

Sexuality & Religion: How Devoutly Religious Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Individuals  
Manage the Relationship Between their Sexuality and their Religion

By

Heather Wheeler

A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Masters of Social Work

Approved April 2013 by the  
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Karen Gerdes, Chair  
Barbara Klimek  
Elizabeth Segal

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May 2013

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed to fill the gap in research with regards to how individuals who define themselves as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) and devoutly religious (either currently or in the past) manage the interaction between these two conflicting identities. The researchers conducted 8 semi-structured qualitative interviews to examine how these individuals manage this conflict and what affects these individuals experience internally and externally. To analyze the interviews, researchers used an open coding method to determine the common themes amongst the participants. Results indicated that these participants traveled a similar path when attempting to manage the conflict between their religion and sexuality and similar internal and external affects were experienced amongst the participants.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| LIST OF TABLES.....   | iv   |
| CHAPTER   |      |
| 1 INTRODUCTION.....   | 1    |
| 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....   | 4    |
| 3 METHODS.....  | 10   |
| Interview process.....  | 10   |
| Study participants.....   | 11   |
| Data analysis.....  | 12   |
| 4 RESULTS.....  | 13   |
| Attempt to reject sexuality.....  | 13   |
| Consequences experienced as a result of attempting to reject or suppress<br>identity..... | 16   |
| Lack of family support due to religious beliefs.....                                      | 19   |
| Consequences experienced due to family's negative response.....                           | 23   |
| Reject organized religious affiliation.....   | 25   |
| Sexuality motivated rejection of religious beliefs.....                                   | 32   |
| Current negative view towards organized religious affiliations.....                       | 33   |
| Ongoing process to manage religious conflict.....   | 36   |
| Attempt to re-affiliate with a religious belief system.....                               | 40   |
| Accept sexuality and self-identity/Sexuality/self-identity primary.....                   | 45   |

| CHAPTER                                    | Page |
|--|------|
| Sexuality will not determine eternity..... | 48   |
| Common path or resolution.....             | 49   |
| Themes to be explored.....                 | 51   |
| Bisexuality.....                           | 53   |
| Transgender and other sexualities.....     | 53   |
| 5 DISCUSSION.....                          | 54   |
| REFERENCES.....                            | 56   |

## LIST OF TABLES

| Table                            | Page |
|----------------------------------|------|
| 1. Participant Demographics..... | 11   |

# Sexuality & Religion: How Devoutly Religious Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Individuals Manage the Relationship Between their Sexuality and their Religion

## Introduction

The subject of homosexuality and religion has been a topic of focus for some time now and there is still a great deal of interest in the LGBT community and their religious beliefs. Spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably; however in this study the researcher identifies the difference between the two. Spirituality is defined as “the sense of meaning, purpose, and morality that individuals espouse regarding their lives” (Tan, 2005, p. 136). “Religion on the other hand...[is defined as] a system of standardized beliefs, practices, and experiences in relation to spirituality”, these ideas are specifically shared by those within the religious community (Tan, 2005, p. 136).

Many people who hold substantial religious faith are more inclined to be homophobic (Friedman & Downey, 1994 as cited in Tan, 2005). For example, the hierarchy within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (i.e., LDS or Mormon) strongly disapproves of homosexuality and the LDS “Law of Chastity” directs that sexual intercourse can only occur between a man and woman who are legally married (Mormons and Homosexuality, 2011). Brigham Young University, a school which is funded and operated by the LDS church has an honor code that includes the law of chastity and students and staff must follow the code in order to remain associated with the school (Church Educational, 2009). The LDS church accepts that homosexuality is a reality for some individuals; however, it is seen as an illness and the sexual thoughts and feelings experienced by individuals who are gay or lesbian should not be acted on. The church

recommends reparative therapy as a cure for those who experience same-sex attraction (Stack, 2012).

The LDS church is not alone with regards to their position on homosexuality. Many Christian fundamentalist also voice firm opposition towards homosexuality. As stated in the Bible “You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22); “ If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their bloodguiltiness is upon them” (Leviticus 20:13). Because fundamental Christians believe in a literal translation of the Bible, these statements prevent them from accepting homosexuality. However it is important to note that not all Christians, particularly more progressive or liberal groups agree with fundamentalists on this topic of homosexuality. In fact, the Christian community is often divided when discussing the topic of support and approval of LGBT issues (Higgins, 2002).

“Religious culture often creates homophobic environments resulting in a struggle to integrate spiritual and sexual identities for LGB” (Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, & Quick, 2010, p. 113). It is no wonder that individuals who have been raised devoutly religious and find themselves questioning their sexuality experience struggles when attempting to manage the interaction between their sexuality and religion. Those who identify with a belief system strongly opposed to their sexuality can experience significant internal dissonance (Mahaffy, 1996). An underlying assumption of this study is that most people have some form of sexuality and identify with some form of spirituality or religion. The driving research question of this study is: “What happens when these two significant aspects of one’s self identity, religion and sexuality are in conflict with one another?”

The ecological perspective demands that we examine and evaluate individuals in their entirety (Pardeck, 1996). This approach recognizes that all sections and levels of an individual's life impact the individual as well as each other (Pardeck, 1996). Therefore it is critical to understand the effects such a conflict may have on individuals as well as how they successfully manage the conflict between these two major aspects of their identity.

Quantitative researchers have examined the religious and spiritual practices of LGBT community (Halkitis et al., 2009). Also some qualitative research has been done which is limited to specific populations, genders, sexualities and religions (Mahaffy, 1996; Gold & Stewart, 2011). However the research on how individuals who self-identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual manage the conflict between religious beliefs and sexuality. Nor can we answer why they chose the path that they do and what are the direct effects they experience as a result of the religious and sexuality conflict. This study examines the paths of self-discovery and personal growth LGBT individuals take to obtain and maintain internal well-being and satisfaction. Additionally this study begins to examine the uniqueness of bisexuality with regards to this topic. Finally this study uses an interview-based qualitative method to examine the major themes of how LGBT individuals manage this interaction between their religious beliefs and sexuality internally and externally; and how the incongruence between their religion and sexuality directly affects them and their lives. In addition to this, this study discusses how these individuals have negotiated their sexuality or religion and whether they have found satisfaction as a whole person.



## Review of the Literature

A recent Gallup survey indicates that 3.4% of Americans identify as LGBT, this percent is based on a sample of more than 120,000 adults (Gates & Newport, 2012). Another survey of more than 320,000 American's indicated that seven in ten or 69% of Americans identify as very or moderately religious, more specifically 40% of those surveyed identified as very religious (Newport, 2012). These numbers indicate that it is likely that individuals that identify as LGBT either in the past or currently identify with a religious affiliation. However, there are only a few significant studies in the research literature that have investigated spiritual practices (Halkitis, Mattis, Sahadath, et. al, 2009) religious and existential well-being (Tan, 2005), spiritual development (Sherry, Adelman, Whilde & Quick, 2010) and religious struggles (Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001) experiences in LGBT samples.

Halkitis et al. (2009) examined the religious and spiritual practices of the LGBT community, while also attempting to establish the meanings attributed to the concepts of religion and spirituality. The researchers conducted a cross-sectional study of 498 participants that identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered (LGBT) that were in attendance at a yearly Pride event (Halkitis et al., 2009). Participants were given a survey that contained both open- and closed-ended questions to evaluate their religious/spiritual beliefs and practices; both qualitative and quantitative data was obtained. Results showed that more than three fourths of the participants were brought up in a home with religious beliefs and practices, however only roughly 25% reported currently identifying with a religious affiliation. Halkitis et al. (2009) recognized that the decrease could, in part, be because

of the participant's conscious decision to discontinue their relationship with the religious organization (Rodriguez & Oullette, 2000 as cited in Halkitis et al., 2009).

Based on the demographic information obtained, participants that reported currently identifying with a religious affiliation were on an average older than those who indicated religious separation; researchers report that this trend may indicate a developmental effect that as LGBT individuals age they will find a need to openly express their religious and spiritual beliefs within a community (Halkitis et al., 2009). Along with this, results showed that a significant amount of the participants reported that their current religious affiliation differs from the religious belief system that they identified as earlier in their lives.

Tan (2005) also used a nonrandom or convenience sample (N=93) survey design to better understand spirituality amongst gay and lesbian individuals and to evaluate the impact that spirituality has on their lives. Specifically the study examined the participants "religious well-being" and "existential well-being" (Tan, 2005, p. 137). Religious well-being is defined as "how one relates to God" and existential well-being is the "sense of life's purpose and satisfaction, without religious reference" (Tan, 2005, p. 137). A Spiritual Well Being Scale was used to measure the participants religious well-being and existential well-being, the Index of Self Esteem was used to evaluate self-concept and self-esteem, the Internalized Homophobia Scale was used to measure how much the participants internalized the negative opinions of society towards gays and lesbians; and finally the Social Provision Scale examined the participants social support.

Researchers reported that the participants “generally expressed” high religious well-being and existential well-being (Tan, 2005, p. 139). The myth is that gay and lesbian individuals are not significantly spiritual. Rather results indicated the opposite i.e. that lesbian and gay individuals have “rich spiritual lives” (Tan, 2005, p. 141). Participants that scored high on the existential well-being measure had higher self-esteem, lower internalized homophobia and decreased feelings of alienation; on the other hand religious well-being was not a predictor of self-esteem, internalized homophobia or feelings of alienation (Tan, 2005, p. 140). These results suggest that lesbian and gay individuals that consider themselves to be moral, possess a positive outlook on life and its meaning, while also feelings that their lives have purpose and are relevant are more likely to be well-adjusted (Tan, 2005). “As the findings of the study suggest, they may, in fact, have nurtured their spirituality well in the face of oppression” (Tan, 2005, p. 142).

Sherry et al., 2010 examined the development of spirituality in individuals that identify lesbian, gay or bisexual. Researchers collected quantitative data from 373 participants and qualitative data from 422 participants; participants responded to postings online (Sherry et al., 2010). Demographics of all the participants were collected and several quantitative scales were used. The Religious Emphasis Scale examined the significance of one’s religious beliefs while growing up; the Quest Scale “to assess distinct aspects of religious orientation: the readiness to face existential questions, the experience of self-criticism and religious doubts as positive, and an openness to change”(p. 114); the Spiritual Well-Being Scale analyzes participants religious and existential well-being; the Harder Personal Feelings Questionnaire examines the participants predisposition for guilt and shame, and the Internalized Homophobia Scale

was created with the intent to examine LGBT individuals internalized homophobia (Sherry et al., 2010).

Qualitative data was based on brief descriptions written by the participants aiming to answer the researchers single question; “briefly describe your experience regarding religion and your sexual orientation” (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 114). It is important to note that in this research the terms religion and spirituality are used interchangeably, however they are defined separately. After analyzing the qualitative data eight themes were identified; sexuality issues made me question my religious beliefs, spiritual but not religious, it was never an issue, rejected religion for other reasons besides my sexual identity, still search or struggling, oppression, and trauma and rejection (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 115).

Results showed that participants that reported high importance on religion in childhood and religious well-being, reported higher levels of guilt, shame, and internalized homophobia; these results indicate that those who identify closer ties to their religion display increased amounts of difficulty when processing their sexuality. Along with this participants who reported higher levels of shame also felt more prepared to address existential questions (Sherry et al., 2010). The lesbian, gay and bisexual participants reported that their sexuality was an influence with regards to questioning their religious affiliation and beliefs; 40% of the participants reported rejecting their religious affiliation or their belief in God or they reported converting to a religious or spiritual affiliation that is more accepting of their sexual identity (Sherry et al., 2010).

Buchanan, Dzelme, Harris, & Hecker, 2001 conducted a review of previous research to attempt to provide a review of the struggle that lesbian and gay individuals experience when attempting to integrate their sexuality and spirituality/religiosity. The article provides the reader with “an overview of the religious and spiritual context that makes individuals unique will be followed by how the narrative perspective can help individuals who identify themselves as gay or lesbian with their struggle for identity” (Buchanan et al., 2001, p. 435).

The researchers begin by defining spirituality and religiosity and dividing the two into categories of intrinsic orientations and extrinsic orientations. Intrinsic orientation is related more closely to spirituality in that the individual is the expert and information is collected from the individuals experience (Buchanan et al., 2001). Whereas extrinsic orientation is at the opposite end of the spectrum and includes religiosity. Along with this the researchers describe the context of sexual orientation in which they will focus their research (Buchanan et al., 2001). Sexual orientation is defined and the coming out process is briefly discussed to set the stage for the focus of the article, which is discussing the “challenges of be simultaneously gay and spiritual or religious” (Buchanan et al., 2001, p. 438).

The authors review previous literature on the coming out process and discuss that a significant part of this journey is the acceptance of one’s own sexual identity; the literature notes that this process is only made more difficult for those who have a religious identity as well (Buchanan et al., 2001). Researchers reported that the severity of the struggle is directly influenced by whether the individual identifies with an extrinsic or intrinsic orientation with regards to their religion or spirituality (Buchanan et al.,

2001). The authors eluded that those who identify more extrinsically with their religion may display more of a struggling when attempting to integrate their religion and sexuality (Buchanan et al., 2001). Along with this researchers reported that it has been found that those who have more of an extrinsic orientation to their religion may also experience a higher level of internalized homophobia (Buchanan et al., 2001). Throughout this section the authors discuss the conflict between one's sexuality and their religious belief system and it is this conflict that creates the internal struggle for these individuals (Buchanan et al., 2001).

The outcome of the struggle is as unique as the individuals themselves, the researchers provide a model or what can be done once the conflict is identified (Buchanan et al., 2001). This model divides these options into two basic categories; choosing between the two worlds and integrating the two worlds (Buchanan et al., 2001). These two options are exactly what they say they are; the individual can opt to choose between their religion/spirituality and their sexuality, or they can attempt to integrate their religion and sexuality.

Finally the authors provide a brief overview of the narrative perspective and its usefulness for therapists who are working with this particular population (Buchanan et al., 2001). They also offer questions and techniques that can be used in the therapeutic setting. The authors note that they clearly emphasize in the article the exploration and deconstruction of the individual religious and spiritual beliefs, but add that this same process can be used with the individuals sexuality, adding that; "The narrative perspective encourages a process of personal exploration and deconstruction" (Buchanan et al., 2001, p. 446).

This article will take information from the previous research done and attempt to expand on what is already known. As noted by Buchanan et al., (2001) these individuals have a choice to make when it comes to integrating their sexuality and religion, however this article will take the perspective that this decision is a process with internal and external battles and affects to overcome. The researcher will interview participants in order to attempt to gain a better understanding of what is occurring internally and externally for these individuals while attempting to manage this conflict and obtain satisfaction with their self identity. The previous research lacks information about the individual's personal journey with their sexuality and religion, this article attempts fill this gap.

### Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the ways in which devoutly religious lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals manage the interaction between their sexuality and religion; and what occurs internally and externally while they are attempting to manage this relationship. Semi-structured interviews with eight self identified devoutly religious (currently or in the past) lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals were used to collect data for this exploratory study.

### **Interview Process**

At the beginning of each interview participants were asked to report their religious affiliation, age, and sexuality. Along with this the interviewer described the semi-structured interview process which allowed the participants to highlight aspects of their story. All participants were informed of the focus question; how did you as a devoutly religious LGBT individual manage the interaction and/or conflict between your

sexuality and religion? The researcher wanted to provide an opportunity for the participants to tell their story of self-discovery, including the challenges associated with identifying as devoutly religious and LGBT. To insure that the participants felt comfortable to discuss what they feel is significant and important to this topic and their story the researcher informed each participant before the start of the interview that although the researcher had prepared some basic questions to guide the interview that they should feel free to discuss what they feel is pertinent to the topic in order to accurately portray their experiences. The interviews were conducted either in the participant's home, university library, or another location chosen by the participant and each interview was approximately 30 minutes to an hour long. The interviews were audio recorded then transcribed. The researcher read the transcripts, coded the content and analyzed them for common themes.

### **Study Participants**

The researcher used the snowball method to recruit participants. A flyer was emailed to all students and staff at Arizona State University School of Social Work. The only requirements were that participants needed to identify as LGBT and in the past or present be devoutly religious.

Eight participants were interviewed. Of the eight interviews six were female and two were male. Five females identified as Lesbian, one female identified as Bisexual and both men identified as Gay. The average age of the participants was 34.5 years of age. All participants identified as devoutly committed to their religious beliefs either currently or in the past. The participants varied in their religious identification. All participants were Caucasian. Table 1 below outlines the participant's sex, sexuality, religious



affiliation and age. All names have been changed to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

| Participant | Sex | Sexuality | Religious Affiliation            | Age |
|-------------|-----|-----------|----------------------------------|-----|
| 1: Terry    | F   | Lesbian   | Catholic                         | 47  |
| 2: Jill     | F   | Bisexual  | Methodist converted to Mormonism | 20  |
| 3: John     | M   | Gay       | Mormon                           | 29  |
| 4: Mark     | M   | Gay       | Mormon                           | 31  |
| 5: Sarah    | F   | Lesbian   | Southern Baptist                 | 23  |
| 6: Karen    | F   | Lesbian   | Catholic                         | 28  |
| 7: Jane     | F   | Lesbian   | Catholic                         | 48  |
| 8: Melissa  | F   | Lesbian   | Baptist/Christian                | 50  |

**Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio recorded then transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The researcher read the transcripts before beginning the coding process. The interviews were then coded based on the theme of the thought of the interviewee. Open coding analysis was used; open coding is the analytic process by which “concepts are identified and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 101). The basic concept behind open coding is to break down the data into several sections and examine the sections closely (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The sections are then

compared for similarities and differences; similar events, experiences, and actions or interactions are then grouped together under an abstract phrase or term. It is important to note that the label or name that is given to the data is suggested but the context; specifically the label or name should clearly imply to readers the idea, context that is being derived from the data. All of the interviews and coded themes were then compiled and compared to one another in order to begin analyzing the content for common themes. The themes that occurred most commonly among the participants were identified as representative themes and were reported as significant results in this article.

## **Results**

The interview data revealed that although there were several common themes and patterns amongst the participants, their individual stories varied by personal experiences. Participants ranged in their individual religious practices and beliefs, however all participants reported a deep devout commitment to their faith at some point in their lives. The participants were diverse in their current commitment to their religious affiliation. The remainder of this section will be formulated around the common themes that emerged from the interview data as well as the individual experiences and similar patterns that were discovered.

### **Attempt to Reject Sexuality**

The majority of participants reported that when they began to discover their homosexual identities that their original solution to this issue was to reject or suppress their sexuality in order to satisfy their religious beliefs. Many felt that this would be the easiest and fastest resolution to their problem. Amongst these participants it was reported that there was an understanding that their religious beliefs and affiliations would not

allow for them to identify as homosexual and that if they chose to it would create significant issues for them within in the religious community and their families.

For example Mark a 31 year-old homosexual male discusses his attempt to live a heterosexual life in order to satisfy his religious beliefs:

“While I always knew (I was gay) I also pursued relationships with women up until the age of 21. The reason is because there were such severe consequences in the church particularly and that translated to my family life within that religion is it does with many others. You exhaust every option possible to try and make yourself believe that there may be another way to live, even though you clearly understand your identity.”

John a 29 year-old homosexual male, who formally identifies as LDS Mormon reported attempting to reconstruct his sexuality through reparative therapy. Reparative therapy, also known as conversion therapy is a technique used by The Church of Latter Day Saints to cure same-sex attraction (citation). John reported that he attended reparative therapy for six months before realizing that the therapeutic technique was causing more harm than good.

For others rejection of their sexual identity was not as obvious or technical. Sarah a 23 year old lesbian discussed knowing she was gay but considered celibacy in order to obey the church and not act on her same-sex attraction:

“I think that I was just in denial about it by thinking that I was asexual, like a new I was attracted to women I just didn’t know how to go about it. I even thought about being celibate for a period of time, but it something you’re born with, it is something you can’t really do anything about. I guess the sort of biggest thing

was, I just sort of had to figure out my relationship with my sexuality was going to be.”

Karen 28 year old lesbian attempted to reject her same-sex attraction by praying. Her religion taught her that homosexuality is an illness and that with enough faith this illness could be resolved:

“It was really difficult I cried a lot. And I really thought and I prayed for God to stop putting those thoughts in my head. I thought it was something that I could push away from, because that’s what I had been raised to think and I also thought that it meant that I was going to go to hell, if I didn’t. And so the fact that I couldn’t stop sort of like thinking about women in romantic ways made me feel like I was really a bad person, who had no control over her willpower and couldn’t be disciplined and follow the right path and that I was going to end up going to hell, so it was pretty rough.”

The majority of the participants (seven out of eight) attempted to reject their sexuality in order satisfy their religious beliefs. Many of them attempted to practice heterosexuality as a way to live to within their beliefs system and strive to please their families and their church. Several of the participants expressed feelings of guilt during the time in which they were coming to pass with their sexuality. Several participants illustrated how their religious belief systems taught them that homosexuality was wrong; it was something to be ignored or cured. Below Karen discusses the disgust she felt internally as she begun to acknowledge her sexuality:

“I was in middle school and I started having like I had girlfriends, like I’d always had female friends and stuff but I started having more sexual relationships with

some of them and started to fantasize more about girls and women and stuff like that. So I was 12, I started to realize that what I thought was a sickness, I thought of myself at the time as being in the same position as a pedophile. Where you like have these thoughts and there like disgusting and you're like a horrible person. It was really difficult I cried a lot. And I really thought and I prayed for God to stop putting those thoughts in my head. I thought it was something that I could push away from, because that's what I had been raised to think and I also thought that it meant that I was going to go to hell, if I didn't. And so the fact that I couldn't stop sort of like thinking about women in romantic ways made me feel like I was really a bad person, who had no control over her willpower and couldn't be disciplined and follow the right path and that I was going to end up going to hell, so it was pretty rough."

### **Consequences experienced as a result of attempting to reject or suppress sexual identity**

Participants reported while attempting to reject their sexual identities they experienced a great deal of internal and external distress. These emotions and feelings ranged amongst the participants but included feelings of depression, anger, and confusion. Also some participants showed symptoms of self-loathing, actions of self-harm (including substance abuse), and suicidal ideation. Here Melissa a 50 year old lesbian describes the emotional roller-coaster she was riding while attempting to reject her sexuality and figure out who she is meant to be:

"here's is this first woman that I was ever in love with and all of my friends that I ever had aren't my friends anymore, in part because we don't have anything in

common anymore and then she's trying to date men to and I am trying to date men. You know I mean there were definitely sometimes where there were thoughts of suicide. There were some fights that resulted in some cutting and things like that. It was just a lot of anguish when I was trying to figure out who I was supposed to be and what I was supposed to do."

The majority of the participants reported negative emotional reactions when attempting to conceal or reject their sexual identities. Mark depicts his struggles internally early on:

"You exhaust every option possible to try and make yourself believe that there may be another way to live, even though you clearly understand your identity. So it was a real problem, I think especially when I was giving out (religious) lessons in particular there were a lot of issues. When I was 14 I remember being very very depressed and borderline suicidal at that point because I very much realized what was reality versus what was the kind of prescribed path for me by the church and my family."

John a 29 year-old homosexual male discusses his internal conflict and his efforts to attempt to live a heterosexual life:

"When I first started confronting all of this stuff it was because I was engaged and the engagement wasn't progressing along like a normal heterosexual relationship was supposed to. So I just started to kind of address these issues and in reparative therapy if you're not having success it's because you're not trying hard enough or you're not faithful enough or something like that or you're not praying hard enough, at least that's the way that I perceived it. And so when I wasn't changing,

I have the pressures of my fiancé was wondering why did like to kiss her, and then you know the assumption of responsibility, because therapy wasn't working so it was my fault. And then I started to drink, smoke and do drugs and stuff.”

Participants reported depressive symptoms, significant substance abuse issues, and suicidal ideation. This attempt to manage the interaction between their religion and sexuality by rejecting a primary component of their self identity caused the participants significant negative distress.

John and other participants report using alcohol and other substances during the period in which they were attempting to reject or suppress their sexuality. Below Jane, 48 year-old lesbian discusses her use of alcohol during her struggle with the conflict between her sexuality and her religion and her lack of family support:

“So I believed that I wasn't lovable, I didn't think this on the surface but underneath I was attracting all of these terrible relationships and it was unhappy and miserable, partying and drinking. Then I finally realized that I felt like crap about myself. I didn't think that I deserved anyone good because I'm not lovable, my mom said so and God said so and if my mother said so than God said so, so I'm screwed.”

During the beginning stages of their sexual discovery, participants reported that their religious belief system were the main source of their dissonance. The participants indicated feelings of fear and shame when discussing how their religious community could and likely would react to their sexuality. With this religious dissonance came the motivation to attempt to reject their sexuality to satisfy their religious beliefs. With their deep roots and dedication to their religious beliefs, the majority of participants felt that

rejecting or suppressing their homosexuality would be the easiest way to alleviate the conflict. Unfortunately for the majority of the participants this actually caused more harm than good.

### **Lack of family support due to religious beliefs**

Along with was the fear and concern of family reaction, since the majority of participants reported that their families were are also closely tied to their religious affiliation. Many of the participants felt that their parent's emotions and feelings about their sexuality would be motivated by their religious beliefs. And unfortunately for some of them they were correct. One individual reported being rejected by their family entirely and despite many attempts to reconcile these issues they have been unsuccessful and continue to have little to no relationship with their parents. This can be seen through Jane's statement below:

“It was not good it was not accepted. I was probably a junior or senior college 21 or 22 years old and I was getting these really severe migraine headaches and I was getting one of these headaches when I was home from school for the weekend. And my dad was questioning me, why keep getting these headaches what was wrong? Why are you so stressed out? We are worried about you. We are worried about this girl and what your relationship is with her and is it healthy? And I was like it's totally fine and said how did you know it was a relationship? And my mother was in the other room who is probably an alcoholic, drinking at like 11 AM, threw her wine glass into the sink and came running in there and said you're going to hell your dead and buried to me your disgusting just sick and perverted and everything else you can think of saying, not that I could of thought of these



things (slight laughter). So she pretty much rejected me and said you're not part of our family and that is the way that it remains. I mean I'm 48 now and I was 21 or 22 then."

Others reported a struggle with their families feeling about their sexuality but have found some to full resolution. Participants reported that their families had some negative feelings towards their sexuality based on their religious beliefs but over time their families and parents have been able to put those feelings aside and love them for who they are. Other participants reported that although their families and parents have attempted to set these feelings aside they still feel as though their relationships are strained.

Here Terry, 47 year-old lesbian outlines the struggle that her mother had over her sexuality but that over time there has been some resolution to this and they currently continue to have a positive relationship:

"Well... It was really strange she kept referring to my ex Kim as, I was really heartbroken over and I was really grieving, and every time I would bring it up to my mom she would just say you just need to kick her to the curb, and you need to do this and you need to do that. And I was like mom she just wasn't my roommate she was my wife, and she didn't speak to me... And we were living under the same roof. It took her a week to kind of digest it and then she finally came around. And now my wife and I are living with my mother, so that's how far she's come."

John describes in his interview that he chose to come out to his parents in a letter. He felt that this would allow them the opportunity to digest their feelings and emotions

about it before being forced to talk to him. John wanted to allow his parents the opportunity to explore their emotions without before forced to address this with him before they were ready to do so:

“I decided to do it in a letter, because I did not want to force my parents to respond immediately. You know like a lot of times, I don’t know... I didn’t want a bad response. I knew my parents love to me so I didn’t want to like, I knew that if they had time I knew they would decide that they love me for who I was and whatever I was doing. So I wrote them a 16 page letter, and the reason that it was 16 pages is because it had journal entries from the previous year. Just good journal entries that would highlight some of the experiences that I had had. That way they were able to follow my experience from initially thinking that I could fix this before anyone can ever find out about it you know that I didn’t even tell my fiancé initially that I was going to therapy and stuff like this; initially I thought I could change it and fix it quickly and slowly I came to the realization that that wasn’t happen. And eventually came to the realization that maybe I shouldn’t change it and then I decided that “no I don’t want to change this I want to find happiness with who I am” and then I started doing that so they were able to see all of that. It took them, I did delivery confirmation on it because I said it home and it took them two weeks from when they received it for them to call me. And where a family that talks every day and I still talk to my mom every day.”

Mark also experienced a negative response from his parents; his parents were visiting him in Phoenix when he decided to come out to them. Once he came out they chose to leave immediately and they did not discuss this for some time. Mark’s parents

would send him religious paraphernalia in attempt to get him to reconsider his chosen lifestyle. To this day Mark reports a continued strained relationship with his parents, to point in which he must monitor what he says to them with regards to his partner. He reports that in order to maintain a relationship with his family he must alter the information he gives his family about his life and attempts to limit the discussion about his partner:

“It was in 2003 and it happened here in Phoenix and they are not from here and they lived 13 thousand miles away and they actually came to visit and when that happened instantly they asked me to leave, telling me they wanted nothing to do with me, change their plane tickets and flew back. And that is how that went.”

Researcher: “Okay. And have you had contact with them since then?”

Yes. Oh yeah. You know that’s been an ongoing thing as well. And for a very long time I would get religious paraphernalia in the mail from them...(pause) you know that was really hard and I think it was kind of like kicking a dog when it’s down... Our relationship currently is definitely different today I have a very very limited relationship with my family. My father is very matter of fact, like I will never hear from him and less I go back home and then I might see him, but the conversation is very limited. And I presume that it’s only because my mother kind of pushes it for him to be a part of things, because she’s kind of like... I think my mother kind of has some issues with codependency and has had them for years and years. So I think she wants to make as much peace is possible, but she still has a very religious foundation as well. Our relationship is also different; it’s gotten better over the years.”

Jill a 20 year old bisexual female has chosen to keep her sexuality to herself because she feels that the conflict would be terrible and would not be worth the effort, therefore she has chosen to display her sexuality as heterosexual and is engaged to marry a man. She feels that informing her family of her sexuality would only result in unnecessary problems that she feels would not be able to be resolved because of her families deep devotion to their religious beliefs. However later in the interview Jill does report that she wishes that she could be truthful with her family at times but knows that there is no point in attempting to debate ideals and beliefs with those basing their opinion on faith, therefore she chooses to keep this part of herself a secret from her family:

“Because my family is way more scary prospect than my religion. I think I really just lucked out because if his soul (her fiancée) was in a girl, I still would have fallen in love with his personality. My family says that AIDS is God’s plague on the earth to punish the gay people. And that’s really not that uncommon of a belief. I love my family a lot, so I’ve learned to like deal with it.”

### **Consequences experienced due to family’s negative response**

All but one participant reported their families (parents and extended family) expressed negative feelings about their sexuality and for most their religious beliefs were the source of this conflict. The majority of the participants who reported negative support from their families reported that they experienced negative affects due to this. Mark discussed his substance abuse issue that he explained to be in reaction to his family’s response to his sexuality:

“It’s gotten better over the years and after I came out with them I actually developed a very severe severe substance abuse issue because of that.”

Researcher: Because of their negative reaction?

Yeah... I mean that was a large part of it..."

Jane went as far as to pretend and mask her sexuality to attempt to satisfy her mother and her mother's religious beliefs. In her interview Jane discussed the negative affect this had on her internally and externally:

"My dad drove up gave me some cash because he can have a trail ride me a check because she would find out. You're going to have to lie to your mother and tell her you were mistaken and that this was just a phase in whatever. And I I agreed with my knew that wasn't going get school paid for and I'm not going to be able to finish on my own and have got to do this right now. So I went home and weekend and I was like mom and so sorry I can't believe I put you through that I was wrong and I was mistaken I was just exploring a course, I love men blah blah whatever I had to say... And then I proceeded to be with women but hid it from her for the next several years just completely lying in hiding everything. You whenever she would come to visit when I lived in Tucson, we would have to de-gay our apartment get rid of anything that we thought she could get a sense from have fake guys all around that were boyfriends, you know that would come to the house and pick me up and go through all the questions like what is your dad do son? Then they would drop me off at my girlfriend's house. So I was lying in living the separate life for several years..."

Researcher: So how did that kind of feel when you are trying to reject those feelings and you are playing the game almost in you were pretending you are straight in front of your mother?

Oh you know... It was terrible. I was I don't like to be a liar I was raised. A lot of the tenants of my religion and morals that I'm very proud of, I don't want to be a liar I know it doesn't feel good to be lied to you and it made me sick. Was making me really unhealthy and I was doing destructive things like partying, drinking and drugs, to try mask it all and cover it all up. I was just like a party or all of the time Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday night and then I was also like a workaholic. I'll do anything I can to not have these feelings, so I'll do all of these things all party all weekend and work as hard as I can during the week, was just terrible it just felt really terrible. It just felt dirty and like a bad person, for doing that..."

### **Reject organized religious affiliation**

As a result of this all but one of the participants reported rejecting their organized religious beliefs, exiting the church and placing their self-identities as a first priority. Participants reported feeling that they needed to reject their organized beliefs in order to accept their sexual identities and that their religious affiliations would not allow for them to integrate the two; therefore being forced to choose between their religious affiliations and the sexual identities. Because of the negative affects the participants reported experiencing the majority of them rejected their religious affiliations.

After a long journey with her religious beliefs Melissa discusses how her church originally forced her to leave and how she eventually made peace with this and decided to reject organized religion:

"I moved down here and lived with a bunch of church girls in a house sending and I kind of fell in love with a girl who was getting involved with the church because she was trying to get out of her gay relationship that was abusive and I was really

feeling guilty about what she was doing her life and was trying to be straight. And we were kind of ships passing in the night it was because of that really had never fully acted upon my gayness I guess, until after. I had gotten kicked out of the church because I, you know because I was open with this and what I was dealing with because I'm an honest person and because I was open with it and they suspected that, that was what was going on I was asked to move out of the house I was living in..."

"...You know I think it's taken a long time for me to feel okay. In the scheme of life it was maybe overnight because a year or two or three to come to that. You know it took years to feel okay to go into a church and I may have been totally fine until that Sunday morning when I went into a church with somebody. Even if that was a church that accepted that my gay partner and I were going to church there. It took a long time to be okay with that it took a long time before I could go into a church and now sing songs that I used to sing before without somehow feeling that I was being hypocritical. Now I kind of feel sorry for those people who live in that little box of a church that doesn't allow them to see how amazing God is outside the doors."

Here Jane discusses her personal feelings about rejecting her organized religious affiliation:

"I think I consider myself spiritual, I don't call that a religion I don't go to any church. I've been really trying to figure this out over the years, and in the most recent years about even my belief in God. I pretty much found out that I don't believe in Jesus as a Catholic religion thinks as a, whatever I'm not going to try

and describe it. I believe that he was a man and he was probably a very powerful profit but I don't believe in all of those things in the Bible that someone wrote about someone said about what someone said... So that whole thing to me was very difficult to say I don't believe in Jesus you don't think I can call myself a Christian if I don't believe in Christ and I don't know on the Christian so I struggled with that because that Christian means you're also a good person to me, that you believe in the tenants of it, but then who is this Christ guy I don't think he's real so than maybe I'm not a Christian and then who is this God character if this is also bullshit then whose God. So I decided that I can still call whatever the universe is in the creator, I still can call that God it doesn't have to mean Catholic God. It just means that I believe in the universe and that things happen based on someone's divine... I don't even know what you call it... Plans. Some plans that I'm not in control of. And that uses sound like that was God to me, Catholic God. But now I just think it's the universe or like a divine plan that's happening"

Researcher: So is it, kind of what I'm hearing from you is that the whole organized religion thing is not ever going to work for you

"Right I don't ever want to be a part of any organized religion again. I mean if it was one I would want it to be Catholic but even the others I think are very similar but in terms of discriminating against certain people in one way or another."

Here Mark discusses his rejection of organized religious affiliations in general, including his own:



“As far as the religious peace goes, I guess it is ongoing, I would say even up until now maybe a year and half ago is when I completely split with anything to do with the church and with religion. I have such a better understanding today as to what religion really is. And that is very helpful in my day-to-day life...”

Researcher: And what are your views now, as far as spirituality is there any...

“...I absolutely do not believe in organized religion and I believe it's a very large conspiracy in a studied extensively social oppression and systematic oppression. I was the sociology major in undergrad and now pursuing my MSW and my MPA, things that I'm learning everything makes a lot more sense to me now and they do believe that there is, I do believe in universal energy you think is the best way to put it. I don't believe that any one religion is valid; I don't believe that any one religion is invalid. But I do believe that organized religion in general is, I'm not sure conspiracy is the right word. I would say it's a systematic form of oppression that is used to control the behavior of large groups of people that has no validity whatsoever.”

John discussed the positive feelings he experienced once he accepted that he had rejected his organized religious affiliation:

Researcher: As of today what kind of role does your religion play in your life? Do you identify differently?

“I identify differently in the fact that I don't identify as LDS Mormon person, and that was really a liberating thing when I first started to say, you know people would ask you a kind of religion I was and I would say “I'm not really in any kind of religion”. And I was really a liberating thing because my entire life identified

as a Mormon, when I finally said no I don't need to do that anymore. But right now religion still plays a large role in my life, just as far as... Just like how your past plays a role in your present life.”

Terry took a slightly different perspective than the other participants, although she does not identify with an organized religious affiliation, she still feels that she has relationship with God, which she describes below. She feels that her relationship with God is a personal one and does not necessarily need to be labeled or practiced in a organized religious community.

Researcher: So you mentioned organized religion and I kind of want to touch on that really quick do you identify yourself as Christian?

“Well I identify as Christian and correct me if I'm wrong but a Christian person is someone that believes in God... An atheist is someone who doesn't. I believe in God or a higher power... So I will call him God because that's the word that's been drilled into my head. Actually believe that all religions are the same thing in there just called something different and it's the people's interpretation of what God is, but it's basically all the same. Devoutly Christian individuals are those who go to church every Sunday and pray the rosary in whatever and claim to be closer to God than I am because they're in church. Whereas my relationship is just a one-on-one relationship with God; and they don't have to be in a group that worships together. I have a Bible but I haven't read it in quite some time, because I basically feel like I know the basics of it. I really have not read the Bible cover to cover and probably 25 years.”

Karen exited the church very quickly, once she identified this conflict between her sexuality and her religion:

“It took like a few more years but when I was 14 I just couldn’t deal with the conflict in my life anymore because of it. So I sort of told my family that I was an atheist and I wasn’t going to church anymore, they were really angry about it and it took a while for us to regain our footing in the family over it. A few years later they ended up stopping going to church as much and it’s steadily dropped off and now they’re not religious in any way, so it was really kind of an abrupt change for them...

Researcher: Would you say that you have a relationship with God now?

Oh I don’t think so. I struggled for a little while like trying to get back to a point where I believed in God, I don’t really like anything anymore it’s not really comforting.”

Throughout the interview Sarah discussed that she was raised devoutly Catholic and attended a Catholic school. Her family still identifies as Catholic and is still very much involved in the religious community. Although Sarah did not make a clear statement about exiting the church she did report that she does not currently practice her religious beliefs in an organized setting. In fact Karen has been attempting to get Sarah to explore other religious affiliations but she currently has some reservations about this. Below we can see the dissonance that Sarah is currently experiencing with her religious beliefs and affiliation:

Researcher: So are you still a member of the church?

“Yeah well I mean... I haven’t really exited the church I guess that even though

now I identify mostly as an atheist or like an agnostic, but at the same time like I still feel like engaged with the church I don't really like go to church just because here I've had a hard time, I mean I found a church that was less like conservative and whatnot but just like working it back into my life has been difficult, but I mean... It's complicated I guess... I wouldn't say that I'm a part of the church anymore but I did definitely see in a different part of my life re-engaging with it, like if the circumstances are right. So like right now I'm trying to work out what is it mean for me to be Catholic if I don't believe in God and that kind of thing is a really big part of any religious belief? Yeah so I guess I never really left it, I did for a time sort of like say that I had left the church.

Researcher: Is it more of a spiritual thing for you at this point?

No it's more of a cultural thing. And it's kind of like there are still a lot of Catholic beliefs that I agree with like social justice and things like that and I like the way that the church encourages (some people within the church) people to think logically and think of sort of like the world we live in a what's going on with it like the art in the history and everything like that. It isn't... I don't know what it is it's not so much spiritual as it is historical and cultural I guess.

Researcher: Do you feel like you have a relationship with God now?

Um no because I don't really believe in God, so like I don't, I don't pray and things like that like I used to do, I definitely don't have that same relationship to religion as I did before. I sort of like come to terms with that.”

The majority of the participants reported no current religious affiliation and along with this they reported no plan to affiliate themselves with another organized religious

system. Several of the participants expressed past and current anger and dissonance with their religious organizations. Some reported that they felt that it would be a lifelong process for them to “make peace” with their feelings towards their organized religious affiliations.

### **Sexuality motivated rejection of religious beliefs**

All of the participants that rejected their organized religious affiliations reported that they were motivated to do so in order to accept their sexual identities. These participants indicated that in order to be satisfied internally as a whole they had to accept their sexuality and reject their organized religious affiliation.

Here we can see that John felt that he was forced to choose; that his religious affiliation would not allow for him to identify as both, homosexual and Mormon:

“I saw being LDS and being homosexual as mutually exclusive, like you could not be both. I mean there is no allowance in the LDS church for people who are accepting themselves as gay. And especially their behaving, doing gay behaviors, engaging in homosexual activity, it’s not allowed in its even something that I would’ve gotten kicked out of school because I graduated from BYU...”

“...Gay people I guess, or the homosexual culture could’ve allowed for me to be LDS, but the LDS would’ve allowed for me to continue being gay.”

Researcher: So there really was no integration, you were forced to reject either your homosexuality or your religion?

“Yeah. And it was my religion the force me to do that”

Below Mark describes how he feels as though he didn’t make a choice, rather he simply lives his life as who he is and that did not involve a choice. He feels that his

identity is what it is and that he would not have the ability to change it if he wanted too, and the attempt to do so could have killed him:

“Well I think it’s important to clarify that I never made a choice, I never felt that way ever and I would largely disagree with anyone who tried to tell me that I had done that. I have chosen to live my life, had I chosen to stay in the religion that I was then I would most likely still have an issue with substance abuse, which would’ve eventually lead to death... And I wasn’t far off from that when I got clean and sober, it is something that would’ve killed me. So essentially I had to make a decision either I was going to kill myself, and that’s what it really came down to I was either planning to kill myself, because I refuse to live that way I was so miserable or I was going to live my life but I would only live my life happy and open and free and I cannot tell you how wonderful my life is today.”

### **Current negative views towards organized religious affiliations**

Several of the participants reported having negative feelings towards their former religious affiliations. These participants indicated that they felt that the members of their religious affiliations displayed hypocritical views towards them and their sexuality. Also some of them expressed some anger and frustrations towards their former religious affiliations for not accepting them as God made them.

Terry discussed why she feels that practicing her religious beliefs independently rather than within an organized religious group. She also expressed her thoughts and emotions with regards to their practices:

“Researcher: And some wondering is that why you don’t feel the need to go to church?”

In fact I think there are so many hypocrites and church that that is an unhealthy place to be.

Researcher: Do you think if you went to church and were identified as homosexual that you feel any backlash?

Oh I think so... And I think that even if I weren't a homosexual I would be doing something that the congregation would frown on. I just think it's full of hypocrites."

Mark expressed some negative feelings and emotions with regards to organized religious affiliations in his interview as well:

"But I do believe that organized religion in general is...I'm not sure conspiracy is the right word. I would say it's a systematic form of oppression that is used to control the behavior of large groups of people that has no validity whatsoever."

Here Jane discusses her frustration and conflicts with the Catholic Church and their practices:

"I don't need to be called a sinner, and get lashes, be in trouble for something. I'm just a human being and I'm totally I am healed for the most part from all that crap. I live my life now and that stuff doesn't really come up all the time anymore, whereas it did the role of the years of counseling. I still, I wouldn't call it animosity but, I have, I don't believe in the Catholic Church. I don't think that, I think it's hypocritical. And I think it's a cult, trying to brainwash these people too, for some reasons which I don't understand, because I don't have time to study the politics of why they are saying that women don't have the same power where they can have the same roles, you know that sort of one man one woman and all of this

birth control and things like, I'm like a church shouldn't be controlling all of this a church should be just loving you and teaching you good things not to exclude certain people and discriminate against people. I have a real problem with the church, the Catholic Church or organized religion in general.”

John also expressed some negative feelings towards the way in which his former organized religious affiliations is run and operated:

“I look at other people that were raised in religion that doesn't, you know that is gay friendly and I get kind of jealous, because like those people still like their religion. My conflict with my religion came up because of my sexuality, and the my sexuality just kind of helped me to distance myself from it and I don't know if it was bitterness but eventually I started to see a lot more flaws in the religion that I grew up with. I don't know enough about any of the other religions to say whether I would like them or not, but the one that I grew up with after kind of distancing myself because of my conflicts and then I started to see other things that were just, I guess I couldn't tolerate those things anymore. Like the involvement with the political agendas, like with anti-marriage and stuff like that. The way that their state is run, living in Utah was quite an experience. I noticed that a lot of the commercial properties in downtown Salt Lake were owned by the church. The church had a very large business portion to it to. But they originated with my conflicts with my sexuality, not being tolerated in the church.”

Jill discussed in her interview the internal frustration she experiences towards her current and former religious affiliation since she has decided to suppress her sexual identity for her family and her religious beliefs:



“Sometimes on the inside I feel like I’m screaming and tearing my hair out but on the outside I have to just smile, I’m so happy. Like I would like to be a perfect Mormon but, for the love of God it’s just too much. Like the no coffee? I get the whole like no alcohol and I don’t do drugs, I don’t need any help being weird so (laughter) and the no sex before marriage, that kind of make sense... But in a weather to just like stop so I just got a call that one a loss. So I just like bother anymore. It’s hard though because I feel like empowered a little bit as a bisexual because crossing the gender norms, I feel like I’m a really strong woman. Like my mom taught me that from an early age and it’s so hard going to church and feet what I could have been. Like you have to wear skirt of your girl and it has to be below your knee and your shoulders can be showing and I have this ink and I covered up because even though it’s not like mandated it’s still a thing. And all of these women are just so like dependent on their men and I’m just like I can’t even conceive of that, like there at a level of dependence that if their husband left them or died they’d be useless.”

### **Ongoing process to manage religious conflict**

A few participants noted when asked about their relationship with God or their current religious affiliation, indicated that they felt as though this will be a lifelong process for them. Some reported ongoing feelings of anger, dissonance, and confusion with regards to their religious beliefs, which will be illustrated below.

Jane described her current anger towards her former religious affiliation and how that continues in her current life. She indicated to the researcher that this would be an

ongoing process for her throughout her life. Later in her interview she goes on to describe that she feels that she will be dealing with her dissonances and anger throughout her life:

Yeah, I immediately stepped away because of everything with my family and then I did this church shopping which was every other kind of church but Catholic through my mid-to-late 20s and then I just decided that religion is just not for me, I don't need that and I tried to go back like around the time when I went on the gay lesbian retreat. I did get back involved with the church at the Franciscan renewal Center, because there were all these people there that I'd met and it felt like home again. Remember going to church a few times and just crying to the whole mass about I am welcome here this is home, they would say to me you've come home and it was this, but it felt again very cultish. "Oh here you are back in our arms" and I didn't want that pressure you to go to church every Sunday now and you have to follow all these things again. I'm like, that's when it started to not feel like I don't agree with the way women are treated and the different politics of the church. Then I started feel like I could have God and my beliefs and I don't have to have it attached to this religion."

Researcher: Right.

"I don't consider myself a Catholic, I do joke and call myself a recovering Catholic (laughter). I try to say I'm recovered Catholic but I know that that's not true, I don't think that it is ever possible, it will always be an "ing" for me.

Because there are so many things interwoven, and my sick family."

Researcher: So is it, kind of what I'm hearing from you is that the whole organized religion thing is not ever going to work for you.

Right I don't ever want to be a part of any organized religion again. I mean if it was one I would want it to be Catholic but even the others I think are very similar but in terms of discriminating against certain people in one way or another. My, I grew up a lot of the morals and things that I learned were good, uncovering it all was that my parents were teachers, even in some of the things that we repeated and said like in a cult like the things you would say. And the responses of the things that were said in church were like "where better than the other religions, if you're not Catholic or you don't believe in Christ you're not going to heaven". So that means all of my Jewish friends and my Presbyterian whenever all my other people were you're not as good as I am. I still, I wouldn't call it animosity but, I have, I don't believe in the Catholic Church. I think it's hypocritical. And I think it's a cult, trying to brainwash these people too, for some reasons which I don't understand, because I don't have time to study the politics of why they are saying that women don't have the same power where they can have the same roles, you know that sort of, one man one woman and all of this birth control and things like that, I'm like a church shouldn't be controlling all of this, a church should be just loving you and teaching you good things not to exclude certain people and discriminate against people. I have a real problem with the church, the Catholic Church or organized religion in general."

John described in his interview that he chose to reject his religious beliefs and accept his sexuality, however in addition to this he discusses his current guilt about not practicing. He reports trying to re-affiliate but this was not successful for him:

Researcher: As of today what kind of role does your religion play in your life? Do you identify differently?

I Identify differently in the fact that I don't identify as LDS Mormon person, and that was really a liberating thing when I first started to say, you know people would ask you a kind of religion I was and I would say "I'm not really in any kind of religion". And I was really a liberating thing because my entire life identified as a Mormon, when I finally said no I don't need to do that anymore. But right now religion still plays a large role in my life, just as far as... Just like how your past plays a role in your present life. So such a big thing, I went on a two-year mission with the church and honest to God all the way through to when I was 25, I loved it. It provided all the answers you could want, you know. Everything was in the context of the will pay off later, if you endure there's a purpose to all of this; it really just had all of the answers you could want. So I miss having the confidence and stuff like that, but I realized that was based off of... I don't know but I realized that I don't think it was based off of the greatest foundations. And so was kind of a false confidence. The way that it plays a role in my life now is just by, like I realize there's a standard of spirituality and I haven't really been spiritual or been good at being spiritual since I quit going to church...."

"..., I dropped all of my belief's at once, and since then I haven't really pursued much by way of spirituality.(pause) I kind of have a guilty conscience about it though. I mean I recognize that whatever relationship that I had with the creator or God or whoever like I really think that there is something to that into spirituality and possibly even organized religion, although I'm pretty doubtful on

that one (laughter). You know I'm pretty sure that there is something to spirituality, like there is a lot of validity to it and a lot of benefit to be had from it, but I haven't been able to get back into spirituality very well because, and I've tried a few times I went to a few other churches that you know that were gay friendly and stuff like that, every time I go I get this feeling of incorrect nostalgia, if that makes any sense. It's like I get nostalgic about hearing about commandments and righteousness and stuff like that, during in the end and trial and faith and stuff like that, though not going back to the Mormon church it feels like a betraying my childhood, like I'm in the wrong place. I find it hard to get new ideas rise because I feel that their betrayal of stuff that I grew up with for 25 years and loved it all the time while I was growing up with it it wasn't until you know I decided that I needed to be more real, I finally started to see what I perceived as flaws and errors in the religion.

Researcher: So were you going to like Christian churches?

Yeah. I tried Christian churches; I found a lot of success in doing yoga but mostly just a physical balance, even with yoga I just didn't feel like I was getting into the spiritual exercises...."

"...so right now yeah there's not a whole lot of spirituality in my life, I'm working to find it."

### **Attempt to re-affiliate with a religious belief system**

Although all of the participants but one reported rejecting their organized religious affiliation, it was also reported by some that they are currently, in the past or would like to in the future attempt to re-affiliate with an organized religious community.

Sarah and Karen currently identify as married to one another and describe in their interview that they are currently attempting to re-affiliate with a religious organization. They also describe using the act of “church shopping”; this idea of looking for a new church that will accept their sexuality. Sarah discusses her connection to Catholicism; she indicates that she does not entirely feel comfortable with attending a new church because she still feels very connected to her catholic background. Also Karen Red expressed strong desire to find a religious community that would accept her and her wife. She discussed missing the community she had as child with her religious community and would like to get that back. During her interview she discussed her interest in possibly attending a Unitarian church.

Karen: I was constantly aware of God’s presence in my life, so that something that I try to reengage with and I haven’t been very successful with it. But over the last few months I’ve really been missing my church community as a kid like Southern Baptist churches are really good for that like they really do provide an all-around community, your friends come from there, the mega-churches have a lot of resources that they offer too, but just your church in general has lots of time and space for people going through various periods of their life they have like their young married groups and like their retired people’s groups and things like that and you can meet and liking out with people who are in the same part of life that you are. So I sort of miss that because a really good at fostering community and we really haven’t found that it all.

Sarah: This is interesting because we talk about this about whether or not to go back to a church and whatnot and I tend to be very married to Catholicism and so

part of me doesn't really want to go to another church even if it would be more accepting if it doesn't have that structure. I would see it as I guess kind of not as like less than but just not my speed I guess, like not what I'm used to or what I'm expecting out of my church going experience. And so it's kind of counterintuitive because I'm like oh I'd rather go to this church where I don't know whether or not they accept us, if we can hold hands and like tell people were married and stuff or we go to this other church which is like super accepting but I'm like ehh I don't know like.

Karen: She's talking about the Unitarians, we've been church shopping...

Sarah: There's only like sort of nondenominational churches that are accepting of people, I don't know but it's hard for me to get away from the mass and that sort of thing.

Researcher: So I have to ask, with Catholicism you identify with it, is like the only thing you struggle with is that they may not accept you there?

Sarah: Um yeah like the individual people in the parish would not accept me ... But yeah I don't know, I want to experiment with going to other denominational we just haven't gotten around to it.

Karen: And I really miss it, I wish that we could find like a congregation that we could feel comfortable at and I've been sort of trying to get her to go to the Unitarian church. We've a friend that grew up Unitarian she always tells us, she's also gay and she never had any issues with it at all it's a super welcoming community

Sarah: I never really had that experience within my parish like being super social, like welcoming because it was so cliquish and like sort of catty... So I never wanted to be a part of that to begin with and like I went to school in my parish and I like had a really hard time socially in school and so I was like I really don't want to hang out with your families, because like if you're being mean to me about your family, and we did hear from somewhere right. So like that's part of it to, you know you talk about how like you had a really good experience with the church community and I never had that in so I don't see the draw there.

Karen: But if we define a community where even like an evangelical, I just like miss it so much, even if we could find one where we could walk in and be like yeah were married and everyone's over it.

Researcher: Do those exist?

Karen: No... Not at all (laughter).

Sarah and her partner display some conflict about their feelings on re-affiliation. Karen really would like to regain a connection to a religious community and Sarah is more hesitant about this. However in addition to this Karen also reported a more positive experience with her previous religious community than Sarah. The couple reports that they have not yet decided to go back to church but they continue to discuss their options despite their conflicts both internally and externally.

Mark describes his current negative emotions and feelings towards organized religious organizations in general. He displayed and expressed anger and frustration towards organized religious affiliations in general. Later in the interview Mark stated he would never again affiliate with another organized religious organization:



“... I absolutely do not believe in organized religion and I believe it’s a very large conspiracy in a studied extensively social oppression and systematic oppression. I was the sociology major in undergrad and now pursuing my MSW and my NPA, things that I’m learning everything makes a lot more sense to me now and they do believe that there is, I do believe in universal energy you think is the best way to put it. I don’t believe that any one religion is valid, I don’t believe that any one religion is invalid. But I do believe that organized religion in general is, I’m not sure conspiracy is the right word. I would say it’s a systematic form of oppression that is used to control the behavior of large groups of people that has no validity whatsoever.

Researcher: Okay. And so I guess I’m just trying to understand your beliefs currently. It’s just the spirituality you don’t ever see yourself connecting with a organized religion again?

Never. I believe in universal energy, I think part of that is almost like a karma element. So I believe and I have for a long time that, and I’ve said this for almost 10 years now there’s only one universal sin and that is if you hurt another person. For me it’s kind of like, I live a very principle spiritual life if you want to look at it that way but it does not include any attendance at any organized religions events of any kind.

Researcher: Does that include a God of any kind?

I kind of have my own understanding of that also, having the closest thing I would have to that is an understanding of universal energy, like mother Earth kind of thing. If you study world religions there some tie-ins there two different ones

that touch on that, again I think it goes back to there's not one that's valid or one that's invalid but that there's universal energy.”

### **Accept sexuality and self-identity/ Sexual/self-identity primary**

After attempting to reject their sexuality all of these participants accepted their sexuality and put their self-identities first and foremost. The majority of the participants reported rejecting their organized religious belief systems in order to fully accept their sexual identities. Participants reported feeling significantly better as whole when they accepted their sexual identities. This self-acceptance led to overall internal satisfaction and well being reported by the participants.

Here Jane describes her current feelings as a whole since accepting her sexual identity and rejecting her organized religious beliefs:

“Oh I feel great, I feel fine with myself, I feel complete and whole. I know that I was created to be exactly who I am and that God whatever you want to call it loves me and I am perfect. I can make mistakes and he still thinks I'm perfect. I don't need to be called a sinner, and get lashes, be in trouble for something. I'm just a human being and I'm totally I am healed for the most part from all that crap.”

Below John reviews the journey that brought him to self-acceptance and how he feels internally about this:

“Yeah. I tried to, you know I tried your reduce my sexuality and that didn't work, I had to reduce my religion, and I didn't really reduce it I cut it off. And I just had to manage my life aside from that once I felt the my life as a little bit better managed like I've come to a little bit more peace, then I tried to reintegrate my

religion, but I found when I tried to reintegrate religion, it just felt like this nostalgia that was in the wrong place, I could just kind of feel odd or weird or wrong I don't know... Because it just didn't click, because it was an easy reintegrating religion or other religions, so I really haven't tried to reintegrate religion for about a year and a half now. I've haven't tried to go to a church or anything, but I have been trying to reintegrate spirituality, and developing spirituality again. I feel much more just honest. Now I don't feel like I'm hiding things anymore, it's just like the most peaceful thing in the world to just be yourself. People see you, because you're acting yourself and now I am not so concerned about what they see or their opinion of it."

Mark describes the outcome of his journey to attempt to manage the conflict between his sexuality and his religion. Here we can see the significant positive impact that accepting his sexuality and rejecting his organized religious beliefs have had on him internally and as a person as a whole. This quote paints a clear picture of the effects this conflict and the resolution of the conflict has had a Mark life:

"I have chosen to live my life, had I chosen to stay in the religion that I was then I would most likely still have an issue with substance abuse, which would've eventually lead to death... And I wasn't far off from that when I got clean and sober, it is something that would've killed me. So essentially I had to make a decision either I was going to kill myself, and that's what it really came down to I was either planning to kill myself, because I refuse to live that way I was so miserable or I was going to live my life but I would only live my life happy and open and free and I cannot tell you how wonderful my life is today. Everything

looks different, I am very happy I have so many more friends today that I consider to be close family. I have an amazing partner, I feel spiritually more sound than I ever have before and I live with a lot less fear than I think most people do and I think that there are a couple of things that motivate people and one of those is fear and I don't think that is a good motivator. I think that it can really lead to some ugly situations for people and you know I think what motivates me today as opposed to that fear is seeing on a regular basis the results of my decision to live happy and to be free with it. I'm a very, I mean everything is just changed I can't even tell you... it's amazing."

Regardless of their current commitment or conflict with their religious beliefs the majority of the participants reported that their sexual and self identities were placed as their primary concern. The only participant that is not included in this statistic is Jill who identifies as bisexual and is currently engaged to a member of the opposite sex and continues to practice within the Mormon faith.

These individuals indicated that in order to live a happy and satisfying life they needed to be able to live their lives as who they truly are. Participants that reported possible consideration to re-affiliate they also acknowledged that if they decided to so the church and its community would need to first accept them and their sexual identities before they would be willing to re-affiliate.

Karen discusses her desire to reunify with a religious community but that she will under no circumstances be willing to forfeit her sexual/self-identity for this:

"I feel like what I'm trying to do is reunify with my religion because it is important to me. But I don't know anymore what that looks like and it's all driven

by the fact that I'm gay and I'm not interested in being in the closet, and I'm way too old for that. I mean were married now and were planning our family soon in so where like getting to a point where we would want to hide it anyway and couldn't. So for me like I have no idea where to move forward, and at this point our management of this conflict is were obviously going to find some sort of religious community that conforms to both my beliefs and my life. Because I've chosen my identity, my lesbian identity over my Christian identity, and silver religion is telling me that that's not a meaningful identity or that's not a real identity or that I'm just choosing a sinful behavior that I'm not going to be able to consider it."

### **Sexuality will not determine eternity**

For the participants who reported current close ties to their religious beliefs felt that although their sexuality is not accepted by their religious affiliations, they do not feel that their sexuality will determine where they spend eternity.

Terry described heterosexuality as a rule in the Bible and that she feels as though she has broken a rule in the eyes for God but that she will not be punished for eternity for break this rule:

"I believe that each person's relationship with God is individual, he's laid out some rules and we have to do our best to live by them... He's like a parent, you can't do this you can't do that, but everyone slips up and make some mistakes but the love from God is like a love from a parent, they're not like kick you to the curb when you make a mistake. Yes he does say that homosexuality is a sin just like anything else lying, cheating, anything else. And when you have your

conversations with God, and I do believe that he understands me, and I understand him. I understand what he was trying to do, it just like a parent, when they layout rules they're trying to protect us and it's the same with him, he's trying to make our path as easy as it can be, but we're going to fail were going to make mistakes.”

Here Jill who still identifies as a member of the Mormon faith discusses her belief that her sexual identity and practices will not determine where she spends eternity:

Researcher: So when it's Judgment Day for you how do you feel that that will go for you? Do you think your sexuality will be a factor?

Oh no... Other things will be a factor. I have a temper and it's got me into trouble quite a bit. So I'm more worried about that. And like with being bisexual... God doesn't do things without there being a purpose. He made me this way for a reason”

### **Common Path of Resolution**

Within the results there were common experiences, but amongst these themes there was a common pattern that emerged in the majority of the participants. This common pattern was the path and order of experiences that occurred for the majority of the participants. All of the participants identified with an organized religious affiliation at the time in which they began questioning their sexuality.

All participants reported internal concerns with regards to their sexual identity as related to the religious affiliations beliefs about homosexuality. The majority of the participants reported attempting to reject or suppress their homosexual identity in order to comply with their religious beliefs. Some reported feeling that this would be easier than

dealing with the conflict or attempting integrate their sexuality and their religion. All of the participants that attempted to reject their sexuality identified internal and/or external issues during this process. Participants reported that rejecting their sexuality affected them negatively and had significantly poor results.

These individuals then began the process of accepting their sexuality and their self-identity. During this process the participants were required to address the issues with their religious beliefs towards their sexuality. Ultimately for the majority of the participants they felt that they had to choose between their sexuality and their religion.

This led the majority of the participants to reject their religious affiliation and accept their sexuality and self identity, these participants reported that through this process they identified that their self-identity and their sexual identity is more important to them than the religious affiliation that did not accept their self and sexual identity. It was reported by these individuals that they felt that in order to be happy they needed to accept their identity and put who they are first.

However the participants varied in their current status with their religious affiliation/beliefs or spirituality. The majority of the participants reported no current affiliation and no interest to re-affiliate at this time. However some of the participants are currently attempting to re-affiliate with a religious community and one participant currently identified with a organized religion, it is important to note that this participant is currently suppressing their sexuality to satisfy their religious beliefs and to avoid conflict with their family. Below these themes will be closely examined, along with the common internal and external issues these individuals experienced during this process.

## **Themes to be Explored**

The two participants that reported minimal internal and external conflict with regards to their sexuality and their religion also reported adequate family support. Both of these participants indicated that members of their family expressed some struggled and may have required time to adjust to this idea, however these participants also indicated that they felt supported by their families and never felt rejected because of their sexuality. Since only two of the participants were able to report this experience it is not considered major theme but it does ignite some curiosity with regards to the extent in which positive family support can affect individuals who identify devoutly religious and find themselves struggling with their sexual identities. Sarah discussed her family's positive reaction to her sexuality and identifies her mother's minimal conflict with it and how that conflict did not affect the positive support they provided her with.

“It was my senior year of high school and I... Came out to my parents and my dad's family, who I was also very close with because they all live around here, I didn't plan on telling them until later but my parents ended up telling them that I had a girlfriend or something and so they were also like really cool with it, and like always figured that I was gay, so wasn't really shocking to them at all I guess, they were like whatever about it. I think my mom still has some internal conflicts about it, but the communication of my family is such that no one ever really talks about their feelings, so I don't know what those feelings are (laughter). It wasn't, there wasn't a lot of like I don't know open conflict about it and there hasn't been since then.”



Here Terry illustrated the positive support she received from her siblings when she came to them. So also described the struggle that her mother had with regards to her sexuality but that over time these emotions were managed and Terry was able to maintain a healthy relationship with her mother and her siblings.

“All of my family except for my mother took it very well, while they already knew. I had been into long-term relationships at that point, and I’ve categorized them as roommates. But my siblings all new and my friends from high school all new. Everybody knew but it just wasn’t spoken about. Well it felt positive all the way around for me. Because it was a secret that I was having to keep to myself and which is very freeing to just get that out there. And the way that all of my siblings reacted to it made me feel very good. I got a really long letter from my sister and she said that she really wanted her son to know his aunt completely and how I’m going to have such a positive effect in his life.”

Researcher: “So you’re coming out process...”

“It really wasn’t that bad, except for my mom because I didn’t know where she was at. And we never really talked about it but I could see her coming around to it, I mean I’ve had several relationships since then and all of my spouses have come to Thanksgiving dinner you know celebrated Christmas, so it’s good.”

For these participants their positive family support minimized the conflict and dissonance they experienced during this process. They indicated that the support that they received from their families alleviated some of the, if not all of the anguish they felt over this conflict.

## **Bisexuality**

Unfortunately there was only one participant that identified as bisexual, however she alluded to some interesting themes in her interview. She informed the interviewer that she felt as though she got lucky that she fell in love with a man because she will be able to appear to be heterosexual to her family and church community. Because of this she has chosen not to disclose her sexual identity to her family in order to avoid any conflict. However by do this she identified some internal conflict with her desire to want to be able to be herself around her family. She has been forced to suppress her sexuality to avoid conflict with her family but she is also an active member of the Church of Latter Day Saints. Her current religious affiliation does not allow for homosexuality on any level, but as indicated in her interview her religious affiliation and community it very important to her and it is not something she would be willing to give up at this point in her life. But because of her sexual identity she is able to suppress the part of her sexuality that is not accepted by her family or religion, this has had an effect on her internally but currently she feels that these internal issues are worth avoiding the conflict with her family and religious community.

## **Transgender and other sexualities**

It needs to be acknowledged that there are other sexualities that this research did not examine. This research did not have any participants that identified as transgender or other; therefore there was no data that examined how these individuals would manage this interaction or conflict.

## **Discussion**

It would seem that individuals who identify as LGBT still experience substantial amount of criticism and discrimination from various religious affiliations and organizations. These interviews show that these individuals are still forced to face a confliction between their religious beliefs and their sexualities they can't ignore. The participants in this study indicated that they felt as though they had to choose between the two; that although the gay community would accept their religious beliefs or affiliations they felt that their religious organizations would not accept their sexual identities. Because of this conflict these individuals reported experiencing internal and external effects from this.

The participants in this study attempted to take the researcher through their journeys of self-discovery and acceptance. And although their individual experiences and viewpoints differed they also had significant similarities. These similarities provide researchers and practitioners with a better understanding of what these individuals go through when attempting to find happiness and self-satisfaction. This information can be used by all social workers and other helping professionals that work with this population, to increase understanding of the internal and external affects these individuals face during this important journey. In addition to this, this study strives to increase awareness and advocacy for this population.

This research study was rather small, but attempted to delve deeper into the personal experiences of individuals attempting to integrate or manage the confliction between their sexuality and religion. Future research should attempt to obtain a larger sample to establish increased significance with these patterns. As discussed earlier this

study only had one participant that identified as bisexual, which provided us with some data on how these individuals deal with this conflict but we were unable to establish significant patterns because of limited participants. In addition to this, none of the participants identified as transgender or other; this is an area that future research should examine and focus on.

Some of the participants discussed attempting to or being in the process of re-affiliating with a religious organizations; future research may want to examine how this process worked for these individuals and if they were successful. In addition to this it was reported by a number of participants that they felt that making peace with their religious beliefs and affiliations would be a life long journey and would be something that they would have to continuously manage throughout their life. Future research should examine this population later in life to evaluate this journey and to see how these individuals continue to manage this issue throughout their lives.

## References

- Buchanan, M., Dzelme, K., Harris, D., & Hecker, L. (2001). Challenges of being simultaneously gay or lesbian and spiritual and/or religious: A narrative perspective. *The American Journal of Family Therapy*, 29, 435-449.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1080/01926180127629>
- Church Education System Honor Code. (2009). Retrieved from [www.byu.edu](http://www.byu.edu)
- Cochran, S. D., Sullivan, J. G., & Mays, V. M. (2003). Prevalence of mental disorders, psychological distress and mental health services use among lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults in the United States. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 71, 53-61.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1037/0022-006X.71.1.53>
- Friedman, R. C., & Downey, J. (1994). Special article: Homosexuality. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 331, 923-930.
- Gates, G. J., & Newport, F. (2012). Special Report: 3.4% of U.S. Adults Identify as LGBT. Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/158066/special-report-adults-identify-lgbt.aspx>
- Gold, S. P., & Stewart, D. L. (2011). Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students coming out at the intersection of spirituality and identity. *Journal of LGBT Issues and Counseling*, 5, 237-258. <http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1080/15538605.2011.633052>
- Halkitis, P. N., Mattis, J. S., Sahadath, J. K., Massie, D., Ladyzhenskaya, L., Pitrelli, K., ... Cowie, S. E. (2009). The Meanings and Manifestation of Religion and Spirituality among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Adults. *J Adult Dev*, 16, 250-262.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1007/s10804-009-9071-1>
- Halkitis, P. N., Mattis, J. S., Sahadath, J. K., Massie, D., Ladyzhenskaya, L., Pitrelli, K., ... Cowie, S. E. (2009). The Meanings and Manifestations of Religion and Spirituality among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Adults. *LGBT Religiosity and Spirituality*, 16, 250-262.
- Higgins, R. (2002). Tied in knots. *Christian Century*, 119, 8-9.
- Kocet, M. M., Sanabria, S., & Smith, M. R. (2011). Finding the spirit within: Religion, spirituality, and faith development in lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals.

- Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5, 163-179.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1080/15538605.2011.633060>
- Mahaffy, K. A. (1996). Cognitive Dissonance and Its Resolution: A Study of Lesbian Christians . *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* , 35 (4), 392-402.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.2307/1386414>
- McDaniel, J. S., Purcell, D., & D'Augelli, A. R. (2001). The relationship between sexual orientation and risk for suicide: Research findings and future directions for research and prevention. *Suicide and Life Threatening Behavior*, 31, 84-105.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1521/suli.31.1.5.84.24224>
- Mormons and Homosexuality. (2011). Retrieved from [www.whatmormonsbelieve.org](http://www.whatmormonsbelieve.org)
- Newport, F. (2012). Seven in 10 Americans Are Very or Moderately Religious . Retrieved from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/159050/seven-americans-moderately-religious.aspx>
- Pardeck, J. T. (1996). An ecological approach for social work intervention. *Family Therapy*, 23(3), 189-198. Retrieved from <http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/618882025?accountid=4485>
- Rodriguez, E., & Oullette, S. (2000). Gay and lesbian Christians: Homosexual and religious identity integration in the member and participants of a gay positive church. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* , 39, 333-347.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1111/0021-8294.00028>
- Sherry, A., Adelman, A., Whilde, M. R., & Quick, D. (2010). Competing selves: Negotiating the intersection of spiritual and sexual identities. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* , 41, 112-119.  
<http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1037/a0017471>
- Slick, M. (n.d.). Christianity and Homosexuality. Retrieved from [www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org)
- Stack, P. F. (2012). Mormon group still using discredited “gay cure” therapy. Retrieved from <http://www.standard.net/stories/2012/05/27/mormon-group-still-using-discredited-gay-cure-therapy>
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research* (second edition ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publication Inc.

Tan, P. P. (2005). The importance of spirituality among gay and lesbian individuals.  
*Journal of Homosexuality*, 42:2, 135-144.  
[http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1300/J082v49n02\\_08](http://dx.doi.org/http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/10.1300/J082v49n02_08)