

COMPARING SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT THEORY TO HOMOSEXUAL  
IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT THEORY

by

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## **Abstract**

Maintaining identities of being a Christian and a lesbian or gay has traditionally in mainstream society been considered to be an oxymoron. Yet upon review, a large number of homosexuals profess to be Christians and find strength in their faith. The purpose of this report is create a hypothesis that is developed as a result of a literature review and informal interviews on the identity development and synthesis that occurs for lesbians and gays in the areas of homosexual identity and spiritual identity.

To accomplish this task a comparison was made between Anthony D'Augelli's Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Development (1994) and Sharon Daloz Parks Spirituality Development Theory (1986, 2000). Within the confines of this report, key attention was paid to examining whether the developmental critical paths for each area can be visually constructed as parallel lines with independent critical paths occurring simultaneously, if there is only a one line with a singular critical path or if one critical path intersects the other and therefore certain development stage(s) of one model must be completed before the individual can progress in the other model.

Findings revealed that in most cases individuals did not move simultaneously on the two developmental paths. Rather, it was necessary for most individuals to be high on either the spiritual identity development model or high on the homosexual identity development model in order to move forward on the other with the goal being to gain a reconciliation between the two identities.

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## **CHAPTER 1 - The History of Homosexuality and its Relationship to the Christian Religion**

Some of the earliest examples of homosexuals are documented in letters and documents written by the Greeks. In the Greek society, homosexuality especially among men was considered common place. Many writings openly discussed the relationships of men with men in a language that implied inclusiveness and acceptance (Boswell, 1994). Religiously and spiritually, the Greeks subscribed to the mythical Greek gods. From a point of doctrine it is interesting to compare the fact that the Greeks worshiped gods who had much strength and influence but were not infallible nor were any of them the Supreme Being (Rose, 1991). By comparison, Christianity is based on the concept of a triune Godhead that is uncreated, all-pervading, omnipotent and all knowing (Boswell, 1994).

During the time of Jesus Christ, the Roman Empire controlled the world set of societal norms. The Roman influence did not necessarily subscribe to a specific religion; thus, multiple religions were practiced at this time. Societal norms were set by the Romans. Homosexuality in the Roman world was accepted more as a practice than a lifestyle. Wealthy young men were often provided a male concubine to keep them company and allow them to exert their sexual energy during their adolescence prior to marriage. The practice is documented in marriage agreements where the husband is forbidden to have concubines of either gender after entering the marriage. The Romans valued virility and manliness. Therefore, society welcomed the idea of the man being the penetrator but not necessarily the penetrated. Despite what would imply at least a passive

acceptance of homosexuality in the Roman world, the same acceptance did not apply to lesbians (Boswell, 1994). Female homosexuals were written about in a very negative connotation. Women, at the time, were considered property, therefore, any woman who exhibited a will of her own even if it was related to her sexuality was viewed as abnormal. Given this connotation it is hard to fully evaluate the Roman philosophy on lesbianism (Dunn, 1998).

In 36 A.D. Christianity was born following the death of Jesus Christ. Unlike the Greek and Roman societies that preceded the emergence of the Christian society, Christians valued celibacy because they viewed it as being Christlike. For many women, involvement in the church and the celibacy that came with that was a form of power. No longer were they sexually controlled by men (Boswell, 1994).

Laws at this time did not prohibit homosexual activity. In fact court documents show the only cases involving homosexual conduct are related to the events surrounding the conduct, such as the rape of a nonslave or a child, than the fact that it was a homosexual act. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian society had experienced a number of tumultuous occurrences including plagues, famine, tornados, and other natural disasters. In response to the frequency of these occurrences, many Christian leaders became convinced that these things were happening due to acceptance of homosexuality. At this point in time, laws were developed outlawing sodomy and homosexual acts (Boswell, 1994).

For more than 700 years, most Christians have viewed homosexuals as sinners and perverts. It was the Christian cultural dominance of the United States that influenced

the American Psychological Association and other major mental health organizations into calling homosexuality a mental disorder until 1972 (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008).

Today Christianity finds itself in three distinct categories regarding homosexuality (Hodge, 2005). The first category, which I will call the conservative Christian category, continues to rebuke homosexuals and homosexual behavior. The basis for their beliefs is the literal interpretation of the passages in the Bible that condemn homosexuality. Religious groups falling into this category are highly involved in political agendas and attempt to pass laws that disallow any kind of same-sex marriage or partnership. Likewise, they fight to block nondiscrimination clauses that include sexual orientation or gender identity. They offer conversion therapy or ostracism for their members who come out as being homosexual (Hodge, 2005).

The second category, which I will call the moderate Christian category, is less engaged in political actions. This group firmly believes that homosexual conduct is wrong, but holds onto the concept of “love the sinner, hate the sin.” They believe in a more liberal interpretation of the Bible, but still believe that it is the Word of God. Their belief is that homosexuals should be valued and accepted if they maintain a celibate lifestyle (Hodge, 2005).

Liberal Christians, which are the final group, have accepted homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle and provide a welcoming and affirming venue for lesbians and gays. Many of the liberal Christian denominations openly ordain lesbian and gay ministers. The liberal Christian group feels that the Bible is to be a guideline for them to follow but that it was written hundreds of years ago and cannot directly address the complex social situations of today. Several of the churches found in the liberal group are churches that



were specifically established to minister to the gay and lesbian community while others have evolved into acceptance of the homosexual community (Hodge, 2005).

In multiple research studies on homosexuals, a significant number of study participants reported to either have been or currently are involved in an organized religious community (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005; Maher, 2007; Tozer & Hayes, 2004). Given the history of dissidence between the Christian church and the homosexual community and the number of homosexuals with religious community involvement, it is no wonder that gays and lesbians often experience severe emotional challenges as they are moving through their homosexual developmental process. It also raises the question of how lesbians and gays reconcile their homosexual development with their spiritual development.

The purpose of this report is to develop a hypothesis that is supported by a literature review and quasi-semi-structured interviews. The focus will be to compare the on the identity development and synthesis that occurs for gays and lesbians in the areas of homosexual identity and spiritual/religiosity identity and to report congruencies and disparities. To accomplish this task a comparison will be made between Anthony D'Augelli's Model of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Development (D'Augelli, 1994) and Sharon Daloz Parks Spirituality Development Theory (Parks, 1986; Parks, 2000). Within the confines of this report, key attention will be paid to examining whether the developmental critical paths for each area can be visually constructed as parallel lines with independent critical paths occurring simultaneously, if there is only one line with a singular critical path, or if one critical path intersects the other such that certain

development stage(s) of one model must be completed before the individual can progress in the other model.

## **CHAPTER 2 - Spiritual and Homosexual Identity Development Theories**

### **D'Augelli Lesbian and Gay Development Theory**

In 1994, Anthony D'Augelli disputed the then standing development theory put forth by Vivienne Cass some 10 years prior D'Augelli did not agree that homosexual identity development occurred in sequential steps. Instead, D'Augelli considers homosexual development to be a lifelong developmental process which individuals would flow in and out of, depending on feelings, beliefs and circumstances at the time. In support of his theory D'Augelli drew parallels to two other psychological developmental theories (1994). The existential theory perspective (Corey, 2005) ascertains that no two people will walk the same path and, therefore, we are who we choose to be. The cognitive behavior theory (Corey, 2005) contends that people react differently to circumstances and make cognitive choices. As he intertwined these two theories into his homosexual development theory, D'Augelli characterized the identity of being homosexual as a hidden identity that could be concealed whenever the person chose (D'Augelli, 1994).

D'Augelli (1994) identified six development processes involved in gay or lesbian development:

1. Exiting heterosexual identity

2. Developing a personal homosexual identity status
3. Developing a homosexual social identity
4. Becoming a homosexual offspring
5. Developing a homosexual intimacy status
6. Entering a homosexual community

D'Augelli's development model (1994) is considered to describe a lifelong process in which individuals move forward and backward within the model and in varying directions within a given stage of the model. The process of exiting heterosexual identity is embedded in the fact that society as a whole is heterosexist. By definition heterosexism is the normalization of the heterosexual lifestyle. Everyone in society is assumed to be heterosexual until identified otherwise. Therefore, for people to develop an identity as a gay or lesbian, they must first recognize that their feelings and emotions are not heterosexual. While this process often happens in late adolescence or early adulthood, it can occur at any point in a person's lifespan. Recently, it has, become more common for people to enter their lesbian/gay identity at earlier ages than have been documented in studies within the past few decades. During this process it is possible that a person might share their thoughts with other individuals or this belief may also lead to sexual experimentation.

Developing a personal homosexual identity status marks a point where people accept that they are not heterosexual (1994). Following this acceptance, people must review what it means, in their life, to be homosexual. The developmental progress for homosexuals made through this process involves examining internal homophobia and addressing homosexual myths. At the same time, they begin to discover the true essence

of being homosexual. Discovery of gay or lesbian identity involves such areas as social normality, expectations and adherences. Many times when going through this stage, the gay or lesbian person will seek the mentorship of others who can help in confirming or denying a long-held belief about homosexuality.

Developing a homosexual social identity involves creating a support network for the individual's sexual identity (1994). The creation of this network requires the person to "come out" or tell others about their sexual identity. This "outing" of oneself can involve not only telling other homosexuals, but also heterosexuals who hold an important place in a person's life. This process can be very challenging for an individual. In the context of "outing" oneself to a group of gays or lesbians the actual "outing" is not usually as challenging as finding one's place within a new "homosexual" community. Like any other group or community, hierarchical structures exist within the lesbian and gay community. Many of the members will likely be at different levels of their homosexual development. Integration into the group will mean gaining and understanding the group's dynamics. When "outing" oneself to a heterosexual who is important in his/her life, the context of sexual identity development changes drastically. In this instance, the gay or lesbian must be prepared to cope with the acceptance or rejection of their announcement by the friend or relative. In many cases, this revelation can end or damage the relationship. If not ended, many times these relationships take on a different context that requires navigation; for example, if two female friends spent a good portion of their time together attending events at which they sought male companions, the announcement by one that she is a lesbian might leave the other to wonder what she will do now with their time together. In relation to people who may not react in a supportive way, the

homosexual must consider whether or not this reaction is temporary or permanent. The homosexual needs to determine whether the person's attitude might change over time, or whether it will change if they are dating someone different. All of the questions above must be answered by the gay or lesbian who is to progress through this developmental process.

Becoming a homosexual offspring is by far one of the most challenging developmental processes that a homosexual will go through (D'Augelli, 1994). Parental and familial love and acceptance is one of the most impactful developmental relationships that exist. By "coming out" to parents and immediate family, a gay or lesbian can risk financial support, continued familial relations, physical harm, and ostracism from the family. While in many cases unconditional support does come from the person's parents and family members, often this is not the case. In many cases, when acceptance is offered from the family, the gay or lesbian may take a lesser role than they previously held. For example a heterosexual sibling returning from college might be asked if she is dating anyone or if she has a boyfriend. While it is likely that similar questions may not be asked of the homosexual sibling.

Developing a lesbian/gay intimacy status in a heterosexist society is a necessary part of development. Few homosexual individuals have grown up observing a same-sex relationship first hand or as a part of societal norms (D'Augelli, 1994a). Generationally, it has not been until this current generation of children that gay or lesbian characters on television or in the media have been more than either a comic relief or someone to be feared. Homosexual individuals have been provided few social cues regarding the navigation of intimate relationships. In today's world, their heterosexual counterparts

have seen societal norms like, boys asking girls out, boys paying for dinner, mothers doing the cooking and cleaning, and fathers fixing the car and mowing the lawn.

Homosexual are left to develop their own norms. Since a lesbian or gay sexual identity can be hidden, often it is hard for outsiders to understand the intensity of a relationship between two individuals of the same gender. For example, if two women move into an apartment together, it might be common knowledge that they are lesbians. However, that information does not necessarily provide an immediate indication of the intensity of their relationship. In the heterosexual world, there is much more meaning implied to a male and a female moving into an apartment together especially if they are known to be a couple.

Entering a homosexual community indicates a willingness on the part of the gay or lesbian to enter into social or political action. This action can be defined in many ways but essentially refers to the person's ability to stand up for equal rights on behalf of lesbians and gays (D'Augelli, 1994). These actions might be as personal as requesting friends and family to not use derogatory terms referring to lesbians and gays in his or her presence. These actions might extend into the work environment, where they request partner benefits or request that nondiscrimination clauses be included in human resource documents. Their actions might reach into the political arena to either fight for same-sex marriage or run for office. This development process is one that many lesbian or gay individuals may never reach or fully embrace. The willingness to participate in social or political types of actions can pose many risks to individuals. These risks, include but are not limited to, loss of job, harassment, physical violence or threats of violence.

## **Parks Spiritual Development Theory**

A student of James Fowler, Sharon Daloz Parks immersed herself in research based upon Fowler's five stages of faith development (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006). The outcome was that Parks developed a four stage model of spiritual development specific to traditional college aged population (1986, 2000). Similar to D'Augelli's development model (1994), Parks' model is recognized as non-sequential and that people can move forward and backward depending on circumstances within their lives. In addition to Fowler, Parks' theory is heavily influenced by the works of the following: William Perry, who examined forms of cognition; R. Kegan and his forms of dependence; and J. Piaget and his attention to the impact community has on development (Chickering, Dalton, & Stamm, 2006). Parks' model contains four stages:

1. Adolescent or Conventional Faith
2. Young Adult Faith
3. Tested Adult Faith
4. Mature Adult Faith

Given that Parks' (1986, 2000) theory is not a sequential theory, it is important to note that not only can people progress forward and backward, but a number of people do not progress through many of the stages. Some never progress beyond the Adolescent or Conventional Faith stage.

The Adolescent or Conventional Faith stage is a time marked by authority-bound and dualistic forms of knowing (Parks, 1986; Parks,2000). People's faith and beliefs are set by what an authority figure has declared. In any case, an authority figure may represent a parent, group or any entity which the individual gives immediate and

nonreserved credence. Likewise, people find themselves dependent on the authority figure for self. Their sense of self and worth is based almost exclusively on the thoughts and opinions of the authority figure and their sense of community is high. Their community consists almost exclusively of memberships obtained by birth or circumstance to which they had little or no input. They are most likely involved in the same faith structure as their parents and have not ventured out to explore beyond the prescribed beliefs of this given faith. Within this stage, information obtained that is contrary to the person's current belief is either rejected or compartmentalized so as not to create an internal conflict that would be in need of resolution.

The Young Adult Faith stage is a developmental process in which the person begins to expand their ways of knowing (Parks, 1986, Parks, 2000). Given that they have been faced with multiple differing truths, they begin to recognize the fact that truth sits in an unqualified relativism and that truth is contextual and relative only to the situation presented at a given time for a given individual or circumstance. In an example, Parks suggested that this change in knowing might occur when an individual meets another person who does not fit the stereotype that had been provided them by their authority figure. Potentially, with realizations such as these, the individual might also enter the counter dependence stage. This stage can be characterized by a rebellion. The person is pushing away from the authority figure and is declaring the authority figure to be wrong but the individual is unable to declare what is right. Through the recognition that truth is contextual and the pushing away from their authority figure, the individual may also find themselves socially in a state of diffused community in which they may cling to parts of



the currently established community but have the recognition that they, at the very least, can explore other communities.

Tested Adult Faith is the third stage of Parks' theory. By this stage the individual has refined his/her form of knowing into a commitment in relativism (Parks, 1986; Parks, 2000). Simply stated, people have begun to feel responsible for their knowing. They can assert what their beliefs are and why they hold those beliefs. Their goal is to do the best they can to make meaning of the world. This stage is also marked by an inner-dependence. In contrast to independence, inner-dependence allows people to include themselves as authority figures. Since self is now viewed as an authority figure, the person is then provided the right to care for self. Concluding this stage is the concept of self-selected community. While in the previous stages, community was either selected for the individual or something to cling to in the chaos caused by pushing away from their foundational authority figures, community now is a self-selected group, that is, deemed to fit within their new sense of relativism. In this realm the self-selected group will be very similar and like-minded to the individual. This selection allows the individual to continue to strengthen their thought processes since they are supported by the group.

The final stage in Parks' theory is Mature Adult Faith (1986, 2000). This stage is typically not achieved until people are well into middle age and may very well never be achieved by some. Conventional commitment characterizes this stage as a form of knowing. In this stage, an individual does not abandon themselves as an authority figure, but instead opens up the possibility that, in addition to themselves, another person may very well be an authority. There is also cohesion with their forms of dependence as it has

turned from inner-dependence to inter-dependence. The characterized difference in these two terms comes with the recognition that inter-dependence is not necessarily a new element in the person's life. Instead, it is only at this time of their life that they can truly appreciate that inter-dependence existed all along. All beings have a level of inter-dependence that helps to maintain the communal balance. In keeping with these final revelations, a person's community is now made up of a diverse structure. No longer is their sense of community limited to only like-minded individuals but it can extend out to include those who believe differently without creating a threat to one's own sense of self.

## CHAPTER 3 - Literature Review

There is not a plethora of literature available that directly discusses the development cycle of an individual's sexual identity as it compares to that individual's religious or spiritual identity development. The literature that does exist predominantly agrees that as individuals seek to explore the intersection of their multiple identities they must be at a stage of full acceptance of their sexual identity before they can seek resolution with other identities (Abes & Jones, 2004; Love, Bock, Jannarone & Richardson, 2005; Stevens, 2004).

To fully understand the need for reconciliation of identities and the challenges faced by lesbians and gays in accomplishing this task, it is important to understand the divisiveness between the sexual identity of a homosexual and the spiritual or religious identity. Homosexuals raised in conservative or moderate Christian denominations have received homophobic messages throughout their life (Buchanan et al., 2001) Research completed by Finlay and Walther comparing a variety of elements to homophobia, defined as negative attitudes toward homosexuals (2003). In this study, they found that the higher the level of religiosity, which they define as the number of times people attend a church service or participate in a church activity, the higher their level of homophobia. Their study also revealed that, religiosity possessed the highest correlation of all factors studied.

Religion is often considered a family tradition and when in need members of other minority groups will seek out their families for reassurance and guidance. Homosexuals represent a distinct minority because unlike most minority groups who are

fully supported by their family, homosexuals often are rejected or marginalized by their families (Maher, 2007). Much of the basis behind this rejection stems from the religious beliefs their family holds. While some mainstream Christian religions are considered accepting and affirming of homosexuals, the vast majority still consider homosexuality to be a sin. In a study by Lease (2003), family members of lesbian and gays were asked about their religious affiliations before and after the coming out of a child and about their current acceptance of their homosexual offspring. Prior to their child coming out, 65 percent were involved in a religion that was unaccepting, 6 percent were involved in a religion with a neutral stance, and 19 percent were involved in a religion that was accepting. After learning that their child was lesbian or gay many of the parents left the church or changed to a church that was more accepting of lesbians and gays. One year after learning of that a child was homosexual 43 percent had an unaccepting religion, 5 percent had a neutral religion and 38 percent had an accepting religion. Despite the larger number of parents involved in an unaccepting religion, 91 percent of the participants personally felt they were accepting of their child, two percent were neutral and seven percent were unaccepting.

Homosexuals who are raised in nonaffirming religions often experience a delay in the development of a homosexual identity (Buchanan et al., 2001; Cates, 1987; Hendrickson, 2007). In comparison, those with no religious affiliation reached the sexual identity milestones faster (Hendrickson). Religious homosexuals also typically experience greater internalized homophobia (Buchanan et al.) and lower self esteem (Lease et al., 2003). For many Christian religions, the only assistance available to homosexuals is conversion therapy. Conversion therapy is a practice in which the

individual is counseled or coerced into a belief that their homosexual feelings are not valid and that the individual will refute his or her sinful ways and return to being a heterosexual. Reasons for people seeking conversion therapy included religious guilt, rejection by the church community and fear of eternal damnation (Tozer & Hayes, 2004). In research done by Tozer and Hayes (2004), they found that gays and lesbians identified negativity toward internalized homosexual attraction as the single mediating variable on the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and propensity to seek conversion therapy. Most members who seek conversion therapy are rejected by the religious group even after they have accepted their “ex-gay” status. The only peer group left for them is other “ex-gay” members (Cates, 1987).

Among ethnic groups, such as African Americans, the homophobic message received from the “black Christian churches” is perceived as being an even stronger message than is received in most predominantly white Christian churches. Participants in a study by Miller (2007) described incidents of direct confrontations by ministers in the midst of a service or in one case a funeral. Though research shows that as a whole African-Americans are less accepting of homosexuality, it is interesting that it was actually the “black Christian churches” who first adopted a doctrine that disputed the use of the Bible verbatim, highlighting the fallacy of the scriptures that refer to slavery.

Religious and spiritual beliefs have been found to be considered in two categories; intrinsic and extrinsic (Tozer & Hayes, 2004). If a person’s religious beliefs are extrinsic, their beliefs exist due to forces outside self. While the motives may be very genuine and sincere and in most cases are ultimately benign or not harmful to others in nature, they still are ulterior. Examples of when beliefs are extrinsic are those involved

in religion due to the social nature of being a part of a community. Often people's religiosity is considered to be extrinsic when they are involved in a religious group simply because they are seeking acceptance. Another example would be people who do not know what they believe but feel that being part of a religious group will provide them with the ability to find inner peace. People's beliefs are intrinsic when they live their beliefs. They truly feel that their spiritual and religious beliefs are the guiding force with which all decisions in their life are made. The theology of many religions believes that homosexuality goes against the teachings found in the Bible. This theology, coupled with an intrinsic religiosity, has been found to directly relate to homophobic views and prejudices (Tozer & Hayes, 2004). Conversely, extrinsic religiosity has been shown to be less homophobic due to the fact that these people do not feel as vested in their religious beliefs as those who possess intrinsic religiosity (Tozer & Hayes, 2004).

In opposition to the concept that intrinsic religiosity fosters homophobia and prejudices, Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker contend that those with an intrinsic religiosity actually live in more of a world of self authorship which is beneficial to lesbians and gays and leads many others to be less homophobic (2001). In contrast, those with an extrinsic religiosity may be more inclined to follow the doctrine of a given religion and not explore beyond what they are told. Therefore, they become the blind followers and are likely to be homophobic because it goes against what the religious leaders have said. Furthermore the individuals have not developed their own self-authorship that would allow them to disagree with the leadership.

Religion and spirituality have a strong impact on the lives of many people whether their beliefs are intrinsic or extrinsic. More than two-thirds of the population in

the United States acknowledges membership in a church or synagogue (Heermann, Wiggins, Rutter, 2007). Sixty percent of the population report that religious faith has a strong impact on their lives. (Cates, 1987). Religion and spirituality are generally associated with psychological well-being (Heermann, Wiggins, Rutter, 2007). In studies of gay men with HIV researchers found that men with a religious or spiritual beliefs coped with the disease better than those without a strong belief structure. Many of the men who were not “out” about their disease or sexuality to their family or community, viewed God as a parent figure and confidant (Siegel, Schrimshaw, 2002). Psychologically, Allport (1950) viewed religion as a step toward the maturity process, and James (1961) found support that religion could help protect people with internal conflicts.

Though the breadth and benefits of religious and spiritual participation are well documented, so are the challenges that exist for lesbians and gays as it relates to reconciling their sexual identity with their spiritual identity. It is important to recognize that identity exploration does not always occur within homosexuals or it may exist on varying levels. Stevens (2004) found that identity resolution development ranged from no attempts to reconcile their identities to full immersion in the reconciliation process. Love, Bock, Jannarone & Richardson (2005) had very similar findings but also discovered that students who had not reconciled their identities often found themselves in turmoil. Often, rather than working toward reconciliation, lesbians and gays will merely accept compartmentalization.

To accomplish reconciliation homosexuals initiate a variety of in similar fashion, Abes found that the higher meaning-making capacity that lesbians had, the more

successful they were at integrating multiple identities within their life (2004). Interviews conducted by Degges-White and colleagues concluded that a person's identities can only be combined at such a time that all identities are equally accepted (2000).

Despite the unwelcome atmosphere surrounding a homosexual Christian, research shows that at least a portion of the homosexual population places a high priority on their spirituality. However, research has shown that while a Christian lesbian or gay is struggling with their sexual identity they typically experience a spiritual loss (Stevens, 2004). According to Erickson (1963) the fragmentation of a person's identity is considered psychologically to be problematic. The act of constructing a person's spiritual and sexual identity is referred to in various terms. Love, Bock, Jannarone and Richardson refer to this construction as reconciliation (2005). They have chosen this word specifically because it reflects the discord between two areas that must come together. Abes and Jones, as well as Stevens, refer to the merging of multiple identities as integration (Abes & Jones, 2004),(Stevens, 2004). Roseborough refers to this identity collision and reformation as "rearranging a world view" or "reintegration" (2006). Degges-White, Rice, Myers uses the phrase "identity synthesis" (2000).

Developmentally, research has found that in examining the intersection between having a heterosexual identity and a Christian spiritual identity, people generally fall into varying levels: reconciliation, compartmentalization, nonreconciliation and undeveloped. Lesbians and gays who have come to an inner acceptance of both their spiritual identity and their homosexual identity roll in the category of reconciled. They live their lives in a manner that encompasses and utilizes all of their identities in multiple settings. Characteristics of people within the reconciliation category were self-acceptance, a strong



sense of spiritual identity, interaction between spiritual identity and sexual identity, a relationship with God (higher power), and a separation between religious dogma and spirituality (Love et al., 2005). Reconciliation can only be achieved if people have fully accepted their sexual identity (Stevens, 2004), but full reconciliation must envelop the acceptance and integration of all identities (Degges-White et al., 2000). Existence within the reconciliation category is also described as obtaining self-authorship (Roseborough, 2006) and having a high capacity for meaning-making (Abes & Jones, 2004).

Individuals who are aware of both their spiritual identity and their sexual identity but do not feel that the two are intersected are considered to be in a compartmentalization category (Abes & Jones, 2004). This category is characterized by individuals living “double” lives. Many within this category are not out to family members or friends and may have a very active spiritual or religious life but in most cases their sexual orientation is not a part of spiritual life. “Defecting in place” is a term used to describe people in this category. They continue to actively participate in their religious community but fail to follow its beliefs (Hendrickson, 2007). Many lesbians and gays never develop beyond the compartmentalization category. Most who do not advance in their development suffer from self-esteem issues and are not considered to have reached full self-authorship or development on scales such as Kegan’s meaning-making.

Quite possibly the most painful category for lesbians and gays to be in is the nonreconciled category. Individuals within this category live in constant turmoil over their sexual identity and their spiritual identity. Unlike the compartmentalized group who have neatly packaged their identities into separate boxes, this group is fully aware of the dissidence between their multiple identities and has yet to resolve the conflict. Residual

effects of existing within this category continue to emerge in their life. In research by Love and his colleagues, one student discussed the incongruence she felt in the fact that she highly valued openness and honesty yet she was not “out” about her sexuality to her parents or family (2005).

The final category that exists would be the underdeveloped spiritual identity. In this category are gays and lesbians who do not and may very well never explore their spiritual identity. Included in this category would be those who consider themselves agnostic, atheists and those who are undecided but do not really have an urge or yearning to further explore the subject of spirituality or religion.

Despite the challenges faced by Christian homosexuals, Love and colleagues did find that many seeking a resolution of their spiritual identity and their sexual identity were aided in their journey by their religious upbringing (2005). Many seeking to find their spiritual identity who had not received religious education struggled to develop a language and concept.

## **Interviews**

### ***Darlene***

Darlene is currently 51 years old and self-identifies as a lesbian. Darlene is one of three children and was raised in a conservative Catholic home. Throughout her primary education, Darlene attended a parochial Catholic school. As early as 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Darlene recognized an attraction for other women. As a child she would often play and identified with the boys in her neighborhood versus the girls as she was not interested in the activities that interested the other girls. In high school, Darlene sought counsel from her priest regarding her sexual orientation. In this conversation, she was assured that despite the popular interpretation of Bible verses condemning homosexuality, it was his belief that the Bible was intended to be interpreted in its entirety. Throughout high school and into college, Darlene was involved in sexual relationships with other women, but continued to maintain the persona of a heterosexual woman. Around the time of Darlene's senior year in high school her father died. As the youngest and only child living in the home, Darlene felt the need to continue to live with and help her mother despite entering college. Darlene continued to maintain her Christian beliefs and regular church attendance. Darlene continued to date men, however, many of her friends during college were lesbians. In her interview, Darlene commented that she felt had she not been living with her mother, her sexual identity most certainly would have developed faster. This comment is interesting not only as it relates to sexual identity development but also as it relates to the development of college students as a whole, raising the question of whether or not students who continue to live

with their parents after they enter college develop at a slower rate than students who live in residence halls or private dwellings. Early in her college career, Darlene met Paul. Darlene eventually quit college to marry Paul. In retrospect, Darlene suspects the speed in which she got married was a direct reflection on her living situation. She saw marriage as the only “acceptable” way to get out of her mother’s home. Paul was Catholic as well, and though they were not tremendously active in the church, they continued to profess the Christian Catholic faith. After a few years of marriage and the birth of a child, Darlene began a relationship with a woman. This relationship continued for several years during which time Darlene filed for divorce. Her relationship with the woman continued for two more years after the divorce was final. When that relationship ended she continued to have relationships with women. Darlene’s sexual identity continued to develop more and more throughout her various relationships. During the relationship with her first female partner, she was out among other lesbians and her family but not when it came to her child and former husband. With each subsequent relationship, she became more open about her sexuality. Currently, she is involved in a 13 year relationship. Throughout her life, Darlene’s spirituality has continued to develop. As her life situations have changed, her spiritual development moved her farther from organized religion reflected by decreased church attendance and more toward self-authorship.

### *Sally*

Sally is a 38-year old and self identifies as a lesbian. Sally is an only child but grew up in an environment that included a lot of family. Sally was raised Southern Baptist. Her spiritual life as a child involved church services 2-3 days a week and a lot of fellowship involvement with other parishioners. Sally believes that her Southern Baptist

background and her parents' strong faith gave her the ability to build a strong faith and relationship with God. Growing up, Sally had a traditional heterosexual life. In retrospect, she does not have a recollection of having attractions to other females in her childhood but by the same token she did not have attractions toward males either. Prior to adulthood, she was unaware of homosexual relationships. But as she reached adulthood the realization existed that there were several couples within her church family that were homosexuals even though they were not identified as such. Sally believes that in her case her parents did not have the vocabulary to appropriately discuss these homosexual relationships.

As Sally entered college she was very involved with the Baptist Student Union (BSU). It was here that Sally first was forced to examine the dissidence between homosexuality and theological beliefs. The president of the BSU came out as a gay man. This caused a great deal of alarm within the group and within entities which provided funding for the group. The group eventually decided to handle this situation by taking the remainder of the semester to go through a "discernment" process. The purpose of this "discernment" process was to allow the students to come to an educated decision on the subject of the acceptability of homosexuality within the church. Ultimately, the students were unable to come to a unanimous decision regarding this subject but concluded that they did not feel they would be following God's will if they were to dismiss the student from their group. So they accepted him and maintained his status with the group.

Sally was raised with a strong sense of personal responsibility. This sense of responsibility extended into her spiritual and religious beliefs as well. She described situations in which family members had struggled with abuse and alcoholism. Her

Baptist Christian beliefs, as it related to these situations, were that God still loved this person but that they needed to get their act together because their issues were harming others. This sense of personal responsibility helped to influence her thoughts within the BSU dilemma and continued to influence her spiritual beliefs. In her mind, personal responsibility also meant that it was her responsibility to build a personal relationship with God.

After college, while visiting a friend, Sally was faced with the situation that a female friend was attracted to her. It was at this point that Sally began to explore her own sexual identity. For Sally, this exploration took about two weeks, at which point she had come to the conclusion that she was a lesbian and that her sexual identity was compatible with her religious beliefs. Sally recognizes that two weeks seems like a minimal amount of time to wrestle with and developmentally work through her sexual identity. However, she believes that had she not been at such a high stage in her spiritual and religious development, it would have defiantly taken longer. She truly feels that God created the issue with the BSU to prepare her for the time she must face her own sexual identity dilemma.

### *Dana*

Dana is 42 years old and self-identifies as a lesbian. She is currently an only child but was raised with a brother who died when she was 16 years old. Dana was raised Missouri Synod Lutheran her entire life. Within her family, church was a very important aspect, and the family attended services every Sunday. Dana always considered herself a tomboy and enjoyed taking part in a game of football with the boys much more than playing house or dolls. At an early age, Dana has memories wondering what it would be

like to be the “boyfriend” of one of her female friends. Dana dated males throughout her high school and early college career but typically did not date any one person for a long period of time. Dana noted that often when she was on dates with her boyfriends, she would spend quite a bit of time wondering what her female friends were doing and hoping she was not missing out.

When Dana left for college, her church attendance decreased tremendously. At the time, Dana was drinking several nights a week which typically equated to being up late at night. Given the option of sleeping or attending church service on Sunday morning Dana chose the latter. Despite her lack of involvement, Dana still maintained her faith in God. Early in her college career, Dana began to question her sexual identity. Several of Dana’s basketball teammates were lesbians, and she found it interesting that she felt a strong connection to them. For several years, Dana continued to explore her sexual identity while still maintaining a persona for some that she was heterosexual. During this time of her life, Dana still considered herself a Christian but very much compartmentalized that part of her life from her sexual identity.

Dana’s sexual identity continued to evolve to a point where, while not being a matter of open discussion, her immediate and extended family, friends and coworkers all recognized her relationship with her female partner. After being in a relationship for several years with the same partner, Dana and her partner decided to have a child. It was at that point in time that Dana was forced to address her relationship between her religious and spiritual identity and her sexual identity. While Dana did not agree with all of the theological teachings of her church, she still considered herself to be a strong Christian. Likewise, Dana felt it was important for her child(ren) to be raised in a

Christian community. Eventually, Dana decided that she felt the most comfortable in the Christian denomination in which she was raised. She decided to resume attendance and participation in that church. By making this decision, Dana acknowledged that she realized that beliefs and lifestyle did not necessarily match that of the church. At this point in her life she stated that it was her opinion that no critically thinking adult could accept the doctrine or theology of a given denomination 100 percent. Therefore, she was no different than most. The church had the right to accept or reject her but her beliefs did not change. If rejected she would seek out a more affirming church community. Dana was pleasantly surprised to find that she already knew a number of members of the church, through work, community involvement or friends. Dana and her family were accepted by the membership and continue to be involved in the same church community.

### *Josey*

Josey is 49 years old and self-identifies as a lesbian. Josey was raised in a family with three sisters and a brother. While professing to be Christians and celebrating the Christian holidays, Josey's family did not regularly attend church nor did they belong to a specific Christian denomination. Josey remembers that as a child she and some of her siblings would occasionally attend Sunday school with an aunt but it was irregular at best. Throughout high school, Josey dated men, and after high school, she married. Josey and her husband had two children and were married for 12 years. During this time, Josey and her husband attend an Christian ELCA Lutheran Church, and Josey participated in the service on a regular basis. In describing her spiritual beliefs at that time, Josey saw her participation in the church more as a community involvement and her service participation as a way to enhance the service more than a need to feel in tune with



the word of God. Unhappy with her marriage, Josey filed for divorce. It was at this time that Josey first recognized that she was attracted to women. After her divorce, Josey did not continue her participation in the church. Josey described her transition from a heterosexual woman to a lesbian as being a very smooth transition. Given her spiritual beliefs could be defined as extrinsic and her religious participation was communal, she had no incongruence between her homosexuality and her religious beliefs.

Shortly after her divorce, Josey began dating women and eventually settled down with one woman and has been in a relationship with that woman for 13 years. Josey feels that today her belief structure can best be described as Agnostic. Her personality and beliefs center on the concepts of fact verses faith. Josey, feels she would have no problem embracing the concept of a higher power, but it would need to be proven to her.

### ***John***

John is 21 years old and self-identifies as a gay man. He is also a college student. John grew up in a city and was raised in the Catholic Church. John's family initially attended a very conservative and traditional Catholic Church. They were very much involved in the church and especially the church choir. Due to a dispute related to the choir, John's family sought out another church. Their search led them to an inner city nontraditional Catholic Church. John described this church as being the "Black Catholic Church" and commented that the church was much more open and less hierarchical than the original church he and his family attended. John considers his confirmation when he was a junior in high school, as the high point in his religious and spiritual life. After coming to college, John continued to attend the Catholic Church regularly. In the last six months, his attendance has been less regular due to his exploration of spiritual identity.

In this journey, John has read many texts on the beliefs of other religions but always views them in a Christian context. He does not believe that he is necessarily searching for a “new” religion but is looking at ways to feel more complete in his life. John stated that recently he has gone back to attending Mass more regularly, but he feels he that now he is attending for the spiritual and emotional gains he receives from the service not just because he should.

When John was 11 or 12, he began to become aware of his sexual identity. John commented that he “shut off” his sexual identity particularly in high school in order to stay in touch with the other students and involved in the activities he liked. John did not reveal his sexual activity during this time frame, he did comment that when he worked through his beliefs about sex, in his mind, he did not differentiate between sex with men or sex with women. In his concept, sex outside of marriage possessed the same status regardless of the gender of the individual.

John began to come out his second semester at college although during this time he was very careful about his involvement in gay or lesbian affiliated organizations for fear that someone would make the connection. He came out to his parents and immediate family during his sophomore year of college. Only after coming out to his parents did John get involved in Delta Lambda Phi a fraternity that is predominately for gay men.

When discussing the reconciliation of his religious/spiritual identity with his sexual identity, John described spending quite a bit of time being angry at God. He qualified this statement by saying that he had always felt a personal relationship with God and that his anger was not so much in the form of “Why am I going to Hell for being who I am?” rather it was phrased in the context of “Why are you making me go through this?”

John does not feel he is at the end of his spiritual or sexual identity journeys. He feels that he needs to continue to grow in both areas and does not consider himself to be in full reconciliation. He noted, that he does believe that his sexual identity journey accelerated his religious exploration. Were it not for this occurrence in his life, he commented, it would have been easy to continue on his standard path.

### *Doug*

Doug is 32 years old and self-identifies as a gay man. He is also a college student. Doug's parents divorced when he was three years old, so for many years his religious influence came from his mother and his mother's parents who are all orthodox Catholics. He attended a Catholic elementary school. Doug described himself as being a very inquisitive child but when it came to religion particularly where his grand parents where concerned, it was made very clear to him that you do not ask questions. You simply accept what is told to you.

When Doug was ten he began spending weekends with his father. Doug's step-mother was a very conservative Baptist. His father was less conservative and but followed his wife's beliefs to maintain harmony in the household. Doug's characterized his father as being very spiritual but not tremendously religious. He commented that he believed that his father prayed often, but Doug felt his father wasn't really sure who he was praying to but felt there was some higher power.

An instrumental time in Doug's life was one summer when he stayed with his paternal grandparents. Doug's grandmother was full blooded Native American and subscribed to the more nature-based spiritual beliefs. She was also felt it was important for children to ask questions and encouraged Doug to talk about his spiritual beliefs and

doubts. Upon his return to his mother, he began to ask her questions about the Catholic faith and religion in general. This dialogue opened up Doug's relationship with his mother and allowed him the ability to further explore his spirituality.

When Doug was twelve, he began to realize that he was gay. This is also the time that he and his mother moved to another town. The atmosphere in town was still very religious but it was not Catholic, and Doug attended a public school. During this time, Doug sought out knowledge about his sexuality. Often he and his mother would go to the mall, and she would let him look at whatever he wanted to on his own. Doug would take this opportunity to go to a bookstore and read homosexual-related magazine such as the Advocate. Through his readings, he discovered that there were people who were gay and religious.

Doug "came out" to his father around the age of thirteen. His father accepted his sexual identity, commenting that it was "about time" that Doug had figured it out. However, Doug's step-mother did not understand. Doug came out to his mother around the age of fifteen. At that time Doug was involved with a man who was 25 years old and suffering from AIDS. His partner's family had disowned him and Doug needed help providing support and caring. His mother not only accepted Doug's homosexuality but also welcomed his partner into her home. Doug's mother viewed this act as being the only "Christian" thing to do and that she knew her son was not equipped to handle this situation on his own. Doug's partner eventually died. At this time, he decided to explore other options for church participation. He attended an off shoot of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), a denomination, that was established predominately to provide an accepting and affirming place for homosexuals to worship. Though he liked

the welcoming environment, Doug was put off by their relaxed style, he described the church as meeting in a hotel banquet room, and the minister wearing jeans and a tee-shirt.

At the age of seventeen, Doug was in a car accident where he was purposefully run off the road by a person who did not accept his homosexuality. Following this accident, he had a renewed desire to find a religious home. He attended a different MCC church. He felt much more comfortable in this church and began to regularly attend. One service he attended involved a “laying of hands” healing ritual. Given his Catholic upbringing, this practice seemed strange to Doug and prompted him to ask a number of questions. The response he received to his questions was that if he was questioning he obviously was not letting Christ into his life. Turned off by this response, Doug left the church.

For several years, Doug did not concern himself with religion or church. During this time he was living a very “risky” lifestyle. Examples of this lifestyle included regular attendance at sex clubs and bath houses. The events of 9/11 impacted Doug greatly. He spent that entire day praying in a Cathedral. Six months later, he decided to read the Bible. While he had read passages in the Bible on and off throughout his life he had never sat down and read the entire book. At this point, he began to read other books from other religions. He explored the beliefs of the Mormons and read about Hinduism.

In 2002, he was diagnosed with nonhodgkins lymphoma. He describes his chemo treatments being rough, but during this time he began to meditate. He also spent a 3-5 year time span after his diagnosis where he was celibate. He used this time of celibacy to reflect on his life and to try to make sense of his risky behavior in previous years. In 2005, he was diagnosed with a reoccurrence of cancer. At that point he moved back to

Kansas and his mother helped him recover from the treatments. Shortly after completing this round of treatments, Doug was also diagnosed as being HIV positive. After this diagnosis he began to attend church again. He returned to the MCC church. At this point, there was a new minister in the church. He felt very comfortable and attended not only services but also adult study classes.

A few years later he moved to Manhattan to complete his education. When reaching Manhattan, he tried several different congregations, but did not find any that felt comfortable to him. At this point he will occasionally attend the MCC church when he is in that town, but otherwise views his spiritual and religious beliefs as being very personal and close to him.

## **CHAPTER 4 - Conceptual Comparison of the Theories**

When comparing, based on literature reviews and interviews, the context of D'Augelli's Lesbian and Gay Identity Development Theory (1994) to Parks' Spiritual Identity Development Theory(1989, 2000), immediately there is a collaborative feel due to the fact that they both are considered to be lifelong developmental processes rather than sequential steps. On the surface both theories appear to be cognitive developmental structures. Cognitive development structural stages arise sequentially and always in the same order. Though both theories have steps or stages both theorists clearly state that they view the steps or stages as fluid. For example, in D'Augelli's process of becoming an offspring he is speaking specifically about the immediate family. However, it is not a far stretch to realize that within this view could also fit the processes of becoming a lesbian or gay family member as it applies to extended family relations. Likewise, Parks' Young Adult process specifically discusses the "authority figure" in a very generic way, meaning that the authority figure could be a parent, aunt, uncle, clergy or another person who holds power within the person's life.

Stepping through the side-by-side developmental processes of each, an even clearer picture of the similarities between the two theories emerges. In the first process of Park's theory, the individual is in a state of authoritative form of knowing. In essence, this stage would most likely exist within the presexual identity development process described by D'Augelli. Today's western society is generally heterosexist, in that individuals from birth are raised to believe they are heterosexual. There is no concept

that they will be anything else until they begin to recognize homosexual feelings within their own lives.

D'Augelli's processes of developing a personal homosexual identity status, a homosexual social identity, and homosexual offspring status, closely resemble Parks' young adult faith stage. In D'Augelli's theory these three stages represent a time of turmoil and exploration. The lesbian or gay may not know who they are or where to go but they understand that what they thought, is not reality and they must begin to construct their own reality. Parks' young adult faith stage is characterized by rebellion. The individual has discovered and accepted that what they thought they knew may not be correct, but they have not yet determined the right path or developed to the point of self-authorship.

The Tested Adult Faith stage, for Parks, marks the person's development to be able to accept himself or herself as an authority figure and has developed a state of self-authorship. However, choices of cohorts consist primarily of those who believe in the same relativism as the person. While not as clean a connection as the other processes/stages, D'Augelli's process of developing an intimacy status implies the building of a relationship with a person who is also a homosexual. It is likely in this process that a person would select someone who believes in the individual's same sense of relativism.

Mature adult faith marks the pinnacle of spiritual development in Parks' theory. In this stage, people are able to identify themselves as an authority figure but also accept other's truths as well. Within Parks' mature adult faith a person is also able to accept and make up their community with a diverse group of people. Likewise, D'Augelli's process



of entering a lesbian/gay community refers to the concept of being an active participant within the homosexual community. In this process, D'Augelli would expect to see an acceptance of others uniqueness and differences and would expect the individual to appreciate the value and strength gained by this diversity.

### **Summary**

Through a comparison of D'Augelli's (1994) and Parks' (1989, 2000) theories, the interview responses and the literature review, it is easy to see the similarities of the developmental theories. It appears that a number of homosexuals have begun the development of their spiritual identity prior to beginning their development process for their sexual identity. Many homosexuals who consider themselves Christians were introduced to religion by their parents and families in their childhood. All of the interviewees reflected this statement with the exception of Josey who really did not receive religious guidance until she was married. Regardless of their religious upbringing, most homosexuals who were interviewed originally perceived and perceived themselves as being heterosexual. Every interviewee, even if they recognized at a young age feeling different or feeling affections toward others of the same sex, began their sexual development as a heterosexual. In fact both Josey and Darlene were married for a period of time in their lives.

Historically, over the past 700 years, literally all denominations of Christianity have condemned homosexuality on some level. Recently, some denominations have become accepting and affirming to lesbians and gays. Sally and Doug were the only interviewees who were currently affiliated with a church that was considered accepting and affirming, but none of the interviewees grew up in a religious setting that possessed

that view. The research found that those who grew up in nonaffirming surroundings were more likely to have delayed sexual involvement, and those with an intrinsic religiosity were more likely to seek conversion therapy. While none of the interviewees mentioned involvement with or even consideration of conversion therapy, Sally's experiences more than any revealed signs of delayed sexual development. While she did not acknowledge a homosexual identity until after college, she also did not have significant relationships with men either. Similar to Sally, though aware of his sexuality, John consciously didn't act on it until after he came to college. When reviewing Doug's life-story he, more than any of the other interviewees "came out" and was sexually active at a young age.

In contrast to involvement in nonaffirming surroundings, the literature also found that individuals who really had no religious background had an easier time accepting their homosexual identity and possessed less guilt and shame. Of all the interviewees, Josey's upbringing possessed the least amount of spiritual guidance or religious dogma. As expected from the literature, Josey appears to have had the least amount of struggle with accepting her lesbian identity. Doug easily accepted his sexuality as well. Though raised in a very traditional Catholic home, Doug's interactions with his father and paternal grandmother likely influenced his perceptions and provided him the flexibility to own a sexuality that fell outside of the realm of acceptability within the Catholic Church.

Nearly all of the interviewees experienced a spiritual loss during their sexual identity development. Specifically, Darlene and Dana both avoided their religious community and compartmentalized their sexual identity and their spiritual identity. John's loss can be identified by his drop in attendance at religious services and his description of his researching other religious and beliefs. While still professing

Christianity, he found himself looking to see if there was more. Though not spiritually complex, Josey left the church she had been attending when she began her sexual identity process. Despite the fact that Darlene had sought religious counsel from her priest and received a relatively affirming message, she still discontinued attendance at religious events or participation in her religious community.

Though all interviewees traveled different paths to acceptance, this researcher would define all but John as having reached D'Augelli's final process in all areas of their lives. Though very comfortable with his sexual identity, John appeared to still be tentative about full involvement in the lesbian and gay community. Most of the interviewees stated that they were out within the contexts of work, family, community and spirituality. Again, John described examples where he was not fully out. In terms of Parks' (1989, 2000) stages most of the interviewees appeared to also be at Parks' Mature Adult Faith stage. I would characterize John as being in the Young Adult Faith. He is comfortable where he is at with his faith, but it seems to be somewhat untested. He is still searching for the right balance in his life. Thus, it appears that all of the interviewees except for John had achieved reconciliation. Dana, Sally, John and in some aspects Doug were the only interviewees who regularly attended religious services. Despite their lack of attendance, all the others stated that they were at peace with the intersection of spiritual/religious beliefs and their sexual identity.

When looking at the path that each of the interviewees traveled to get to their point of reconciliation, several themes emerge that are consistent with the findings in the literature review. In terms of sexual identity development, all participants referred to times in their lives when they were not completely out regarding their sexual identity.

Though Sally moved from identification to acceptance quickly she still had a very personal struggle, when she decided to enter the seminary. She felt that God's hand had led her to the seminary but was unsure that she would be allowed to reach ordination were she open about her sexual identity. Even though Darlene had recognized her sexuality at an early age, she still moved forward and married a man. Even after her divorce, she did not readily admit her sexuality to her former husband for many years. Of all of the interviewees, Doug appeared to have the least amount of turmoil accepting his sexual identity.

As we examine the sexual and spiritual identity development of the interviewees, it is clear that the intersection of their developmental process did not occur at the same time. For Doug, many of the sexuality identity milestones he crossed pushed him toward greater evaluation of his spiritual identity. In the case of Darlene and Dana, neither of them achieved reconciliation or full development in both areas until after they had achieved full development in their sexual identity. Sally, on the other hand, had already achieved full spiritual development at the time she began her sexual identity journey and was able to easily move through the development processes. The results from Darlene, Doug, Josey and Dana provide additional confirmation to the research which has found that lesbians and gays typically must have achieved full acceptance of their sexual identity and/or be living a life guided by self-authorship before they can find full reconciliation within their life as it relates to their spiritual and religious needs (Love et al., 2005). Sally provides another dimension that was not addressed in the literature. Her story implies that if a person begins her sexual identity exploration at a stage of self-

authorship within her spiritual identity that she may more easily work through the processes associated with accepting a homosexual identity.

In conclusion, it is the belief of this researcher that this report provides strong evidence that the developmental process of spiritual and sexual identity development cannot occur simultaneously. Instead one identity must be developed to a high level before the other identity can be developed. In most cases, individuals develop their sexual identity and come to full acceptance with that, before they can begin to reconcile this identity with that of a Christian spiritual or religious identity.

### **Theory to Practice and Further Research Implications**

The outcome of this research shows the importance for student affairs professionals not only to acknowledge the challenges associated with the developmental process affiliated with a person accepting a homosexual identity, but also highlights the challenges that can be caused in this process by their spiritual and/or religious identity. Student affairs professionals are encouraged to help students find the necessary resources that allow them to work through challenges to the students sexual identity while knowing that spiritual resources are needed for most students but will take a back seat until their sexual identity is fully formed.

Further research needs to be conducted on the relationship between spiritual identity development and sexual identity development. While this research provided anecdotal support for the hypothesis that a person needs to have a high sexual identity first it also raised the question of the effect that a high spiritual identity has when a person is faced with accepting a homosexual identity. If this scenario proves to be a consistent occurrence, implications are possible that students would have an easier time

accepting and developing their sexual identities if they were more developed in their spiritual identities.

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