Faith and Sexual Orientation Identity Development in Gay College Men

Faith is “a generic human phenomenon—a way of leaning into or meeting life, whether traditionally religious, or Christian, or not” (Fowler, 1986, p. 16).

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Study Background

- **EVOLUTION OF THE PROJECT**
  - Initial conceptualization as class project
  - Interested in the intersection of gay identity development and faith development
  - Theoretical foundations
    - Anthony D'Augelli
    - James Fowler
    - Abes, Jones, & McEwen

- **RESEARCH DESIGN**
  - Qualitative with quantitative components
    - Quantitative Instruments
      - Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS)
      - Outness Inventory (OI)
    - Semi-Structured Interviews
  - Two sites
    - Large public research extensive institution in the Southeast
    - Midsize private research extensive, highly selective, institution in the Southeast
Quantitative Methods

- Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS)
  - Assesses six dimensions of lesbian, gay and bisexual identity
    - Internalized Homonegativity/Binegativity (IH/B)
    - Need for Privacy (NP)
    - Need for Acceptance (NA)
    - Identity Confusion (IC)
    - Difficult Process (DP)
    - Superiority (S)

- Outness Inventory
  - Assesses the degree to which lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals are open about their sexual orientation
    - Out to family (OF)
    - Out to world (OW)
    - Out to religion (OR)
    - Overall outness (OO)
Interview Protocol

• **Introduction**
  * Tell us about yourself.

• **Centers Loyal To**
  * What motivates and inspires you?
  * What beliefs and values are central to you and the decisions you make?

• **Images and Powers Loyal To**
  * What relationships are currently most important to you? Were there former relationships that were significant? Why are they no longer significant?
  * What symbols are important to your life?

• **Shared Master Story**
  * What gives your life meaning?
  * What positive, negative, and neutral experiences have changed or shaped your life?
  * What were the taboos in your early life? How have you lived with or out of those taboos? Can you indicate how the taboos in your life have changed? What are the taboos now?

• **Overview**
  * Where do you feel that you are changing, growing, struggling or wrestling with doubt in your life at the present time?
  * Ask follow-up and clarification questions as appropriate.
## Participants

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<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Racial Identity</th>
<th>Religious Identity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>State University</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian (Baptist)</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
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<td>Christian (Pentecostal)</td>
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<td>Brian</td>
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<td>Craig</td>
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<td>Mark</td>
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<td>George</td>
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<td>Christian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Achintya</td>
<td>Private University</td>
<td>South Asian American</td>
<td>Hindu</td>
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Findings

1. Examination of Faith
   • Reclaimed Faith
   • Separation of Faith and Sexual Orientation
   • Less Examined Faith

2. Importance of Relationships
   • Primacy of Relationships with Friends
   • Ostracization

3. Lives Lived in Service and Activism
General Trends

(focus on Internalized Homonegativity and Identity Confusion)
Achintya: “I’m kind of just going with it. I am just going to see what happens. The chances of me meeting a Maharashtrian gay male are very, very slim, because straight people within our community can’t even meet. We have to have conventions every two years where we actually have three speed dating events. And we have pictures of that one couple that does meet. ‘Cause the chances of getting them all together and then finding out if one couple is compatible is like slim to none. So, it’s not... it’s a very potential road. In that, it’s not really worth contemplating that too. I mean, I really don’t know who I am going to end up with. So, I mean...Like I said, also, I don’t know if I am exclusively attracted to males. So, I might end up having a traditional, whatever, marriage. If it feels right. If it makes sense to me and it works.”

Mark: “I guess like especially so like when I think about my growing up and like religion like so being gay that’s just not okay. In a lot of communities like in general I’ve never heard of a preacher like in a Black church saying like, “It’s totally fine. Like be who you are.” I’ve never heard that you know. It’s always been like this is not okay. This is inappropriate. That’s not right. Like you’re going to hell you should not do this like a man and a man should not be together. Like I’ve heard that so many times.”
Relationship of Culture, Faith, and Sexual Orientation Identities

Culture/Family

Sexual Orientation

Religion/Faith
Brofennbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
James: “So, there are three verses, possibly four, in the bible that mention homosexuality. One or two of them are in Leviticus and I believe the other ones are in Corinthians? And to be perfectly honest, I haven’t figured that out yet. There are some interpretations of it that deal with the culture of the day and all of that kind of stuff, but, you know, I can’t really put a lot of stock in it because if you start saying there’s an alternative interpretation you can alternatively interpret anything you want any way you want. So, even though I am comfortable with that, I can’t use that as proof for someone else that I’m okay and that God still loves me. So, the biggest thing to me is grace. So, the whole thing about that is when Jesus Christ died on the cross he took all of our sin and he was a perfect and ultimate sacrifice for us. And, so if you believe in him and accept his grace it doesn’t matter what you do, God still loves you. You know, John 3:16, everybody’s favorite verse that everybody memorizes and everything and so many people forget the part who so ever. And I’m like, Jesus didn’t say who so ever believeth in me except the gays or except Black people, you know? So that’s what really lets me know that I am okay. Plus, if someone is not a Christian, they can’t really understand this or if someone is not religious, they can’t understand this, but I feel God’s love. I can feel his presence and that lets me know too that I’m okay and that I don’t have a one way ticket to Hell just for being gay.”
Implications for Practice

• Culture, Environment, and Positive Programming
  • How do we support the decrease of internalized homonegativity and increasing identity clarification?
  • What programming in partnership with cultural and religious offices may send signals and messages to this end?

• Importance of relationships and mentorship
  • It’s not as simple as it seems: reinforces intersectionality and the whole student
  • Programs must be more expansive/broader than just faith and sexuality
  • Co-constructed programming: not “to” but “with”

• Cultural humility and practitioner responsibility
  • Increasing cultural diversity on college campuses
  • Offering opportunities for service and activism
References


