to them, but I knew it would not be acceptable for

me to say anything so I just kind of kept quiet.

Brett explained in his interview how he initially came-out to his best friend, but

when she did not respond favorably, it hindered his coming-out in the future. He said,

My first friend, she was my best friend in high school. We tapered off after that.

She was very conservative. I think she was Catholic. And I told her, and it wasn't

a response I was expecting. I was expecting her to be a little standoffish, but our

friendship basically died after that.

Brett then had to decide what to tell his mother after she asked him if he was gay. He

continued,

I denied it and told her no because that was the natural way to do things. I didn't

want to go into counseling for it, I didn't want to talk to anyone at church, I just

wanted it to end right there. That prompted me to not tell anyone for awhile. I had

already lost one friend, my best friend, and my mom was obviously against it. So

I figured they're the closest people in my life and not going to say anything to

them so I was just going to keep to myself. It was that way until I got into college.

It was not until after Brett had been at college and living with his partner that his mother

approached the subject again and Brett did not deny it. Brett said,

Because about four years ago, when I first came to K-State, she came to our

apartment one day and saw how we were living. And that weekend I went to her

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house and she asked me, "You guys are more than just roommates, aren't you?" I

said, "A little bit." That was it. And for awhile she wouldn't talk to me.

Just as Brett lost a friend after telling her that he was gay, Leslie also lost a friend after

she found out that she was gay. Leslie said that it was the day after when her friend, a

neighbor came to her. She stated,

> She said "Last night, do you have recollection of what happened?" I said no and
>
> she said "You were looking at gay women on the computer." I was like oh,
>
> because I was at the time having thoughts that I was gay, but I was not sure. I
>
> wasn't ready to come-out because I thought I could be with guys and not be gay
>
> so I felt guilt for it. I wasn't allowed to talk to her anymore, her husband was just
>
> like wow, I can't believe she did that but I had to lie my self back into that and
>
> say sorry, that's not really what happened and this is what happened. Since that
>
> was before I came-out and since I have come-out, I have not been able to talk to
>
> her.

Alex also discussed with the researcher how he has lost friends through the coming-out

process. Alex said,

> I lost a couple of friends. I have never been told to my face; you never know what
>
> they are going to say behind your back, but to my face I have never been harassed
>
> or anything or called out on anything.

Amanda discussed first what happened to one of her gay friends before telling how

depending on what religion a person is determines if she would come-out to them. She stated,

> My friend who is Catholic and gay, he didn't tell many people. He would only tell
>
> about 10 people and that was because he was scared it would get back to the

congregation and the backlash the Catholic Church would have because they

don't necessarily believe that it is the best idea. I have met people who are of the

Catholic religion who are very open about it though. It changes based on who it is

though. I would never come-out to the friends I have who are Muslims because it

is just not something that is widely accepted in that faith. So I do actually choose

who I come-out to based on my personal experience on how open they are and

then religion does play a role because I am not going to disclose that fact lightly

to anyone because I know there can be backlash. There are multiple things that

contribute to it, but religion does definitely play a role in my mind.

Peter also saw that the religion played a factor in coming-out. In his case, Peter was in a Catholic

environment that he did not feel comfortable coming-out in. He stated, "I didn't want to come-

out at all. Being in a Catholic environment, being in a Catholic school it was engrained into me

very quickly that this is wrong, you weren't supposed to do this." Kyle tried to use his religio-

spirituality to guide him to the answer that maybe he was not gay. Kyle explained how he

searched for divine intervention when he said,

In fact, I used to do these little things to myself because I was convinced maybe it

was a phase. And so I would do these little tests, like I would flip a coin and I'd

say if it's heads I'm not gay and if it was tails then I was but it was never anything

consistent, obviously. So I was trying to find something maybe divine, actually to

help explain this for me. Like maybe if a flip of a coin could be magically a sign

of some kind. Because of its inconsistencies I disregarded it but at some point

right around when I was sixteen is when I came-out to myself, resolved the fact

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that I was gay and I still couldn't say it out loud, necessarily. But it was definitely

internally I knew it.

The decision of who to come-out to or who not to come-out to is once that the above

participants struggled with. Some refrained from coming-out based on previous coming-out

experiences with friends while others examined religio-spiritual aspects before making the

decision. The search for divine intervention and support was even apparent to assist in coming-

out to ones self.

Research Question 3

The third research question presented in this study is as follows: In what ways did the

traditional college-aged LGBT student's religio-spirituality change through the process? Three

main themes emerged from the participants in regards to this question. The first theme is leaving

the church after coming-out. The second theme is feeling a need to protect family still in the

church. The final theme is maintaining a relationship with God or higher being without a

relationship in a church or religious institution.

Table 4.3 Themes for Research Question Three

Theme	Coding	Participants Mentioning Theme
Leaving the Church after Coming-Out	L	Julie, Peter, Kyle, Jill, Leslie, Sarah, Brett, Mike, Jason, Alex, and Amanda
Feeling a Need to Protect Family Still in the Church	P	Kelly, Jill, Mike, Tony, Jason, Sarah, Peter, Amanda, Alex, and Benjamin
Maintaining a Relationship with God or Higher Being without a Relationship in a Church or Religious Institution	R	Jason, Mike, Tony, Amanda, Peter, Kyle, Alex, and Benjamin

Theme: Leaving the Church after Coming-Out

During the individuative and projective faith stage (Fowler, 1981), individuals begin to personalize beliefs. Parks (2000) also describes this transition to an internally focused faith rather than one necessarily associated with a church. Fowler and Parks do related that traditionally this transition occurs in late college and early adulthood, rather than the age of many of the participants of this study. Twelve of the participants discussed with the researcher how their coming-out led to them leaving their church in which they grew up. For Julie, in the eighth grade, she intentionally failed to complete the necessary service project in order to be confirmed Catholic. She said,

> …but when your mind starts to develop and you start to question a lot of things in your life. I think that that definitely played a big role in deciding what I wanted to do with my religion or figure out about my religion and I think that that's when I started, eighth grade is when I rejected, blatantly rejected Catholicism because I knew that my lifestyle was different than what they suggested. I kind of rejected Christianity in general, and along with that I guess Islam, because those other religions wouldn't necessarily fit my belief systems. I think that in my rejection of Christianity, I've come up with my own philosophy of spirituality, so I've just never felt the need to talk to any person of religious authority about my sexual orientation. I wouldn't say that I have any kind of organized spiritual beliefs, and if nothing else, I've rejected any kind of man-made philosophies, because I believe that they become corrupt over time. I think that I take a few of those moral beliefs out of a lot of different religions. I definitely feel that I agree with a lot of moral beliefs in Christianity, those kinds of philosophies of life in general.

But specific, like "You should not do this," I don't think that I necessarily believe those. I think that I haven't come full-circle into any kind of other real spiritual beliefs.

While in high school Peter came-out to some of his friends and began to wonder if church was appropriate for him. Peter said, "In high school, I had started to question religion already. A lot of my friends were in the same boat as me, they would constantly question the Bible and they found a lot of things that did not make sense and they thought were absurd."

Amanda also began to question her connection to a church while in high school, even before coming-out to many people outside of close friends. She said,

> Well, I started having the atheistic point of view when I was a senior in high school more or less. I had been on that boundary even when I was a lot younger in high school and when I came to college I openly said I was atheist and had some Confucian points of view which is basically peace before violence and things like that. [I did this] because of the hypocrisy or contradiction I guess of what the church actually taught and the Bible said. To me when I was a Christian, the Bible was the one thing you should go by and when it said that despite what the pastor said, I would look at the Bible. So that contradiction made me start to try to figure out whether I wanted to be in a church or not that said it was bad, but said it was ok at the same time. I don't think it was that big of a role, but yes I do think it played some role because I did recognize those contradictions.

Kyle explained that he struggled with his connection to the church and when he came-out he wanted to keep his sexual identity completely apart from the church. He said,

I think when I came-out I really just turned myself off, in that area. I didn't even really consider what the Pope would think, or what my priest would think. I've always felt like this is something that is not a choice, it's not something that I can actively turn on and turn off. I think that I'm fairly conflicted at this point as to whether or not I would be straight if I could do it, but at the time I was like, if I had a choice, I wouldn't be choosing to be gay. But it's just so deeply engrained in me that I feel like God is the thing that has really given this to me, and so it's something that obviously not everyone understands, but I just felt very adamantly about the fact that they are wrong, and I'm right, damnit. But I think that when I came-out I really had no other consideration.

Sarah made note that her change in religio-spirituality was definitely because of her sexuality. She stated, "I think I see myself as being non religious now. I might have been more religious now if I had not have come-out, I might be going to church more than just Christmas with my family when I visit them in Colorado. I probably wouldn't be non- religious and I would probably believe more in God."

Both Jill and Leslie were told that they could not be in the church based on their actions. For Jill, her actions were prior to her coming-out, yet she was still removed from the church. Jill explained,

Growing up I would say I was very, very religious. I completely put the way that I acted into that dogma, but again, some things didn't go together. Then I would get depressed because well I don't fit 'this' and so then to me it was that I am not happy in this so I am just not going to do it anymore. Yeah, I didn't separate from the church completely until I was 20, so this is just a year since separation. I

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officially left the church because I slept with a guy. I am pretty anti-religion. I am

pretty anti-dogma. I have been taking in the whole hippie-culture thing, where

there is a loving energy around and my logic is if God is a loving God and he

knows where I came from and accepts me; if he is an asshole then I am fucked

anyway. That's where I go. Church, to me, is so painful. It's too painful to try to

think about.

Leslie was told she was excommunicated from the Mormon Church because of her sexuality.
She said,

I was actually told that I wasn't supposed to go to church because I was gay and

that I wasn't allowed to be in the religion. My dad was part of the head council

and he went to the bishop and told him I was gay and he was like, well we are

going to have to excommunicate you. My dad told me I was pretty much

excommunicated a group of people I was leaving, but I do not think it was an

actual excommunication because I never saw paperwork and this church has

never said anything about my records so I do not think it went through, but I was

told it would.

Brett made his decision to leave the church. He as well as Mike are looking to the future
about what church they may or may not want to be a part of for their future. Brett explained,

I was just tired of going. I was tired of being preached at. I was tired of being told

that I was going to hell. I didn't like getting dirty looks when I walked in the door.

I didn't want to be apart of it anymore. I do feel like I've turned my back on God,

and everything I was raised to believe in, but I don't know. I almost feel justified,

because I was made to be who I am. So if people are going get this religious idea

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and not going to like me for who I was, I was going to turn my back just as fast as they turned their back on me. I don't even own a Bible anymore. I just got rid of it. I left it at my mom's house. My boyfriend and I have talked about going back to church together, where we could be accepted together. I don't even know a place here; it's just talk at this point. We might, I might get back into it one day, when I am older, more established, even more comfortable with myself. I would like to. At this point, I think about it a lot. I think about God everyday actually. Just wondering why things are the way they are in our world. How can I be a better person? Moral things basically. So I do want to get back into a church someday. I just don't know when or how.

Although Mike does say that he is currently still Catholic, he understands that his future may force him to leave the church. Mike said,

I just don't see myself not being a Catholic as things change, if the church moves to a more aggressively anti-gay stance, then that might change but I don't see that happening right now. I think one of my biggest problems with the church is that not only do they discourage the act itself as a sin, but in the last document that came-out I think they spoke about how parishes and priests are supposed to be very compassionate towards gay people, that at the same time gay people aren't supposed to be out. To me that totally reinforces shame, and how are people supposed to get help if they cannot even say who they are? So I think that's my biggest problem with the church right now and I think that's the thing in my mind right now that is the most right for change. If the teachings about the act of homosexuality, if there is not some kind of concession made, or some kind of

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institution created within the church where homosexuals can have monogamous

relationships, at least the church needs to be able to accept homosexuals openly

within the church, even if it won't accept their relationships.

Jason also considered what will happen in the future if he wants to have a partner and a family. He said,

We were sitting in church one day and I looked around and realized, "what's

going to happen when I do find the person that I am supposed to spend the rest of

my life with?" "What's going to happen when I want a family?" I can not walk

into a Catholic church with another male and my eight kids and sit down in the

front row and be like 'hi!' It's not going to work; I know that. I am a very

realistic person and I understand that it's not going to work. As optimistic as I

want to be, I do not perceive the Vatican saying, 'it's okay' anytime in the next

century. It's just not going to happen. I have come to the conclusion that

eventually I will have to leave the church if I want to continue to, you know. I

will want to raise my children around Christ. I think it's important.

When asked why he wanted to be interviewed for this research, Alex described how he had only been out of the church for 4 out of his 22 years and it was a new thing for him to not be a part of a church. He said that the putting back together of religio-spirituality and sexual identity is what takes time and what each person must encounter. As seen by the large number of persons who have left the church in this participant sample, leaving a church can be a part of that process.

Theme: Feeling a Need to Protect Family Still in the Church

Ten of the 15 participants mentioned at some point in their interview that they in some way or another protect their family who is still in the church that they grew up in. Maslow (1943) explains the need for acceptance, safety, and security. Some participants in this research retained those needs from their family after coming-out. For some of these participants, they respect their family and the family tradition of attending church together. For others, participants kept their sexuality quiet around family friends, especially within the church in order to avoid embarrassment for their parents or family. The comments built upon a theme of feeling a need to protect family members still in the church.

Kelly began the conversation when asked if people in her home church knew that she would be making the transition to become a female. Kelly said no and continued with the following in order to protect her family from the trouble it might cause:

> And honestly, it would cause my family a little bit more trouble because, there are
> good people there in the church that are supportive, but then there are people in
> the church who aren't supportive so my parents would have to deal with really not
> supportive people while they're trying to sort it out in their own heads and that's
> not fair to them. At the time where it becomes more apparent that I'm becoming
> female, like once I start taking hormones for a while, you know, it will be
> somewhat hard to hide the fact that I'm growing breasts. At that point in time, you
> know, I may start. I may let people know. But I'll cross that bridge when I get
> there.

Jill also has not let her home church know that she is gay. She explained some of the reasoning behind her decision which is based partially on the church dogmas and traditions. She said,

That is part of the reason why it would be way difficult for me to ever tell them. My mom would apologize and tell me she is sorry that she didn't do a good job because this is the way you are living. I would say, 'don't be sorry.' They don't accept it at all. They feel like anybody who is homosexual at all need to be saved and they just don't know it yet. My dad is very old fashioned, very traditional ideas. His dad, my grandpa is very traditional. I am afraid if I completely came-out with everything that he wouldn't let me see my sisters because he would be afraid that I would negatively influence them. The worst part about it is that I still want to see my sisters and another part of is that I am the oldest sister, they look up to me, and I don't want that image tarnished. I don't like being converted and they try a lot and I don't want to try to convert them back or un-convert them, whatever the right term is. If they are happy in their religion then I don't want to ruin their chances of meeting somebody and being able to marry somebody that they really want to. They have arranged marriages that are through your parents, so if another parent says, 'your family, not so much,' then they won't get married. That, to me, is very important, so that is why I keep things under wraps.

For Mike, it is not necessarily respecting his family, but also respecting the members of the church. He said,

It comes down to my ability to disagree with the church and still be part of the church and still a member of the church. And that's accepted. Now are there certain things that I would not do, if I had a significant other to bring them to church and to display that very obviously, no I would not do that. I feel like the church is probably on the right path, it's more out of respect than fear. I would not

want to put the people in the church in that situation to deal with that, I feel like I

would be putting something on them that would not be fair, because whatever

their personal beliefs are, and that's not something that I don't think I've ever

talked to any of them about. It's been more about the church and my relationship

to the church. I feel like it wouldn't be helping the situation because it's not

something that the people would affect, like the priest. It's not something that

they have control over. And I would just be putting them in a bad situation. So I

wouldn't do that.

Tony and Jason both describe how they want to respect their parents, even outside the

walls of the church. Tony's father is not very supportive of his sexuality, yet Tony maintains

respect. Tony explained,

I also know that like he told me that if I don't go to therapy that he wants me to

remain celibate for the rest of my life. I'm dating somebody now but he doesn't

know. I'm scared to tell him. Because I know that that would kind of make it real

for him maybe. I don't know for sure but I'm pretty sure that'd be probably be

embarrassed or I mean not embarrassed but he'd feel judged by other people. So

it's like one day I just want to go in there and be like, "I'm gay! I'm with him!

That's my dad and I love him but…" but I haven't done that. I think that'd be

really funny.

Jason mentioned in his interview that outside of the church, his parents had told him that he

needed to be quiet about his sexuality, yet Jason does have mixed feelings about this request. He

said,

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They don't want it publicly, like on Facebook, because my brother's still at home. But I just feel like at the same time, they look at it as respecting them and their feelings and I look at it as respecting me and my feelings that I can't be who I am because I have to hide it for them. So we've had some problems there.

For Sarah, Peter, Amanda, Alex, and Benjamin, they show their respect to their family by attending church with them when they are at home even though while at school none attend a local church. Sarah says that she is interested in church although she does not believe in, but also to go with her mom. She said,

Yes, I do go to church when I go home and I am in awe that some many people go to church and so many people believe what they are told but there is no evidence for just because they are supposed to or they will not go to heaven and I think that is people's motivation and I could be wrong but that is just what I believe…I go because I am interested. I am interested in the people. I am psychology major so I like to be around people and I like to see what they are doing. It is interesting to go after taking a religion class and doing the research that I did to find out my own conclusions to look back at it and see why people believe this. That is one reason I went and the other reason I went is because of my mom.

Peter makes it known that he does not believe in the Catholic faith, but he does not want to disrespect either his parents of the church itself. Peter said,

I don't consider myself Catholic anymore. I go to church services at home out of respect for my parents. I will recite the prayers out of respect for my parents. I will participate. I will take communion. I know that they say you cannot take communion when you have sin on your shoulder, or when you don't truly believe

what is going on. I don't know. It is disrespectful to the institution as a whole for

me to participate even when I don't believe, but I do it out of respect for my

parents. I think it would be a bigger disrespect to them. That's why I prefer to not

go at all so I won't disrespect either, my parents or the institution. I don't want to

disrespect the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church is not a bad thing.

Amanda uses going to church both out of respect to her parents but also as a cover so that her

parents do not learn that she is bisexual or atheist. Amanda explains that even though she does

not go to the same church as her parents, she is expected to attend church when she is at home.

She said,

I would still keep going and remain active and my parents were supportive of that

because they believe religion is something you need to follow regardless of what

church you are at or what sect you are a part of as long as it follows the Christian

god. My parents still think I am Christian. They very much believe that I am that

way, but I am at college so I can't come to that church in my home town. It is

more that I have always done all those things to make my parents think that way

while in my mind and in my heart I knew that was not the way things were. Their

standard is that even if you are not attending the church they attend, you are still

attending church so to me I will go to church and I will take the communion

because my church does that weekly and I will go through the motions even

though I know this is not what I truly believe. I will not sing the hymns. I will just

stand there quietly. That is pretty much all I do and my parents are paranoid

sometimes and will actually drive by the church to see if my car is there because I

was walking out as they were driving by one time. Even though I validate the fact

that it is ok from the beliefs I have, it is always in the back of my mind that I was

taught as a child, engrained in my head that there was a god and homosexuality is

bad and all those other things that I am probably not going to tell many people. I

will probably never come-out to my parents because of their beliefs of it.

Alex also attends church with his family. He said going to church with his dad at home is

the only option while there. He said that he does not attend church at school, but does believe in

God and many of the teachings that he grew up with. He does say, "But I also believe that God

made me the way I am and I have finally accepted that. I have no choice in my attraction to

men." Benjamin is the final participant who attends church with his family. He said, "If they are

going to church I will go with them." When asked of his feelings when he goes to church,

Benjamin replied, "I think it would really depend on what the scripture is that day I guess. I do

feel like it is kind of close-minded. I don't really pay super close attention because it is not what

I believe in."

Theme: Maintaining a Relationship with God or Higher Being without a Relationship in a Church or Religious Institution

After struggling connecting a church doctrines with homosexual identities, several of the

participants were able to separate their religio-spirituality, their relationship with a higher being,

from a church or institution. Chavez (2001) argues that the church or religious institution is not

necessary to have a religio-spiritual identity. Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) recognize this as

well in the late stages of faith development; however, both Fowler and Parks comment that very

few individuals achieve complete conjunctive faith or a universalizing faith. In comments about

current religio-spiritual activity, participants shared information regarding the theme of

maintaining a relationship with God or higher being without a relationship in a church or

religious institution.

Jason said it very directly in his interview, "I live my life for me and for Him and that's

it; not for an institution." He continued,

I don't rely on an institution and we never have though. It's annoys me, you

know, 'he's the priest, with everything you need to go talk to him.' I never talked

to a priest about being gay and I won't. I just won't do it. I mean other people

have gone to Father Keith; I have a friend who did it. I feel like, that day, when I

was coming-out, that was when I felt like I was able to have a relationship with

God, granted, I still like the environment. Even thought I would love a Catholic

church and I attend church, it is something that I won't be able to do. At first I

was really sad about it, really sad about it. Then I realized, you know, it's always

going to be a part of me and it all boils down to, any faith, your relationship with

God.

Mike echoed some of the same comments by Jason that the relationship with God was more

important than the relationship with the church. Mike said,

I tried to keep it quieter just because I was trying to create distance from myself

and the community. I have always had a very personal relationship with God. I

would say that I'm fairly open to religion if it's not God, if it's something else.

Whatever it is, I have had a close relationship with that and I would say that it has

definitely been the Christian God for me. That has been something that has been a

constant throughout my life. The word religion itself to me sort of implies the

church as well. And that is something that's been a part of my life since I was

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born as well. But it's a different relationship, and something that I've, over time,

come to separate. They are related but they are not the same to me. And I think

they may have used to be. But not so much anymore, whereas my relationship

with God has been a constant in my life, my relationship with the church has been

more strained at different times. Yes they've always been a part of my life. I

would say that when I was growing up I was probably more religious than many

of my friends. Even still I'm probably more involved in the church than at least

most Catholics of my age at this college will be…It kind of goes on my personal

hierarchy of what it comes to as far as what is important to me and that is God is

first, but it's not God and the church, it's God.

Tony spoke of his connection with God, but also of his want to attend church more even though

he has made the separation. He said,

Well the connection is still not as strong as I wish it would be like I consider

myself a gay Christian I mean I definitely have faith in Jesus and I go to church

and am active. I think more of it is just like playing a good part in society and

being a good role model more than practicing like religious teaching. I mean if

you're thinking about ways to get into heaven sure you can whatever read the

Bible and do all that kind of stuff but I think it's how you live your life that's

more important so that's kind of switched from where I was. I should go to church

more often.

Amanda was the one participant who explained how she has adapted a new religio-

spirituality that is away from the church that she grew up in. She explained that she had read

much on Confucianism as well as Marxism. Amanda stated, "One of the Confucian values is

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respect and you would respect people regardless of how they felt or regardless of their sexual orientation. So I in my mind that validates the fact that it is ok."

Although Amanda had accepted a new religio-spirituality, Kyle, Peter, and Alex described how they were still searching. For all three, they have questions that make them question God, and they are all trying to resolve conflicts in their mind. Peter explains some of the questioning that he struggles with. He said,

> I am agnostic at this point, I don't know if God exists. I don't know if religion is
> something people use to make themselves feel better. I don't know if religion is
> an excuse to hold themselves over people. I think religion sometimes can be a
> very good thing. I think it can be a way for people to keep their faith in the world
> and their faith in other people. It all depends on what religion it is. A lot of
> Christian religions I believe it is an excuse for them to put themselves on
> pedestals about other people. I believe there is a god, a higher being and I believe
> there is an afterlife. I will do as far to say there is a god, but I don't know if there
> is more than one god. This is the one thing that drove me away from Christianity
> is not the homosexuality. It is if God is all-knowing and all-loving, why would he
> create something that would suffer so much through life? He has to know, from
> what they teach you about God. If he was all knowing and all loving, why would
> he create something that would burn in hell for all eternity? We start to have
> problems then when people say that God loved us enough to have free will and
> make our own choices. It is that conundrum, that unexplainable, people can try
> but they end up confusing themselves. So that unanswerable question is what
> drove me away from Christianity.

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Kyle also explained the question of inconsistency that he is trying to solve. He stated,

> I feel like I haven't really resolved [my religion]. Maybe Catholicism is where
> I'm going to end up or is the best fit for me. I don't know. I wouldn't consider
> myself Atheist, or even a form of Atheism. I definitely have always believed in
> God and I feel like I have a good relationship with him, or her, or she, or
> whatever. I think finding that inconsistency or feeling like there is an
> inconsistency makes me question, and knowing that my sexuality is not
> something that is transient, or is going to change. It's static. It's with me. It's
> permanent. Realizing that there is some kind of a conflict between what I know in
> every cell of my body as opposed to what's being taught to me when I go to Mass.
> Finding an inconsistency has really made me hesitant and has made me really
> question where are the other inconsistencies if they exist? So now it's just become
> this overwhelming problem, not problem but something overwhelming to deal
> with. It feels exhausting; it's hard.

Similarly to Kyle's final statement that working through religious questions is exhausting, Alex explains that he has not had the energy to focus on religion. Currently he knows how he was raised, but he is focusing on the relationship with God rather than the church. He said,

> I believe in God. I believe, I could say, in most of the teachings that I grew up
> with, but I also believe that God made me the way I am and I have finally
> accepted that. I try to segment that part of the religion off; to believe that because
> I am this way and God made me this way and God loves everyone that he makes
> and that I am not damned for feeling this way. That is kind of where I stand on
> religion. It is just hard to put the two together because it was ingrained in me so

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hard that they are separate and that homosexuality just can't fit over on the
religious side. It is just really difficult for me to try to put the two pieces together.
I have problems spreading the word of God that I grew up with because that word
does not accept me. I don't view the church as a bad thing. I in no way dislike it
and have bad feelings towards it, I just haven't figured out where I sit with it. I
also grew up with the mentality that you take it all or you take nothing; you can't
just pick and choose.

Although Benjamin said that he was not sure what to call his current religio-spirituality,
he knew that he did not attend church or feel a connection with a church. Benjamin
stated, "I believe in God. I believe in heaven. I don't really believe in hell. I think you are
judged more by your actions as a human being more than who you love." This separation
of the individual's religio-spirituality from the church has allowed the above participants
the ability to retain their connection with a higher being without being ridiculed or
condemned by a church.

Summary

This chapter has given an overview of the participants involved in the research as well as
examined the three research questions proposed in chapter one. Answers for these research
questions were addressed through extensive quotes from various participants and overarching
themes were briefly discussed. The following chapter will examine and draw conclusions on
these themes as they relate to the literature and theories discussed in chapter two as well as
implications for practice in student affairs and counseling.

CHAPTER 5 - Discussion, Conclusions and Implications

Little has been written about religio-spirituality and the coming-out process for homosexual, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Although there has been limited research on faith development and sexual identity development as well as some research regarding the religious viewpoint of homosexual individuals, the current body of research has not examined the interaction of the coming-out process and religio-spiritual identity of the individual. This study is significant because it does fill the void in sexuality and religio-spirituality research.

This final chapter of this phenomenological study on religio-spirituality and the coming-out process includes a restatement of the research problem and methods used by the researcher, discussion of the results portrayed in chapter four in relation to research cited in the literature review, implications of the results, and areas of future research related to this study.

Restatement of Research Purpose, Methods, and Questions

As first discussed in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to describe and to understand religio-spirituality in the coming-out process for homosexual, bisexual, and transgender college students in the Midwest using a phenomenological design resulting in a picture of the coming-out process and its connection with an individuals' view of religio-spirituality. The three research questions guiding the study were as follows:

1. What have religious affiliations taught traditional college-aged lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students about homosexuality?

2. In what ways did a person's religio-spiritual life hinder/enhance the sexual identity development process and the coming-out process for a traditional college-aged student?

3. In what ways did the traditional college-aged lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) student's religio-spirituality change through the process?

Discussion and Implications of the Findings

The discussions of the findings are based upon the themes which emerged from the three research questions. Nine themes emerged: (1) societal influence on LGBT beliefs, (2) direct family influence on LGBT beliefs, (3) direct church influence on LGBT beliefs, (4) difficulty to merge sexuality and religio-spirituality, (5) feeling of guilt for being an LGBT individual, (6) religio-spirituality affecting when and to whom to come-out, (7) leaving the church after coming-out, (8) feeling a need to protect family still in church after coming-out, and (9) maintaining a relationship with God or higher being without a relationship in a church or religious institution.

Societal Influence on LGBT beliefs

The societal influence on what lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals heard about sexual identities other than heterosexuality was clear in the comments made by the participants in regards to politics, generalizations to larger groups, and things that they heard on a daily occurrence from no person in particular.

For some of the participants, they heard negative responses to homosexuality from political connections. Politicians have long been discussing homosexuality and as more

discussions are being held regarding marriage amendments, I do not see sexuality and politics being separated any time soon. As mentioned, the political realm entered into the church when church leaders encouraged parishioners to vote for certain people or to consider which politician would follow the previously stated religious beliefs and values. When those same individuals are seen at anti-gay demonstrations, it is an appropriate conclusion to draw that the church would also be in opposition to homosexuality.

This conclusion was sometimes inappropriately spread to the assumption that all Christians believe the same thing. Some of the participants concluded that all people in a particular denomination would believe the exact same thing and others thought that an entire faith would think the same thing. Although this is an inappropriate conclusion to draw, it does show how many individuals in society will view religious groups. Religious individuals are often categorized and even though there are common themes, ideas, and values, the church itself is made up of individuals with individual thoughts and beliefs.

For a large portion of the participants, they were able to explain what they had heard about homosexuality from society; yet, they were not able to directly determine where or when they might have heard it. In their youth, many could remember having homosexuality described negatively. Others recalled that all negative aspects of society were placed on homosexuals. If that was the case, why in the world would he choose to be homosexual? Others did mention the language choice of some people saying "That's so gay" or similar comments. With that statement having the negative connotation, being gay was perceived as negative.

There are several implications for student affairs administrators and those who work with college age students in regards to the societal influences on how the participants viewed homosexuality. For one participant, she noted that homosexuality is not often portrayed in the

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media. Romantic movies more than not portray heterosexual couples and even romantic novels are skewed to heterosexuality. Homosexual couples are not seen enough in the media or brought into discussion. Although student affairs professionals might not influence what media produces or what authors write, they can encourage all students to view homosexual friendly movies and to read homosexual friendly books through educational programs or social opportunities with students. The more students see homosexual couples, the more comfortable they may become with this minority.

A second implication is predominantly for the campus ministers. Several of the participants had heard that there were gay friendly religious groups on campus or within the community, but few knew what they were or how to contact them. Especially for those campus religious organizations that are open and accepting of homosexual and transgender students, these organizations should make this known more. Students should understand that they are accepted there. As one participant noted that his brother warned him of the rainbow stickers at a church, it is those rainbow stickers that can attract and make homosexuals feel comfortable. From a personal story of a transgender student who was not part of the participant sample, it was not until she saw the rainbow ally stick on my office door that she came in to introduce herself. The safe zone and safe environment must be advertised for students to feel comfortable.

The final implication for student leaders and student affairs professionals is to continually challenge inappropriate language. No longer is the childhood saying of "sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" true. For a homosexual, hearing "gay" used in a derogatory way is hurtful. Just as we can easily come up with very derogatory and hurtful words for nearly every minority and even majority, it is the leader's responsibility to educate those

using such terms about appropriate use of words and question how they might feel if they were called something derogatory.

Direct Family Influence on LGBT beliefs

Similarly to the information that each participant heard from societal influences, other participants heard negative thoughts about homosexuality from their family members. As family is often a source of strength and people that turn to in times of challenge and struggle, for many of the participants, their family became hindrances rather that supporters of their coming-out process.

From sending participants to boarding school to get help or insisting that they go to therapy to "get fixed," family members often reacted poorly initially and with time did warm up to the idea that their son or daughter was not heterosexual. For the families that were more religious, they would volunteer to pray for the participant or express their concern that the participant would not be admitted into heaven following death.

Aveline (2006) discussed some of this same struggle for the parents. He stated, "…when a young man tells his parents he is gay or when parents find out for themselves, they typically do not anticipate such news. If those parents had long lived with a heterosexual presumption for their son, they had most likely seen his growing years as either heterosexual by nature or heterosexual in potential" (p. 778). Following the coming-out process, the participants often entered into a time of rebuilding with their family. The time of college is often a difficult time for students and parents to get along anyway, and when a coming-out story is added, the stress increases.

The experiences of family influences on the coming-out also validate Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) theory that the outside influences affect the overall identity of an individual. For these participants, the family influence played a role in how they came-out as well and when they were comfortable in coming-out. In Hillier's (2002) article on young people coming-out to their parents, she wrote, "Same-sex-attracted young people are aware of their vulnerable position in the family as they struggle with their secret. Many are emotionally and financially dependent on their parents and few are making their own way in the world. They go over and over in their minds the scenarios that might unfold if and when they tell their parents, and many of them are afraid that they will lose their parents' love and support. Homophobic comments make potential rejection all the more real" (p. 80). As one suggestion, Ben-Ari (1995) wrote that parents should educate themselves when their children are young (prior to puberty) about sexual diversity so that they are better prepared should their son or daughter come-out to them as well as be cognizant of their actions and comments about sexuality during developmental years.

From the statements by the participants, two implications for families emerge. The first implication is that parents must be aware of how what they do and say while their child is young will affect the child through youth and young adult. If the parents are negative or not open to differences in sexuality or in any other aspect of the child's life, then the child will pick up on that and recall it later in life. Student affairs professionals can have an understanding of family background and family influence as well when they work with students.

A second suggestion for family is to explore the local PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbian and Gays). The mission of PFLAG is as follows: "PFLAG promotes the health and well-being of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons, their families and friends through: support, to cope with an adverse society; education, to enlighten an ill-informed

public; and advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights. Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation and gender identity, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity" (PFLAG, 2006). PFLAG can be a good support for parents and families to first understand what their son, daughter, sister, brother, or friend is going through as well as learn how to support his or her in a way that all involved feel comfortable.

Direct Church Influence on LGBT beliefs

Many of the thoughts that the participants heard directly from the church regarding sexuality were not surprising. Because many churches have doctrines which openly condemn homosexuality or homosexual persons, the participants did often hear that they would go to hell because they were homosexual or that they were not welcome in the church.

One finding from the participants was that the participants used their knowledge about different denominations and the doctrines of such denominations to compare one religion to another. Some felt that they were lucky to have been raised in the religion that they were raised in because it was known as a more accepting religion. Others thought about how their life would have been harder if they were in religions that adamantly opposed homosexuality. Because over one-third of the participants grew up with Catholic traditions, it was not surprising to have participants compare the Catholic faith with other traditions. Although those participants outside the Catholic faith did say that they thought they would have struggled more coming-out if their family had been Catholic, the participants who were Catholic did not see the religion being that strict. Many of the Catholic participants expressed that they were still loved by the Catholic Church, although the church disagreed with the actions of being homosexual.

I was not expecting during the interviews for participants to say that they had been removed from a church by others because of their sexuality. Although one participant, Jill, was removed from the church because of sexual actions with a male, she would have been removed for being a bisexual as well. Both Jill and Leslie's stories of being forced to leave a church do show the measures some religious institutions will go to uphold their doctrines.

Not surprising, many of the participants chose not to consult with a minister or other leader of a religious group regarding their sexuality. For many, they already know what the minister would say to them; therefore, why would they go to be condemned? For others, they still saw the religious leader as a source of guidance and support. In these occasions, the participants felt that they would still be respected as a person even if the religious doctrines condemned their actions. The ministerial response that some of the participants valued of gentle condemnation or even being a listening ear are strong implications to these results.

Those within the religious realm as well as student affairs professionals might be called upon as a counselor or guide in times of struggle for anyone. For the individuals searching to balance their sexual feelings with the religious doctrines might come to campus ministers or other leaders in the church. It is imperative that when such discussions occur the minister or professional maintain the caring and compassionate role. Several of the participants discussed that some of the Catholic priests they had had conversations with did not say anything horrible nor did they place judgment on the individual.

Difficulty to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality

Probably the most discussed theme through the current study was the difficulty to merge the religio-spiritual identity and the sexual identity. For many, they felt as if they were living two

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lives. These two lives conflicted with each other and some chose to attempt to keep them shielded from each other and live two lives while others struggled to determine which identity was more important to them. The internal fight that several participants discussed showed the intense mental challenge it was for those participants who had heard since they were young that homosexuality was wrong and inappropriate in the religious setting.

This internal conflict could be one of the hurdles to overcome before completing their coming-out. Their religio-spirituality is and had been a part of their being since a child, yet their new-found feelings of sexuality disagreed with their previous religio-spirituality. Depending on the specific religion of each participant determined the length of time this struggle continued as well as what their ultimate decision to resolve the conflict was.

Any internal conflict can be detrimental to one's self esteem and self worth. This was seen in some of the participants' comments about depression or even thoughts about hurting oneself. This internal conflict is similar to the intrinsic forces that Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, and Hecker (2001) discussed. Mahaffy (1996) and Barret and Barzan (1996) had also speculated that for some homosexuals, their identity as a religious being was not compatible with their sexuality.

Cass (1979) made mention in discussion of the second stage of the coming-out process for homosexual individuals that there can be a feeling of isolation. Just as one participant said that he shut the door between himself as a gay male and himself as a Christian male, Cass explained that during stage two it was common for individuals to compartmentalize their thoughts.

Overall, all participants had a struggle of some sort when coming-out. Twelve of the 15 participants cited some difficulty in terms of merging. Many saw that they were being forced to live two lives. In order to merge the two lives, they had to often change or adapt their religio-

spiritual identity, or in two participants case, lie to keep their sexuality hidden. It was a struggle for some to face the religion that had been a sense of leadership in their life through adolescent years.

This difficulty to merge the two areas of ones life gives the most impactful implication for both those who are coming-out as well as those in the supporter role. The implication is the recognition of this struggle for counselors and student affairs professionals who may be some of the first persons to whom an individual comes-out. When a counselor or other professional is able to recognize that it is common for students coming-out to struggle with the merging of religio-spirituality and sexuality, the counselor can seek to assist them and also listen to them. Understanding that it is common for religio-spiritual persons who are homosexual to have this difficulty to merge can also be very beneficial to those going through the coming-out process. At a time in their life where they might feel rejected or that they are having thoughts no one else is having, knowing that they are not alone can be very beneficial.

Based on this information, it is important for more writing and research to be published about how the students were able to merge. It is clear that they had difficultly and from other comments from the participants in this study, the final decision to merge was done by rejecting the church or developing an independent religio-spiritual identity with a higher being without institutional support. As more research is conducted on what the religio-spirituality is of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals later in their lives, the responses can give those going through the coming-out process options or directions that they might want to also explore.

Feeling of Guilt for Being an LGBT Individual

Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker (2001) stated that the coming-out process could be joined with the guilt, self-hate, depression, and rejection from family, friends, and society. This feeling of guilt was seen through the participants in this research. For some, they felt not only guilty, but ashamed of who they were and their sexuality. When D'Augelli (1994) explained the second process that a lesbian, gay or bisexual individual must go through in the coming-out process, he said that this process often contains the time of challenging any pre-conceived myths about the LGBT population. During this challenge process is when some of these participants felt the guilt and shame.

Participants in the research explained that they sometimes felt the guilt not of necessarily being gay themselves, but they felt guilt placed upon them from family members and church friends. Jill explained how she did feel guilt because she was hurting God and others were embarrassments to their parents and families. This guilt hindered participants such as Amanda from telling her parents that she was bisexual.

The depression that four of the participants experienced was a difficult topic for them to discuss. Brett and Peter in particular explained the deepness of their depression. For Brett, his depression was a daily occurrence that he struggled with. Peter decided to handle his depression by wearing dark clothing and cutting himself. Only two participants discussed that they did not have guilt. It is important to mention in this discussion; however, with the large majority of the participants discussing the guilt as guilt, shame, discomfort, or stress and anxiety, it is clear to the researcher that it is a strong potential for other individuals coming-out to have this same experience or feeling.

Overall, the guilt, anxiety, depression, and discomfort show the impact that the coming-out process had on the cognitive thought process for many of the participants. Kohlberg's (1986) second level, conventional, explains the pressure of group norms and the supremacy of such norms. For the individuals to work through the guilt that these participants felt, they had to move through this cognitive process into post conventional where they could clarify their own moral rules and principles. They could individually determine whether homosexuality was good or bad without the input from society.

The participants' experiences with guilt lead to implications for student affairs professionals and others working with college students. The first is to make sure resources are abundant and available for those coming-out. Understanding that the coming-out process can have stages of depression or guilt, not only brought upon by religion, the individuals need to know of counseling services or safe places to discuss their feelings. Peter did mention cutting himself, and although many students are cutters to make them feel less depressed or feel like they are a real person, self-harm is not an appropriate or safe way to work through depression. Resources about depression and how to work through depression must be made known to students.

A second implication follows the idea that the guilt occurs because homosexuality is not seen in media or not seen as a normal part of society. Sexuality cannot be a taboo topic of conversation. Just as religio-spirituality is becoming more discussed in public institutions and with students on college campuses, sexuality must also be discussed. The more the topic is discussed, the more comfortable students will feel about the subject and may not feel the guilt that has been associated with the coming-out process.

The final implication deals with education and challenging students to develop their own thoughts. From Kohlberg's (1986) theory, the students must move from conventional thinking to post-conventional. In working with the students, professionals must challenge the student's ideas and thoughts and seek verification for such thoughts in order to encourage the student to think for himself. Once the student has thought for himself, the guilt from society cannot and will not affect the student to the degree that several of the participants discussed.

Religio-Spirituality Affecting When and to Whom to Come-out

Many of the participants told their friends that they were gay, lesbian, or bisexual before they approached the subject with their family. Some felt a comfort with their friends because they already knew what their response would be while others chose to tell their friends first incase they did lose friends. They would rather lose friends instead of losing a family member. Some participants still have not told their families or various people in their family because of the viewpoints that they hold, or more importantly the language that they use.

The use of language was a large factor in participants deciding who, when and why to come-out. One participant in particularly did explain that hearing someone say "that's so gay" would turn him off from even saying "hi" to that individual, let alone come-out to him. The use of strongly religious language also turned participants away from coming-out. Several participants discussed assumptions that they had that all Christians would be against them because of their individual previous experiences with Christians. These, although faulty, assumptions that the religious background determined the viewpoint on gays and lesbians for all involved, hindered several individuals to come-out while in college.

The final factor in coming-out was a level of comfort for the individual. Many of the participants discussed that they planned out how they would approach the subject with their friends and their family. When things did not always go as planned, they were often flustered and asked internally for the conversation to stop until they were ready.

The first implication for practice from the theme of when, why, and who to come-out to is to understand that language greatly influences people. The language that we choose to use on a daily basis even when we think that no one is listening might affect someone around us. Using derogatory words might turn someone away from coming-out to us, even though they might be a close friend.

Some of the participants mentioned in their interviews that some of their friends said that it was not a surprise that they had come-out and that they were excited that they finally came-out. Sometimes close friends or family members will recognize that an individual is gay, lesbian, or bisexual before the individual is ready to admit it to himself. As a supporter, the student affairs professional should be patient and continue to acknowledge the worth of the individual through the time that the individual may still be denying that he is gay. The continued support will continue to build trust and respect so that the comfort level will be increased for when they do come-out.

Leaving the Church After Coming-out

As an attempt to resolve the difficulty to merge religio-spirituality and sexual identities, several of the participants left the church. Connected to both the themes of merging as well as developing a relationship with God away from the church, leaving the church was sometimes a more intentional move by the participants. For two participants, they intentionally did not

complete the needed requirements for confirmation, their first step in removing themselves form the church. By doing it in such a way that their parents thought that they were just falling behind on completing paperwork for the church, the participants were not required to explain to their parents the real reasons that they did not want to be confirmed.

Not all participants left the church on their own accord. Jill and Leslie were removed from their church because of their actions. As much as the churches teach about spreading love and encouragement to each other, these two women were not following the doctrines of the church and were told to leave.

Feeling a Need to Protect Family Still in Church After Coming-out

The participants' comments showed that several participants felt a necessity to continue to respect and protect their family members. They protected them from embarrassment in the church and respected them for their beliefs and ideas of the importance of church attendance. The protection of family in the church was a respect for the family values, but they also attended church to often protect their family from embarrassment. The embarrassment would come if one of their children began not coming to church with them or if the church members found out that one of their children was gay. The participants knew that this could embarrass their family and could cause more problems within the family.

The implication for practice within this theme is again the knowledge of the influence that the family has on the individual. The history and family influence is the filter in which individuals create their own identity. Although it might be difficult for some to think about the respect that individuals show to their family even when they have might have been shunned by those same individuals or ridiculed because of their sexuality, the family is still a strong unit for

the participants. This continued respect can be seen as an attempt to continue to develop

integration as Coleman (1982) explained. The homosexual individual seeks to build relationships

of trust and respect as the sexual identity is integrated into the other identities of life.

Maintaining a Relationship with God or Higher Being without a Relationship in a Church or Religious Institution

Following the stages of both Fowler (1981) and Parks (2000) in faith development, the

participants struggled to combine their sexuality with their church connection; therefore, they

began to develop a more personal relationship with God or a higher being outside the institution

of the church. Fowler claimed that the fourth stage of faith development can be a stage of

turmoil. It is during this fourth stage that the individual begins to make their faith and beliefs a

personal idea rather than something told to them by an institution. As was seen in this research,

the participants made the decision to develop the personal connection.

Parks (2000) also discussed making faith and beliefs personal in the tested adult and final

mature adult stage. Within these stages, Parks describes and affirmation of oneself and the

beliefs. Faith for individuals in these stages becomes more individualized. Although Parks does

not necessarily state that the individuals will leave a faith institution, it is not beyond the realm of

opportunities for such to occur.

Separating the institution of the church with the belief in a higher being or God is one

way that the participants concluded how to merge their religio-spirituality and their sexuality. As

discussed previously, many of the participants found a difficulty in trying to merge their two

identities. This idea provides one strong implication of this research that is recognition of faith

development without church involvement. For some participants, they noted that they have a

stronger faith following coming-out because they had to examine what they really believed or thought.

The overall implication from this theme is recognition of faith development without a church. Just as Parks (2000) and Fowler (1981) developed their theories of faith development absent from a specific religion, this is recognition of the differences between religious doctrines and faith. Just as several of the participants have continued to develop a relationship with a god or higher being without a church, it is important for student affairs professionals to understand and appreciate that the student's religio-spirituality may not be connected to a specific doctrine. The religio-spirituality of the individual is what works for each individual. As Amanda discussed with the researcher, she has pulled various ideas and components from a wide range of traditions to create what she views as her religio-spirituality.

Overall Implications for Student Affairs Administrators

As discussed previously, there are several implications for student affairs administrators from this research. Overall, all of the implications can be used by administrators in educating the students that they work with in appropriate language usage as identity development. Administrators must maintain the caring and compassionate role as students come-out to them. As partnerships are formed with parent groups on campus and with religious organizations through campus ministries, the knowledge of identity struggle and multiple identity development will assist the student affairs professional in working with the student and explaining to outside constituents what the students are going through.

Essence of the Coming-Out Process

These nine conclusions develop the essence of the coming-out process and religio-spirituality. Individuals in the coming-out process find themselves at a divide in their lives and they must decide which path to follow or attempt to make the paths intersect. The coming-out process is often an internal debate of whether they are LGBT, whether to come-out, and whether they should leave a church or change religio-spirituality. Aspects of this struggle and internal turmoil emerged in the data from this study.

Recommendations for Future Study

As mentioned in chapter one of this document, little research has been conducted on sexuality and religio-spirituality, in particularly the coming-out process and religio-spirituality. This research has set the groundwork for more research. Although data saturation occurred, this research study did have only 15 participants. It is important for more research to be done in the future in regards to sexuality and religio-spirituality.

One suggested topic of study is to talk to the parents of those students who have come-out and who also have a strong religio-spirituality. As was seen in this research, the parents' belief in many church doctrines hindered the coming-out process of the participant. It would be interesting to know if the parents were aware of the influence they were having, either positively or negatively on their son or daughter prior to them coming-out.

A second area for expansion in this topic would be to interview participants of various specific religious backgrounds. By desegregating the individuals who associated their youth with various denominations, the researcher might be able to see trends through the denominations. It

would be interesting to see if the guilt or struggle of coming-out increased as the condemnation of homosexuality increased across the various religious traditions.

A third research topic is to examine the school history of the participants. Several of the participants in this research study attended religiously affiliated high schools. For those individuals, they made note that they knew they would not be welcome or accepted in their school. For one individual, it was not until he moved to the public high school that he came-out to friends. A strong research study would not only examine those individuals who attended a religiously affiliated high school, but also those who attended a religiously affiliated college or university prior to while coming-out.

This research sets the groundwork for a fourth research area using mixed-methods or quantitative research methods. Through development of an instrument, this topic can be examined on a larger scale to understand regional differences.

Theoretical Framework Revisited

Looking back briefly on the two theories that framed this study, Halpern's (1998) Four Faces and Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) Multiple Dimensions of Identity Model, the results of this research support both. Both theories state that there is an overlapping of identities and for a person to be successful in oneself, the identities overlapping must not be at conflict. The work found in this research discusses that overlapping of the religio-spirituality as well as the sexual identity and the ways the students attempted to merge the two identities. With Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) added dimension of external influences, this research again supported their findings of family and societal influences shaping identity and thoughts of identity.

Summary

This chapter has examined the nine themes which emerged in relation to the three research questions for this phenomenological research study on religio-spirituality and the coming-out process of college-age gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals. In each theme, the researcher has inserted thoughts and ideas as well as tied it back to some of the current literature surrounding various identity developments. The researcher has also given the reader several suggestions for future research to enhance this study and to broaden the literature of sexuality and religio-spirituality.

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Appendix A - Participants

Pseudonyms	Age	Gender	Sexual Identity	Religio-Spiritual Affiliation Growing Up	Current Religio-Spiritual Affiliation
Sam	31	Male	Gay	United Methodist	Christian, but not attending a local church
Kelly	22	Male	Transgender	ELCA Lutheran	Active in an ELCA Lutheran Church
Jill	21	Female	Bisexual	Unificationist	"Anti-religion" and "anti-dogma"
Kyle	24	Male	Gay	Catholic	Believes in God, but unsure of affiliation
Sarah	22	Female	Lesbian	Methodist	Attends a Mormon Church, buts sees herself as non-religious and not believing in God
Leslie	22	Female	Lesbian	Mormon	Attends a Mormon church, but is non-religious
Brett	25	Male	Gay	Presbyterian and Non-Denominational Christian	Believes in a higher power, but no real religion.
Julie	23	Female	Bisexual	Catholic	No organized beliefs and has "rejected any

					kind of man-made philosophies"
Tony	21	Male	Gay	Methodist	Christian, attends United Methodist Church ("not as strong as I wish it would be")
Mike	20	Male	Gay	Catholic	Relationship with God, but has dissociated the church and God
Peter	19	Male	Gay	Catholic and Baptist	Believes there is a God and afterlife, but does not attend a church
Amanda	19	Female	Bisexual	ELCA Lutheran	Atheistic, but has picked up on some Confucianism and Marxism ideas
Alex	22	Male	Gay	Nazarene	Believes in God, but does not believe in an organized religion
Jason	21	Male	Gay	Catholic	Still Catholic, but understands he might have to leave the Catholic church when he has a partner and wants to begin a family.
Benjamin	21	Male	Gay	Catholic	Believes in God and heaven, but not in hell.

Appendix B - Consent Form

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT

PROJECT TITLE: Religion and the Coming-out Process

APPROVAL DATE OF PROJECT: Spring 2007   **EXPIRATION DATE OF PROJECT:** May 2008

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: CO-INVESTIGATOR(S):   Judy Hughey / Camilla Jones

CONTACT AND PHONE FOR ANY PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: jhughey@ksu.edu, 785-532-5527

IRB CHAIR CONTACT/PHONE INFORMATION: Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Jerry Jaax, Associate Vice Provost for Research Compliance and University Veterinarian, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH: The purpose of this study is to describe and understand the role of religion and spirituality in the coming-out process for homosexual individuals in the Midwest using a case study design resulting in a picture of the coming-out process and the role spirituality plays in it. The research will examine also the various doctrines and dogmas associated with various religions that might play a factor in the coming-out process.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED: Research will take place through semi-structured interviews of multiple self-identified lesbian and gay individuals. Participants will be solicited via a local homosexual support and ally program in a Midwest community. Each interview will be approximately one hour in length with the potential for follow-up questions at a later time. Through the interview, the participants will be asked a series of questions to explain their own story of the coming-out process and how religion and spirituality did or did not play a role in the process. Ethnographic research will also take place to examine the official points of view of various mainstream religious denominations to assist in the understanding of how religion or lack of religion can play a factor in the coming-out process.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

Each Kansas State University student will have the option to attend counseling through the K-State Counseling Center free of charge up to four sessions per academic year. An on-call counselor is also available for each student.

LENGTH OF STUDY: May 2007 – May 2008

RISKS ANTICIPATED: No risks are anticipated as the participants have self-selected themselves and are comfortable in sharing their coming-out process. If any, the risk of thinking about a rough time in their life would come about, but that is not anticipated.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED: Participants will be able to think about how their think that religion and spirituality played in their own life. The research will also benefit future persons through the coming-out process to understand another aspect and transition that must take place through the process.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY: Upon transcription of the data, no names will be used and no descriptive data about individuals will be reported in the results.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS: Counseling is available if needed.

PARENTAL APPROVAL FOR MINORS: N/A

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is completely voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant)

Participant Name:

Participant Signature

Date:

Witness to Signature: (project staff)   Date:

Appendix C - Letter to Participants

September 1, 2007
Dear Participant,

    We are inviting you to participate in a research project to study the process you experienced "coming-out" or revealing your sexual identity as a lesbian, gay, or bisexual adult. This process will be studied in context of your religious history.

    If you choose to participate, the interviewer, Camilla Jones, will interview you for approximately one hour with the potential for arranging a subsequent follow-up interview. The follow-up could of a result of questions or issues raised during initial interviews conducted after your interview is completed. The results of this project will be used to assist counselors of individuals who have identified their sexual identity as homosexual in addition to organized religious groups, understand the relationship between sexual identity and religious identity. Through your participation, we invite you to share and welcome hearing your coming-out story and your thoughts on the role and context religion may or may not have played in this process.

    Although we are not aware of any apparent severe risks to participants in this project, safeguards have been implemented for the anonymity and protection of all participants. These safeguards include, survey result data will be reported only as anonymous data with names never being reported. Interviews will be recorded but names will not be associated with the recording to anyone other than the investigators. The digital recordings will be professionally erased using professional erasing equipment in the Catalyst of the College of Education.

    Any minor risk that would occur might be related to feeling anxious or uncomfortable with certain questions. Should any project participant feel anxiety or a need to visit a professional counselor following the project interview, material accompanying this letter explains the process arrange for an appointment. Any student enrolled at Kansas State University may receive four free counseling sessions at the Kansas State University Counseling Center. In addition, provided with this letter is other information related to counseling services available in the community. Mercy Health Center also has a behavioral health center. Please refer to the resource sheet attached to this letter for further details. Please note: you may call Dr. Judy Hughey at her office, 532-5527 or 532-5542 or at home 537-1623 anytime you have a question or concern.

    Again, your participation in this project is strictly voluntary. During the interview, if at anytime you feel uncomfortable or wish to conclude the interview you may do so. Following the interview, you will be sent your transcription to review for accuracy. Should you have question or concerns, you are encouraged to contact the interviewer for clarification and/or correction.

    Thank you for considering assisting us in this important and groundbreaking research project. The sharing of your story will assist counselors to be better skilled in counseling others who may struggle with these important life-changing events.

    Sincerely,
    Dr. Judy K. Hughey

Appendix D - Resource Sheet

Counseling and Other Services

Resource Information

Kansas State University Counseling Services
232 English/Counseling Services Building
Manhattan, KS 66506-6503
785-532-6927
Fax: 785-532-3932
Email: counsel@ksu.edu
> Monday - Friday, 8:00 am - 5:00 pm during school sessions.
> Monday - Friday, 8:00 am - 12:00 pm and 1:00 pm - 5:00 pm during school breaks.

Mercy Regional Health Center
Behavioral Health Services
1823 College Avenue
Manhattan, KS 66502
785-776-2834

Pawnee Mental Health Services
2001 Claflin Street
Manhattan KS 66502
785-587-4361
Hotline: (800) 609-2002

Appendix E - Interview Questions

Guiding Interview Questions

Religion and the Coming-out Process

Demographic Questions

Age:

Race:

Gender:

What is your sexual identity?

What does the term "coming-out" mean to you?

What age were you when you came-out?

What prompted you to come-out?

Would you tell me your coming-out story?

What does the term "religion" mean to you?

Please think to what you define as your coming-out process and explain what religious
group(s) you may have been a part of at that time, if any?

What role do you see that group playing in your process?

Were there others who impacted the coming-out process in a way that was related to
religion?

If so, in what did those individuals or groups impact your coming-out?

Was your religious identity the same prior to coming-out as it was after coming-out?

How would you explain any change in your religion through the process?

What are some things you have heard from others about what various religions say about
homosexuality?

How did hearing that affect your coming-out process?

What question, if any, should I have asked to better understand religion and your coming-
out process?

Appendix F - Coding Categories

S – Societal Influence on LGBT beliefs
> "They may have never said blatantly that they were against it, but I just got the feeling and I began to see people in the church who were active in the community on different issues against gays and lesbians and so I associated that everyone in the church was."

F – Direct Family Influence on LGBT beliefs
> "We are praying for you. You are not going to make it to heaven. We want to see you when you die. We don't want you to go to hell."

C – Direct Church Influence on LGBT beliefs
>   C-D – Doctrines from the Church Influencing LGBT Beliefs
>   > "I can't be gay, but I have to be basically a celibate priest and live a priest life and be by myself and be miserable, and I don't understand that."
>   C-M – Ministerial Teaching Influencing LGBT Beliefs
>   > "I know exactly how my pastor feels because of all the sermons that I have sat through my entire life."
>   C-B – Biblical Text Influencing LGBT Beliefs
>   > "There are some people that claim that homosexuality is mentioned in the Bible 18 times and condemned."

M – Difficulty to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality
> "Religion is the last thing that I have tried to deal with. I believe in God. It is so engrained in me, how I grew up, it's just hard for me think about it."
>   M-L – Lying in order to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality
>   > "I am actually in the church right now, but they do not know we are gay."
>   M-B – Turning to the Bible for Assistance to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality
>   > "I went there, grabbed the Bible, and got back in the car and drove north."
>   M-S – Strengthening Religio-Spirituality in order to Merge with Sexuality
>   > "It's different; I guess I'm more aware of my religion…Now I've actually made it a point to know what is the thing that I profess to believe in."
>   M-R – Maintaining Respect for the Institution of the Church when Unable to Merge Sexuality and Religio-Spirituality
>   > "That's probably why my views on gay marriage don't actually support gay marriage. Civil unions are fine; marriage to me is a religious term."

G – Feeling of Guilt for Being an LGBT Individual
> "Occasionally I will feel really guilty about the way I live and I don't think that feeling would be there if I hadn't been told that since I was little."
>   G-U – Feeling of Discomfort for Being an LGBT Individual

"I don't think I would feel comfortable, I would not feel comfortable going back after this and if I had a partner, taking him and introducing…"

G-N – Feeling of No Guilt for Being an LGBT Individual
"I don't think I ever had any guilt. I think I always felt that being gay was something that was out of my control."

G-S – Feeling of Stress and Anxiety for Being an LGBT Individual
"I got really depressed about myself all the time, didn't want to participate in any school activities."

W – Religio-Spirituality Affecting When and to Whom to Come-out
"…but I knew it would not be acceptable for me to say anything so I just kind of kept quiet."

L – Leaving the Church After Coming-out
"I don't consider myself Catholic anymore."

P – Feeling a Need to Protect Family Still in Church After Coming-out
"They don't want it publicly, like on Facebook, because my brother's still at home."

R – Maintaining a Relationship with God or Higher Being without a Relationship in a Church or Religious Institution
"It kind of goes on my personal hierarchy of what it comes to as far as what is important to me and that is God is first, but it's not God and the church, it's God"

Appendix G - Letter to Priest from Participant Mike

Ok, here we go: I'm here because I haven't gone to communion for quite awhile, and my church attendance has been more spotty recently, but it's more about the communion. I was taught in PSR [Public School Religion] that you're not supposed to go to communion if you have a mortal sin on your soul. Not exactly knowing what a mortal sin was for sure excepting killing some one, I knew that one was for certain, I've always generally judged my ability to receive the Eucharist on a week to week basis. You know, if I had gotten really drunk the night before or did something else I probably shouldn't have, then I wouldn't go that week, but if the next week I knew I had behaved better, which created a general feeling of ableness to receive the Eucharist, I would go, without have reconciliation in between the two times. Now, that goes against what I was taught in PSR, but what do you think of that? Ok, so why I have gone for several weeks in a row that I've attended mass, at several different churches, and with several different feelings of whether I should receive the Eucharist based on my behavior from the prior night and week, and I haven't participated in communion, is because I'm not sure I'm in communion with the church anymore, and that's what I'm here about. First off, I've disagreed with the church's positions and policies on different issues for a number of years. Mainly in the area of contraception, but also on smaller details of things—but I've always, even though I've disagreed, at least respected the Catholic Church for in most circumstances having some kind of principle to guide our beliefs. As in why it disagrees with contraception is the same reason why it disagrees with homosexuality and masturbation. Or the life principle, it's against abortion, but also against the death penalty, positions on opposite sides of the American political spectrum. And finally, it's pragmatism in regards to evolution. But while I've disagreed with the Church, especially in regards to

contraception, I guess I've also always known that while I may dissent from the church's position, it's quite easy to do that privately, and not such an issue where people can't get around it and do many times. I believe the church's position doesn't help relieve the HIV/AIDS epidemic, deal with the millions of abortions that occur around the world every year, or stop the spread of many other STD's, but generally the church's position doesn't win out in most practice and reality. But I'm gay and the church's position on homosexuality does win out in the wider world by a very wide margin. I oppose it, almost completely, and it's not just a passive opposition. I can't passively oppose it when I've accepted that its affect on me is not something that I can ignore or suppress without seriously harming who I am and limiting who I want to be. Not only that, but the affect the church's policy has on the millions of people in similar circumstance as I, which gives me a certain bond with them, I cannot stand to idly allow to continue. It is my understanding that the church pragmatically agrees that homosexuality is not a disorder, but at the same time, the church asks that homosexuals suppress who they are, and never allows them to grow in the experience of finding and sustaining a healthful monogamous relationship with a person that they are capable of fully loving. The church opposes rights for homosexuals so much that it emboldens the more extreme anti-homosexual elements in their outright hate of homosexual men and women. In many societies, and I'm sure it still happens here in the United States, especially in the more conservative areas, this leads to suicide, especially among teenagers, adult pathologies, and hate crimes, which especially outside of the United States, can mean murder and even sometimes officially sanctioned murder and torture. This intolerance and prejudice also can be blamed on creating the same aspects of the "gay lifestyle" that fundamentalist churches actually use as examples of the immorality of homosexuality. I do not believe that young women and men would be as inclined to experiment

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with drugs and alcohol, engage in promiscuous and unprotected sex—many times with partners much older than they are—and in general, subject themselves to the dangers they do, if they only felt more accepted in their families, communities, and churches for who they are. The point is, instead of it being the "gay lifestyle" that created all the problems such as the disproportionately high rate of gays with HIV/AIDS, the high drug use in parts of the community, and the promiscuity, it is actually the intolerant fundamentalist aspects of our culture that created the "gay lifestyle" that is to blame. The same aspects that are none to credit with the amazing amount of stability and good that many gays and their families have been able to establish. So, in conclusion, I'm Gay and it is my hope that I will change the positions the church holds against me and people like me, and in the mean time, I morally feel I should work against the church, and to a certain extent, to be happy and a fulfilled human being, I will have to live in defiance of the church, when hopefully I find a partner to fully share my love with. I do want to be a Catholic; I've realized how much it's a part of who I am, even if it can hurt me. Not just being born in it, but for many other features of it that I have appreciated, or at least come to appreciate over the years. Also, I have not come-out to my parents, much in order to protect them and not add to some of the issues they are already dealing with, although I will hopefully talk to my mom before the summer is over.