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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Lived Experiences of Same Sex Attracted Men with

Competing Spiritual and Sexual Identities

by

Robert L. Hedge, Jr.

MA, Webster University, 2006

BS, Liberty University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Counselor Education and Supervision

Walden University

February 2017

Abstract

This study focused on understanding the lived experiences of men from a conservative Christian background who had disidentified as gay and subordinated their sexual identity to their spiritual identity. The study was intended to create understanding of the social, cultural, and valuative frameworks that informed and guided their attempts at resolving the conflict between spiritual and sexual identity. The study included three research questions: What are the emergent core themes associated with competing spiritual and sexual identities? How has the response of their faith community affected their struggle? How has the response of the gay community affected their struggle? Through the lens of postmodern theory that identity formation is socially constructed, the qualitative collective case study inquiry included interviews with six participants. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and photo-elicitation. The interviews were divided into personal experiences, church experiences, and application of experiences. Using analytic techniques of pattern matching and explanation building, four emergent themes were identified: conflict; importance of faith; feelings of being alone, fearful, and misunderstood; and God is forgiving and loving. The photo-elicitation consisted of six photos, and participants responded to each photo. The interview responses were coded separately from the photo-elicitation responses to better understand the participants' journey in experiencing identity conflict and to identify their current experience of the conflict. The social change implications include generating information aimed at reducing stigma and negative perceptions for those who experience competing identities and to minimize the marginalization of this group of people.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children. You have been and continue to be my joy and inspiration. Thank you for your support, encouragement, and abiding love. I am proud to be your "Doctor Daddy."

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank God for the lifelong relationship provided through His grace and mercy. He has been and continues to be the guiding force in my life. I want to thank my children Patti, Bob, and Adie for all of the great discussions shared during this process. The insight you have shared has been invaluable and has helped to shape and mold my understanding. I want to send out a huge thank you to Dr. Laura Haddock, Dr. Katherine Coule, and Dr. Theodore Remley for the support, insight, and much-needed direction. This could not have been possible without you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

How to address the counseling needs of individuals experiencing same sex

attractions who also experience a conflict of competing spiritual and sexual identities has

sparked much debate and polarization within the professional psychology and counseling

community (Ginicola & Smith, 2011; Gonsiorek, 2004; Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011).

There are several topics of interest in this debate. The innateness and immutability of

same sex attraction (SSA; Byrd, 2010), the definition of sexual orientation (Jones &

Yarhouse, 2011), the development of a gay identity (Cass, 1979; Troiden, 1989), and the

ethicality of sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE; Schroeder & Shidlo, 2002) are just

a few of the topics of interest. In this chapter, I address the background to the problem by

presenting professional counseling and nonprofessional/church ministry responses to the

conflict of spiritual and sexual identities. I define the conservative/evangelical Christian

view of sexuality, religion, spirituality, and sexual orientation. After making a statement

of the problem and presenting the purpose of the study, I present the research questions

and define the constructivist and valualtive theoretical frameworks. This chapter closes

with the assumptions and limitations to the study and a summary of the chapter.

In this study, I looked at how men from a conservative Christian background

negotiate the intersection of competing sexual and spiritual identities. Historically there

are two primary therapeutic responses in dealing with individuals struggling with

competing sexual and spiritual identities. These responses are (a) a gay affirming

approach that promotes an acceptance of SSAs that results in a "coming out" experience

in which the individual identifies as gay, and (b) a reparative/conversion response that seeks to pathologize SSAs and attempts to convert them to opposite sex attractions (Forstein, 2001; Serovich et al., 2008). One of the key issues at the center of this polarized debate is the innateness and immutability of sexual orientation (Byrd, 2010). Innateness refers to a genetic origin of sexual orientation. That is, people are born with a genetically predetermined orientation (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004) and that because orientation is innate, it is also immutable and unable to be changed (Stein, 2011). Sexual orientation is understood as genetically predetermined and unable to change (Haslam & Levy, 2006). Operating from the position that sexual orientation is innate and immutable suggests that providing therapy that promotes changing same sex sexual orientation to opposite sex sexual orientation would be an unethical counseling practice (Fjeistrom, 2013; Haldeman, 1994; Langdridge, 2007). There is also the concern that sexual orientation change therapy may cause psychological and emotional harm to those who participate in this approach (Becstead, 2002; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Panozzo, 2013; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002). Innateness and immutability are important concerns when discussing competing spiritual and sexual identities. However, innateness and immutability are beyond the scope of this study. The intent of this study is not to determine the origin of sexual orientation or if sexual orientation change is possible. In performing this study, I sought a better understanding of the experiences of same sex attracted men with competing spiritual and sexual identities who chose not to identify as gay in order to better inform professional counselors and counselor education programs (Matthews, 2005) in developing counseling approaches and techniques to help in

resolving these competing conflicts. In addition, I sought to promote a change in attitudes and perceptions regarding those who experience competing identities and who seek to alter SSA in order to eliminate or to minimize the marginalization of this group of people (Matthews, 2005; Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, & Quick, 2010; Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011).

In seeking to understand an appropriate therapeutic response, it is important to note that counseling professionals should practice within ethical guidelines. The ACA Code of Ethics states:

> Counselors encourage client growth and development in ways that foster the interest and welfare of clients and promote formation of healthy relationships. Counselors actively attempt to understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of the clients they serve. Counselors also explore their own cultural identities and how these affect their values and beliefs about the counseling process. (ACA, 2005, p. 4)

Furthermore, it is important to understand that these two competing identities are salient constructs of identity for those individuals who are experiencing this conflict (Sherry et al., 2010). Some of these individuals desire to identify as gay with a subordinate spiritual identity (Haldeman, 2002; Levy & Reeves, 2011; Mark 2008; Serovich et al., 2008) while others desire to identify as Christian with a subordinate sexual identity (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011). A third concern regarding counselor response is the protection of those individuals who are seeking counseling help to resolve these conflicts. Until the declassification of homosexuality in 1973, counseling professionals viewed individuals

with SSAs as pathologically impaired and in need of psychological help (Haldeman, 2002; Serovich et al., 2008). They were subjected to behavior modification and aversive techniques that could include electric shock to the hands and genital areas and nausea inducing drugs (Haldeman, 2002; Panozzo, 2013; Serovich et al., 2008).

Historically, there were two primary treatment approaches in attempting to resolve this conflict. One was utilizing a gay affirmative therapy that sought to promote acceptance of a gay identity and to validate the expression of a gay lifestyle (Langdridge, 2007). The second was to utilize a reparative/conversion therapy approach that viewed same sex behavior as a pathological condition in need of repair and reorientation (Byrd, Nicolosi, & Potts, 2008). Each of these approaches used a positivistic developmental model in understanding identity development (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Narvaez, et al., 2009). Developing self-identity encompasses different constructs involving racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual dimensions. The positivistic approach uses an essentialist viewpoint in which the formation of identity is understood as an integrated, fixed, and stable unity of the multiple dimensions of self (Narvaez et al., 2009). In the gay affirming approach, sexual orientation is viewed as an either/or construction (DeLamaster & Hyde, 1998; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Worthington, Savoy, Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002) in which sexual orientation is understood as being opposite sex or same sex oriented. People are born with a specific sexual orientation and they develop a sexual identity that is congruent with that orientation. This is an essentialist biology-driven approach, and the goal of gay affirming therapy is to help the individual develop an identity that is congruent with sexual orientation (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). In the reparative

model, it is believed that people are born with an opposite sex orientation but they develop a pathologically broken same sex identity that is in need of repair (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Nicolosi, 2008; Serovich et al., 2008). The goal of reparative therapy is to help the individual to change from the pathologydriven same sex orientation to a healed or repaired opposite sex orientation (Nicolosi, 2008). A third alternative approach promoted in order to understand identity development is a postmodern socially constructed theory in which the multiple dimensions of self are seen as fluid constructs and open to reinterpretation (Crabtree, 2009). Whereas the traditional theory of the construction of a unified and integrated self is built upon a positivistic and essentialist approach, the intersection of fluid constructs are housed in the postmodern and existential thoughts which promote the belief that identity is not comprised of isolated constructs that have developed into a unified whole but are seen as an intersection of competing constructs (Crabtree, 2009; Sherry et al., 2010) that are influenced by social, cultural, and valuative frameworks (Narvaez et al., 2009; Yarhouse, 2001). In this constructivist approach, orientation or sexual attraction may not be the most important construct in identity development (Sherry et al., 2010; Yarhouse, 2001), and other constructs such as race, gender, or spirituality may be more important or dominant in determining identity (Tozer & Hayes, 2004; Wolkomir, 2001).

Background to the Problem

Homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 and by the American Psychological Association in 1975 (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Serovich et al., 2008; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002). This declassification

has served as the spark that ignited the polarized debate concerning the therapy provided

to individuals experiencing resistance to SSAs (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Nicolosi, 2008;

Panozzo, 2013). Prior to the declassification, same sex sexual behavior was viewed as a

pathological condition in need of being changed to "normal" opposite sex sexual

behavioral orientation (Forstein, 2001). Since the declassification, the primary focus of

therapeutic approaches has been to help those with SSAs in the coming out process

(Wisniewski, Robinson, & Deluty, 2010) and with "integrating same sex attractions into

a broader personal identity" (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001, p. 3). With the

declassification of homosexuality and the increase of gay affirmative therapies, it was

anticipated that reorientation therapies would begin to decrease and over time would

cease to exist as a therapeutic option (Haldeman, 2002). While nondiscriminatory gay

affirming therapies have consistently increased (Langdridge, 2007), there are therapists

that continue to utilize the reorientation approach (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002). The

continued use of reorientation approaches appears to be fueled by individuals seeking to

resolve the conflict between spiritual and sexual identities by attempting to change sexual

orientation or by managing SSAs through celibacy (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Jones &

Yarhouse, 2011; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Nicolosi, 2008; Serovich et al., 2008).

Reparative Therapy Research

As some mental health professionals continued to utilize reparative/conversion

therapies, others investigated the validity and efficacy of the results of reparative therapy

(Bright 2004; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Schroeder & Shidlo, 2002). The majority of

the research conducted found that many gay and lesbian clients who received reparative

therapy reported experiencing harmful psychological and emotional effects (Gonsiorek, 2004; Haldeman, 1994). Many reported an increase in depression, suicide ideation and suicide attempts, sexual dysfunctions, increased negativity towards homosexuality, isolation from family and friends, and loss and grief issues (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Gonsiorek, 2004; Schroeder & Shidlo, 2002). The results of research studies also indicated that many clients reported no change, limited change, or unsustained change in sexual orientation (Bhugra, 2004; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). Proponents of reparative therapy emphasize results from several studies that report a change in sexual orientation or that clients reported a positive effect and denied any harmful effects from receiving reparative therapy as support for promoting and engaging in reparative therapy approaches (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Jones & Yarhouse, 2011; Spitzer, 2003; Throckmorton, 2002; Throckmorton & Welton, 2005). However, these studies have been rigorously disputed in peer-reviewed commentaries (Bhugra, 2004; Panozzo, 2013; Saltzman, 2008) noting concerns with methodology, conceptual frameworks, and ethical implications. This has caused Spitzer (2003) to recant his study and offer an apology to any potential harm that his study might have caused (Spitzer, 2012).

Professional Responses

Many professional organizations have "adopted policies that reject sexual reorientation therapies or sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE) due to a lack of evidence for the mental illness view of homosexuality and bisexuality" (Serovich, et. al., 2008, p. 238). In the American Psychological Association (APA) Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Clients who are experiencing

spiritual and sexual identity conflicts, counseling professionals are encouraged to seek an integration of these salient constructs "as with the client who accepts that he/she is gay and moves from a conservative to an open and affirming religious denomination" (APA, 2011, p. 5). It should be noted that some clients may have a spiritual identity that is more salient than their sexual identity and "in these instances, the client may choose to prioritize his religious affiliation over sexual orientation, and may seek accommodation compatible with such a choice" (APA, 2012, p. 5). The guidelines clarify that this accommodation "is not the same as changing or even managing sexual orientation, but is a treatment goal established in the service of personal integration" (APA, 2011, p. 5).

Nonprofessional and Ministry Programs

Many professional mental health providers utilize gay affirming approaches that provide a safe and supportive therapeutic environment for the majority of gays seeking counseling for resolving sexual identity conflicts. Researchers also advocate the use of gay and faith affirming approaches that integrate a gay lifestyle with a faith/religious orientation (Glassgold, 2008; Tasker & McCann, 1999). However, some argue that these approaches are not effective or helpful for some religious clients (Sherry et al., 2010; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a). Those from a conservative religious background can view the acceptance of SSAs as a loss of faith (Gonsiorek, 2004; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). For these individuals, gay affirming or gay and religious integrating approaches can produce negative or harmful emotional and psychological effects (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008; Benoit, 2005; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). As stated earlier, the majority of mental health professionals and

organizations utilize a gay affirming approach to therapy and believe that

reorientation/conversion therapies are inappropriate, unethical, and empirically

unsubstantiated (Panozzo, 2013). In order to receive help in treating unwanted SSAs,

many conservative religious clients have turned to nonprofessional and church ministry

based organizations. Exodus International was the largest Christian reorientation

program; JONAH is a Jewish organization; Evergreen International, which services the

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon); and Courage for Catholics are a

few of the major ministry oriented programs (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). The research

of these programs indicates a mixed result in determining the efficacy in producing

sexual orientation change. Many studies report no significant change in sexual orientation

and show that those individuals who report change often return to practicing same-sex

behaviors (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Saltzman, 2008). Several studies report moderate

success in orientation and SSA change (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011), but it should be noted

that these studies are rigorously disputed in peer commentaries (Panozzo, 2013). This

sharp and divisive debate concerning the effectiveness and ethicality of

reparative/conversion approaches is not only between those who are religious and

nonreligious or liberally religious and conservatively religious. It also is dividing the

conservative/evangelical church. At the 2013 Exodus conference, the group offered an

apology for any harm that they may have caused in promoting and providing reparative

approaches and announced that the organization of Exodus International was shutting

down their operations. Some of the leaders of the defunct group announced that they

were starting a new ministry organization that would not utilize reparative approaches (Payne, 2013).

Christian Influence in American Society

In discussing pastoral possibilities for spiritual practice with sexual minorities Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) stated that 60% of the U.S. population reported that religious faith was a strong influence in their lives and that two-thirds reported belonging to a church or synagogue. In aNews poll, 82% of American adults identified as Christian with 37% of these identifying as evangelical/born again (Analysis & Langer, 2016. Conservative Christians believe that secular counselors might not be as sensitive to their religious beliefs and may ridicule their desire to adhere to these beliefs (Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley, 2008) and therefore prefer a Christian or Bible-based counselor.

Conservative/Evangelical Christian View of Sexuality

Religious beliefs and doctrines can have a strong effect on the development of spiritual identity (Bowers, Minichiello, & Plummer, 2010; Ginicola & Smith, 2011). In their study on the sanctification of sexuality, Hernandez, Mahoney, and Pargament, 2011 present a correlation between sanctification of sexuality and sexual behavior. "Sanctification" is defined as perceiving an aspect of life as having divine character and significance" (Hernandez et al., 2011), and sexuality can be described as a sacred or divine experience. Effectively understanding the spiritual and sexual identity conflict for the conservative/evangelical Christian necessitates an understanding of the doctrinal basis of sexuality (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). Conservative/evangelical Christians believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible and believe that the Bible contains direct revelation from

God that is complete and infallible. They view the creation story as God's divine design

of humanity. They believe that in the Genesis narrative, God intentionally designed

"gendered people," male and female, and declared them to be "very good" (Gagnon,

2005; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). They were intentionally designed to complete each other

in a mutual and reciprocal relationship. For the conservative/evangelical Christian, this

concept of sanctified gendered relationships is the core construct of spiritual identity

(Gagnon, 2005; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007).

Statement of the Problem

Since the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness in 1973, various

professional mental health organizations such as the American Psychological

Association, American Psychiatric Association, American Counseling Association, and

National Association of Social Workers "have adopted policies that reject sexual

reorientation therapies due to a lack of evidence for the mental illness view of

homosexuality and bisexuality" (Serovich et al., 2008 p. 228) and because of the lack of

evidence that sexual orientation change is possible (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008; Shidlo &

Schroeder, 2002). Also, there are studies that support the proposition that reorientation

therapy has produced psychological and emotional harm to many participants of this

approach (Serovich et al., 2008; Weiss, Morehouse, & Yeager, 2010). With regard to the

topic of resolving the conflict between these two competing identities, I discovered

literature that targeted religious or spiritual people generically without making any

distinction regarding specific religious beliefs or affiliation (Sherry et al., 2010). I also

found literature that specifically targeted LGB individuals who reported having a

Mormon background (Morrow & Beckstead 2004) and literature that addressed same sex attracted men who identified as having a Muslim faith (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). In conducting a review of the literature, I was able to find only minimal recent research with regard to the process of resolving identity conflicts of gay men from an evangelical Christian background. The results of a literature review revealed a gap in studying Christian same sex attracted men from an evangelical church background and indicated a need for further research.

Filling this gap in the literature is important because some LGB individuals from a wide variety of religious backgrounds have reported experiencing isolation from both their faith community and the gay community (Sherry, et al., 2010), resulting in depression, anxiety, and confusion (Gonsiorek, 2004; Mark, 2008) and some counselors have reported feeling uneasy in helping LGB individuals to try to resolve this conflict (Levy & Reeves, 2011; Liszcz & Yarhouse, 2005). Competing spiritual and sexual identities can produce a conflict that engages two distinct and powerful influences that are vying for dominance (Sherry et al., 2010). In their study on how LGB individuals with a competing spiritual identity negotiated the intersection of spiritual and sexual identities, Sherry, et al., (2010) noted that a gay affirmative approach can have a negative effect on those individuals with a predominantly spiritual identity. These individuals may find the attempt to validate same sex experiences as incongruent with their religious belief (Liszcz & Yarhouse, 2005) that results in a rejection of biblical beliefs and spiritual living (Gagnon, 2005). Men who have a strong conservative Christian faith and who experience SSAs may find themselves caught in the middle of two salient and powerful

societal ideologies (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Sherry et al., 2010). The

first is the traditional Christian church, which views SSA as sinful and unnatural, a

condition that needs to be converted to opposite sex attraction (Ginicola & Smith, 2011;

Haldeman, 2002; Tozer & Hayes, 2004). The second system is the gay community that is

condemned by conservative religion and is seen as an enemy of God, community, and

family values. This antagonism has created an "antichurch" attitude in the gay

community (Maynard & Gorsuch, 2001) and "for these reasons, it can be easier for some

LGB people to come out as gay in their religious communities than it can be to come out

as religious in their gay communities" (Sherry, et al., 2010, p. 113). They do not fit well

in the gay community because they are resistant to having and acting upon their SSAs

and because of the "us versus them" mentality that exists between the conservative

church and gay community (Mak & Tsang, 2008), They also do not fit well in the

conservative Christian community because they are unable to change SSAs to opposite

sex attractions (Barton, 2010; Ganzevoort, van der Laan, & Olsman, 2011; Heermann et

al., 2007) This inability keeps them closeted and isolated from others in the church and

creates opportunities for others in the church to question their faith commitment

(Ginicola & Smith, 2011). This subgroup of sexual minority men can be marginalized in

that they are resistant to gay affirming therapy approaches because they do not wish to

identify as gay, and they are resisted by religiously centered approaches as they are seen

as purposely choosing to not change their sexual desires (Haldeman, 2004). An effective

therapeutic approach that will not promote an "out gay" or an "ex-gay" outcome and that

will respect a client's valuative framework no matter which direction he decides to take is

greatly needed (Ginicola & Smith, 2011; Haldeman, 2004; Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

There is a current gap in the literature related to the conflict of spiritual and sexual identities of evangelical Christian men experiencing SSAs. Due to this gap in the literature this qualitative collective case study was conducted in order to generate rich in-depth information (Ponterotto, 2005; Yin, 2009) gleaned from interviewing this subpopulation of same sex attracted evangelical Christian men using open-ended questions and photo-elicitation. Current literature identifies a need to provide counseling to individuals with competing sexual and spiritual identities (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004). The information gained from studying these emerging themes has contributed to the understanding of the emotional and psychological needs of this population and will aid in the formation of theory and therapeutic interventions (Ponterotto, 2005; Yin, 2009).

Research Questions

Research Queston

RQ: What are the emergent core themes that are found to be associated with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

Issue Subquestions

SQ1: How has the response of the faith community of those with competing spiritual and sexual identities affected their struggle with competing identities?

SQ2: How has the response of the gay community affected the struggle of those

with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

Topical Procedural Questions

TPQ1: What themes emerge from gathering information about these cases?

TPQ2: How might the conflict between sexual identity and spiritual identity be

described?

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Theoretical Framework

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From a positivistic viewpoint, sexual orientation and sexual identity are seen as

integrated, fixed, and unchanging constructs of self. In the existential postmodern

viewpoint, self identity is understood as multiple constructs viewed as competing (Sherry

et al., 2009) and differentiating parts that are fluid (Crabtree, 2009), where change and

choices are made . The constructionist framework of identity challenges an essentialist

view of a biology-driven expression of sexuality (Crabtree, 2009). This study utilized the

context of postmodern theory that identity formation is socially constructed (Sherry, et

al., 2009) and influenced by individual valuative frameworks and attributions (Yarhouse,

2001; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a) in order to better understand the conflict between sexual

and spiritual identities of gay disidentified Christian men from an evangelical church

background. In utilizing an existential postmodern viewpoint of a socially constructed

identity of self with multiple dimensions (Jones & McEwen, 2000) and an evangelical

valuative framework (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a), one outcome assumption is that same sex

attracted men from an evangelical background would express a dominant spiritual

identity and subordinate their sexual identity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a). In subordinating

their sexual identity and recognizing that changing sexual attraction is difficult and not

very successful (Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002), it is assumed that these men would choose a

life of celibacy (Beckstead, 2002; Benoit, 2005). This choice of not engaging in a

meaningful and reciprocating relationship would have the potential for producing

continued experiences of conflict between these two powerful and important identities

(Benoit, 2005). A second assumption due to this ongoing conflict is that emotional,

psychological, and spiritual concerns would need ongoing attention from both the

professional counseling and organized church communities (Lease et al., 2005).

Significance of The Study

The nature of this study was a qualitative collective case study design. Qualitative

research is consistent with understanding the emerging themes of the lived experiences of

same sex attracted males with competing sexual and spiritual identities (Ponterotto, 2005)

and with understanding how definitions of self are socially constructed (Crabtree, 2009).

Emerging themes and socially constructed definitions were viewed from a postmodern

constructivist view (Sherry et al., 2010) and a valuative framework approach (Yarhouse,

2001). In recent years, case study design has been recognized as a separate qualitative

research design (Yin, 2014). The difficulty in utilizing the case study as a separate

research design has been the absence of a "codified" system of case study design;

however, the need of developing a codified design has been addressed in scholarly

research in recent years (Yin, 2014). This study sought to investigate the contemporary

phenomenon of same sex attracted men from a conservative/evangelical church

background with conflicting sexual and spiritual identities and to understand how this

conflict may affect the daily lives of same sex attracted men struggling with this conflict. Case study is an appropriate design when research is investigating contemporary events and when seeking to understand the "how" and "why" of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). By utilizing a postmodern constructivist approach and a qualitative collective case study design, the scope of this study was to seek a better understanding of the experiences of same sex attracted men from a conservative/evangelical church background with competing spiritual and sexual identities in order to better inform professional counselors and counselor education programs in developing counseling approaches and techniques to help in resolving these competing conflicts. The intent of this study was also to promote social change of attitudes and perceptions regarding those who experience competing identities and who seek to alter SSA in order to eliminate or to minimize the marginalization of this group of people (Matthews, 2005; Sherry et al., 2010; Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011).

Definition of Terms

Religion: Historically the term religion was understood as both an institutional and individual construct (Hill & Pargament, 2008). More recently, this broader concept has been narrowed to two terms, with religion defining the institutional or external concept and spirituality defining the individual or internal concept (Rose et al., 2008). In this study religion is defined as an institutional, external, and fixed system.

*Spirituality***:** Spirituality is understood as an internal and personal construct of an individual's experiences and beliefs as they worship and honor their relationship with

God (Rose et al., 2008). In this paper, the concept of spiritual identity is understood as an individual, personal, and subjective belief system.

Sexual orientation: In modern Western culture, sexual orientation is usually defined in one of three categories; heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual (Schneider, Brown, & Glassgold, 2002; Worthington, 2014; Yarhouse, Nowacki-Butzen, & Brooks, 2009). In this paper, sexual orientation refers to the directionality of sexual desires that tend to be consistent and stable over a period of time (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). The salient point of view is that "most people are primarily oriented toward one sex" (Schneider, Brown, & Glassgold, 2002, p. 266).

Sexual identity: Sexual identity is defined as the private and public labeling of a person's sexuality (Yarhouse et al., 2009), which for some can be fluid and changing in direction and intensity (Diamond, 2007) being influenced by multiple factors such as race, religion, and culture (Sherry et al., 2010).

Assumptions and Limitations to this Study

Assumptions

Qualitative research is based in postmodern constructivism and calls into question the positivist belief in the ability of quantitative research in understanding social behavior (Barusch, Gringeri, & George, 2011). "In qualitative research the inquirer uses the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study to establish validity in a study" (Crewsell & Miller, 2000, p. 127). Qualitative research assumes that a person's reality is socially constructed and culturally influenced by gender, race, nationality, and religion (Crabtree, 2009; Sherry, 2010). These constructivist assumptions are important

to this study because they allow the participants to discuss their experiences in an open manner in which they are not restricted by the positivist belief that identity is an integrated and fixed construct. Rather, they promote the understanding that identity is fluid allowing for change, flexibility, and adaptability (Sherry, 2010). There are four basic assumptions I made regarding this research. The first was that the participants of this study would express a dominant spiritual identity with a subordinate sexual identity (Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a). I further assumed that because their spiritual identity was the more dominant construct, these individuals would have attempted sexual orientation change. Another assumption was that since SOCEs have been shown to have little success (Shildo & Schroeder, 2002) some of these individuals would be living a celibate lifestyle (Benoit, 2005). The fouth assumption was that this choice of not engaging in a meaningful and reciprocating relationship would have the potential for producing continued experiences of conflict between these two powerful and important identities (Lease, 2005).

Limitations

The phenomenon of SOCE is a divisive and polarized circumstance that engages debate between two powerfully salient and antinomic ideologies that makes this study difficult to conduct. The antinomy between these two ideologies is accentuated by several factors: (a) the inability to come to a consensus concerning definitions of sexual orientation and identity (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011), (b) the variability of differences within the sexual minority population, and (c) the social and political implications of these factors. Another limitation of variability exists as many evangelical Christian

churches are not a part of a centralized denomination but are rather independent and autonomous organizations. Even though these different churches may agree that same sex sexual activity is not compatible with biblical teaching, their attitudes toward and interactions with individuals struggling with these competing identities may differ between individual churches. Not only is the individual Christian church chosen as the pool for participants a possible limitation, but also geographical location may be a limiting factor. My intention was to seek participants from conservative Christian churches located in the Southern states of the United States of America. Not only do ideological beliefs differ between conservative/evangelical churches, it is also possible that there are differences due to geographical location. That is, the Northern church may set a different parameter than does a church located in a small town in the Southern "Bible Belt" or one located on the west coast. A limitation to this study is that it does not include individuals who have experienced this conflict between sexual and spiritual identities and who no longer attend a conservative Christian church. It does not examine the experiences of those men who have identified their sexual identity as their dominant identity. While such research is important to this subject, it is beyond the scope of this study.

Yin (2014) presened four tests for judging the quality of research designs: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. Yin stated that these "four tests are common to all social science methods" and "have served as a framework for assessing a large group of case studies" (Yin, 2014, p. 45). This case study has an exploratory design, and its research questions are intended to increase understanding for

professional counselors in meeting the needs of this sexual minority group and to generate subsequent research (Yin, 2014). Out of the four tests for judging the quality of research designs listed above, construct validity and reliability are important in judging an exploratory design (Yin, 2014). There are several effective principles that are used when judging construct validity and reliability. These principles are using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence (Yin, 2014). Using multiple sources of evidence increases the construct validity and reliability of a study. Due to time and monetary constraints that are consistent with writing a research dissertation, I am limited to utilizing the single evidence source of participant interviews using open-ended questions and photo-elicitation. In order to strengthen this limitation, the participants were asked to review the case study report to ensure the accuracy and inferences drawn from the interviews (Yin, 2014). It is important to note that establishing credibility in qualitative research is connected to the assumption that the participants reality is socially constructed (Creswsell & Miller, 2000). Member checking was utilized to confirm the credibility by asking the participant to review the data in order to determine its accuracy (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I utilized the HyperResearch computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to create a case study database and to maintain a chain of evidence of the interview material.

I have pastored and have been actively involved in Christian church ministry for over 40 years. I have pastored both denominational and nondenominational churches. I have a BS in church ministries from Liberty University and an MA in mental health counseling from Webster University. I have counseled gay and lesbian individuals both

as a pastor and a professional counselor. I would define myself as a conservative/evangelical, and I have a strong commitment to the Christian Bible as an inerrant sacred text that informs and governs that relationship between God and human beings. Another factor that affects me as a researcher is that one of my daughters has a same sex orientation and has integrated her spiritual and sexual identities and lives in an open and stable lesbian relationship. I believe that these two important personal attributes will help to balance my approach, data collection, and analysis of the research material. As a researcher, it is important that I understand that my background and beliefs may serve as potential bias in reviewing the literature as well as in interpreting the data gleaned by interviewing the participants (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2012). In order to address this potential bias, I will utilize the validity procedure of reflexivity by maintaining a researcher reflective diary highlighting how my experiences have led me to perform this study (Carlson, 2010; Houghton et al., 2012).

Summary

The purpose of this research is to add to the current literature on the experiences of conservative/evangelical Christian men with competing spiritual and sexual identities. The focus of this study is on men who desire to subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual identity and who engaged in the attempt to eliminate or control SSA. This phenomena has generated much debate and has polarized the professional counseling community (Haldeman, 2004; Panozzo, 2013). The literature review reveals a gap in research among conservative/evangelical men. The goal of this research is to understand the lived experiences of this marginalized subgroup of sexual minorities to better inform

professional counselors and counselor education programs and to advocate for social

change. Since the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness, individuals

experiencing SSAs have continued to seek sexual orientation change, and some therapists

have continued to utilize sexual orientation change therapies. The literature review

reveals mixed results concerning the efficacy of these therapies (Jones & Yarhouse,

2011; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002); however, the majority of research indicates these

therapies are ineffective in changing sexual orientation and suggests that sexual

orientation is an enduring construct (Serovich et al., 2008; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002).

Even with this enduring quality of sexual orientation, there are those who still seek to

control SSA in order to remain true to their religious beliefs (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002;

Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). These individuals not only need professional counseling help

that will honor, respect, and accept their spiritual identities, religious beliefs, and their

desire to control SSAs, but they also need spiritual guidance that understands the

enduring nature of sexual orientation (Sherry et al., 2010). Integrating these two

worldviews of secular counseling and religious/spiritual beliefs is a difficult task as the

relationship between them is strained and often antithetical (Ganzevoort et al., 2011).

Chapter 2 presents a review of the existing literature tracing the history of

psychotherapeutic theories and treatment of homosexuality and the relationship of the

reorientation, gay affirming, and religious integrating viewpoints. The chapter will begin

with the history of the treatment approaches of homosexuality from Freud to the present.

Next, an explanation and comparison of essentialism and constructivism will be

examined contrasting the fixed, static understanding of sexual orientation with the open

and fluid construct of sexual identity. Finally, the interaction of intersecting and competing identities will be explored. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used to explore and study the research questions. This chapter discusses the qualitative collective case study design used to investigate the lived experiences of same sex attracted men with competing spiritual and sexual identities. Chapter 3 also describes the participants of the study, interview questions, coding procedures, analysis of the data, and the ethical considerations. Chapter 4 summarizes the results of the emerging themes related to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides an interpretation of the findings from this study, discusses the implications for social change and recommendations for action, and considers the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Same sex attracted men with competing spiritual and sexual identities are caught between two salient and powerful ideologies. One ideology is emphasized by the LGBT community that promotes an acceptance of SSA that results in a "coming out" experience in which the individual identifies as gay (Langdridge, 2007) and promotes integrating a gay lifestyle with a faith/religious orientation (Glassgold, 2008; Tasker & McCann, 1999). The second ideology is emphasized by the conservative evangelical Christian church that seeks to repair/convert SSAs to opposite sex attractions (Byrd et al., 2008). Each of these approaches has a positivistic theoretical orientation. The positivistic approach utilizes an essentialist viewpoint in which the formation of identity is understood as an integrated, fixed, and stable unity of the multiple dimensions of self (Narvaez et al., 2009). The relationship that exists between the LGBT community and the evangelical conservative Christian church can be adversarial (Barton, 2010; Haldeman, 2002; Johnston & Jenkins, 2006). Ganzevoort et al. (2011) refered to this conflict as "identity politics" and described the "gay agenda" and "devil discourse" rhetoric of Christianity's rightist fundamentalist description of the LGBT community as well as the gay activist, leftist verbiage of homophobia and homonegativity to describe Christian theology in which each group uses the other "as a projected enemy" (Ganzevoort, van der Laan, & Olsman, 2011, pg. 214). The needs of this subgroup of sexual minority men can be marginalized as they may be resistant to gay affirming therapy approaches because they do not wish to identify as gay, and they may be resisted by those who practice

religiously centered approaches as they are seen to be choosing not to change their sexual

desires (Haldeman, 2004; Sherry, et. al., 2010). In an effort to promote an effective and

appropriate therapeutic response to their needs and to promote social change that will

reduce minimization of this group, I conducted a qualitative collective case study.

In this chapter, I present a postmodern social constructionist view of

understanding the development of sexual identity and the influence of attributions and

meaning-making in identity development. I discuss the essentialism of modern theory,

define social constructionism, delineate the impact of valuative frameworks, attributions,

and meaning-making, and present the conservative Christian view of sexuality. I trace the

theories of homosexual identity development beginning with the stage model approach

and ending with understanding the social constructionist view of multiple intersecting

identities. I address the review of the existing literature tracing the history of

psychotherapeutic theories and treatment of homosexuality and the relationship of the

reorientation, gay affirming, and religious integrating viewpoints, and I also present a

brief overview of the history of the treatment approaches of homosexuality from Freud to

the present.

Literature Search Strategy

A literature search was conducted utilizing the databases of the Walden

University Library and Google Scholar. The multidisciplinary database ProQuest Central

and the subject databases of Counseling, Psychology, and Social Work were utilized as

well as the database found at Google Scholar. The key search terms used were: *sexual*

identity development, social constructionism, reparative therapy, essentialism and sexual

identity, valuative frameworks and attributions, religion and spirituality, competing

identities, modernism and postmodernism, and *sexual orientation change*. I used each of

the key terms listed above in each of the databases listed. I found the Counseling database

and the Google Scholar database yielding more relevant articles than the other databases.

The Psychology and Social Work databases did not yield many relevant articles.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation of this study is postmodern constructivist theory

promoting the concept that identity is socially constructed with multiple dimensions and

can be influenced by an individual's valuative framework and attributions (Sherry et al.,

2010; Yarhouse, 2001). "Social constructionism is a belief both in the primary

importance of social forces shaping human behavior and experience, and that knowledge

is not in fact a reflection of the world, but rather a product of discourse" (Stein, 1998, p.

31). Social constructionism challenges the positivistic approach of essentialism, which

posits that sexual orientation and identity are integrated, fixed, and unchanging constructs

of self (Jones, 2009; Parker, 2009; Worthington et. al., 2002).

Essentialist Theory

The conceptualization of human sexuality can be understood from either an

essentialist or a social constructionist framework. The essentialist view is positioned

within positivistic quantitative theory and basically takes the "born that way" belief of

human sexuality (Haslam & Levy, 2006; Parker, 2009) and constructionism embraces

social interactionism that views sexuality as a "learned meaning acquired through

interactions with others and developed into sexual scripts that then guide other sexual

behaviors" (Parker, 2009; Stein, 1998, p. 31). Social psychologists with an essentialist

viewpoint believe that people organize their understanding of sexuality into categories in

which category members have a fixed and natural essence (Cox & Lyddon, 1997; Parker,

2009). In today's language these categories are labeled as heterosexual, homosexual, or

bisexual, sexual behavior is attributed to nature that is predetermined, and sexuality is

understood as a naturally occurring category (Cox & Lyddon, 1997; Crabtree, 2009;

Parker, 2009; Stein, 1998). Essentialists view the category members as natural kind with

a biological basis and they would have immutable and historically invariant traits that are

defined as entitative or essential to nature (Haslam & Levy, 2006b). Therefore, same sex

and opposite sexual desire and practice is a fixed and enduring quality that lacks personal

choice (Stein, 1998). Essentialists believe that sexual orientation is the real essence of

being for an individual and will endure throughout time, culture, and social influences

and is an essential or necessary part of self-identification as well as experience and

expression (Yarhouse, 2001).

Social Constructionism

While the essentialist study of self is rooted in a modernist belief of an objective

universal truth that can be known by using the scientific method of observation and

discovery which posits a stable and essential view of self (Cox & Lyddon, 1997); social

constructionism seeks to understand the ways that self is personally and socially

constructed through experience, language, and social interaction (Crabtree, 2009; Parker,

2009). Crabtree (2009) while arguing for a socially constructed understanding of sexual

identity cautions against the thought that individuals have the ability to "construct

themselves or reconstruct themselves multiple times in adulthood" (Crabtree, 2009, p.

256). In other words, sexual identity is not seen as a simple choice where one just freely

chooses to be heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Michael Foucault and Ernesto

Spinelli were early constructionists who challenged the essentialist belief in sexual

identity development (Crabtree, 2009; Parker, 2009). Foucault believed that the

essentialist position on sexuality was a reaction to religious beliefs that sexuality was to

be understood from a biological necessity for procreation and a theological tenet of a

sinful action (Parker, 2009). Through the use of science, biology, medicine, and

psychology essentialists believed sexuality was a natural and normal biological

expression due to the underlying immutability of human nature (Parker, 2009). Spinelli

followed Foucault's thoughts and presented sexuality as a part of the human need of

inter-relatedness, the desire to have relationship, and a matter of social discourse as

opposed to being biologically determined (Crabtree, 2009; Stein, 1998). Essentialist

theory has generated stage/phase models of sexual orientation that generally view

development and the coming out process as synonymous and should be integrated into a

gay identity (Yarhouse, 2001, 2005a). Two early stage models developed through the

work of Cass (1979) and Troiden (1989) view the experiences of same-sex attractions as

indicating that one has a homosexual orientation that determines the "true-self" of an

individual; this view promotes openly accepting and living in a gay identity (Rosario,

Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2011; Rosario, Schrimshaw, Hunter, & Braun, 2006). Having

same-sex attractions and developing a gay identity was seen as being a universal process

that made little if any distinction regarding gender, race, cultural, social, or religious

differences (Sherry et al., 2010; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a; Yarhouse & Tan 2005b).

Valuative Frameworks and Attributions

      The shift from focusing on linear essentialist systems to understanding cultural

and social systems that are concerned with the way an individual interprets and

experiences sexuality has become an increasingly important topic in sexual identity

research. This change of focus was generated by social theorists as they studied gender

and sexuality as well as by feminists and gay activists (Parker, 2009). This new paradigm

focused on "cross-cultural comparisons and contrasts and a new focus on sexual diversity

and difference" (Parker, 2009, p. 254). In focusing on sexual diversity and difference

researchers began studying differences in social construction of identity between Western

and non-Western cultures and on the relationship between "sexual practice and individual

subjectivity" (Parker, 2009, p. 255). This shift set the stage for noting and understanding

the influence of valuative frameworks and attributions in sexual identity development.

Noting the effect of valuative frameworks and attributions on sexual identity is of great

importance to this study of men with competing identities from a conservative

evangelical church background. A review of the literature provides an understanding that

religion can have a negative effect on individuals who experience SSAs as they can

internalize negative messages and can experience negative self-stigma (Rodriguez, 2010;

Tan & Yarhouse, 2010). The review also provides an understanding that religion and

spirituality can have an important impact on one's beliefs, experiences, and values and

that Americans can place great emphasis on spirituality in constructing a self-identity

(Rose et al., 2008). Sexual identity involves understanding of a person's biological sex, sex role, orientation, and valuative framework (Yarhouse, 2005c). Biological sex refers to being male or female, sex role concerns adhering to social expectations, orientation refers to the direction of attraction, and valuative framework identifies what individuals intend to do with their sexual desires (Yarhouse, 2005a). Intentions are powered by the meaning that individuals ascribe to their sexual attractions and the meaning is determined by an attributional search (Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005). Some who experience SSAs attribute these attractions as signaling that they are gay, and they take on a gay identity, while others see the theological concepts of original and personal sin and they will disidentify with a gay identity (Ganzevoort et al., 2011; Ginicola & Smith, 2011; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005b).

Gansevoort (2011), studying conflict, dialogue, and religious identity strategies, reported that identity is ascribed by the understanding that "It is not just 'who I am' but also 'whom I want to belong to'" (p. 217). Personal identification is not the only concern in identity formation; group identity is just as important. Determining what to do with multiple group memberships such as being Christian and gay is a conflict that can be resolved by denoting the unwanted identity as being a personal issue and therefore having an SSA problem instead of being homosexual/gay (Ganzevoort, et al., 2011). In describing the strategies used in negotiating the conflict between spiritual and sexual identities, Ganzevoort (2011) describes the use of four modes: (a) choosing a religious lifestyle in which a complete denial of a person's homosexuality can occur, (b) choosing a gay lifestyle with a complete denial of a person's religious lifestyle, (c) belonging to

both groups simultaneously by alternating between the two groups where both groups are kept separate and in secret, and (d) seeking to integrate both identities and live openly in both communities. Ganzevoort's first stage, choosing a religious lifestyle and Christian identity over a gay lifestyle and gay identity, is the stage of interest to this study. This study identified men from a conservative evangelical background who had competing sexual and spiritual identities and who had chosen to live integrally and in congruence with their stated Christian beliefs. An assumption was that those who have a strong commitment to a conservative Christian faith that views the practice of same-sex sexual behavior as being "sinful" and opposite of the "will of God" for their lives have a life experience of conflict (Ganzevoort, et al., 2011; Giancola & Smith, 2011). The majority of extant literature presents that attempts in changing a person's sexual orientation and attractions have not been very effective (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002; Weiss et al., 2010). Even studies that have been generated from a Christian perspective investigating the success of Christian ministry programs show a minimal to moderate success rate (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). The literature review supports that sexual orientation and attractions are enduring constructs that can remain over time (Giancola & Smith, 2011; Weiss, et al., 2010). Religious beliefs and values are also very important and are also enduring constructs (Ginicola & Smith, 2011; Hill & Pargament, 2008). The conflict between these competing enduring identities can be difficult to manage and can have lasting repercussions no matter which identity is chosen.

Conservative Christian Framework of Sexuality

The discussion of a conservative Christian framework of sexuality begins within the context of the importance of family that is centered by a heterosexual couple. It is within this context that genital sexual activity is defined and understood (Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). Christian belief is that God created gendered people for the purpose of enjoying genital sexual activity with the intention of procreating within a heterosexual marriage (Smedes, 1994). Christian teaching does not reduce genital sexual activity only for procreation but views this as a gift from God as his will for human expression (Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). Sexuality does not exist only in the bonds of marriage but extends to an expression of completing another that is a fundamental element of being human (Smedes, 1994; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). Christian theology views marriage as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church and is therefore tied to a higher, more spiritual purpose ((Roberts, 1993; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). The Christian perspective is that the higher purpose of sexual activity not only places it within the bounds of heterosexual gendered relationships but also within the bounds of marriage (Roberts, 1993; Smedes, 1994). The Christian sexual framework is that God places people in families and desires a union between gendered individuals as his will for the expression of sexual activity.

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Conceptual Framework

</div>

Understanding Multiple Intersecting Identities

Early theories of homosexual development utilized a stage model approach. In the first stage a person begins to consider the possibility of being gay and will traverse to the

final stage of acceptance and identification of being gay (Cass, 1979; Horowitz &

Newcomb, 2001). Stage models have an essentialist theoretical orientation in which the

formation of a gay identity is seen as a person's acceptance of a true self and real sexual

orientation (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Stage models postulate that as individuals

come to acceptance of their sexual identity, they will attach a greater valence to their

identity and integrate this identity into their self-concept (Stirratt, Meyer, Ouelette, &

Gara, 2008). Self-identity is seen as an integration of the multiple constructs that make up

an individual. That is, a person can be female, black, bisexual, American, and Baptist.

From an essentialist stage model approach, these various constructs are integrated and

harmonized into a fixed identity that is stabile and invariable over time (Abes, Jones, &

McEwen, 2007; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). This essentialist explanation does not

adequately describe the experience for some in their development of sexual identity

(Crabtree, 2009; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). In a postmodern culture, theories based

on essentialism and biological determinism are unable to capture the complexities and

variability of multiple identities (Crabtree, 2009; Jones, 2009; Stirratt et al., 2008).

"William James (1890) maintained that the 'empirical self'' comprised a material, social,

and spiritual self, and that each of these components contained its own set of multiple

selves. Identity multiplicity is also evident in the work of Mead (1934), who underscored

the importance of social interactions with others in the development of varied self-

concepts" (Stirratt et al., 2008, p. 89-90). A review of the literature revealed research on

intersectionality and multidimensions of multiple identities and the sociological contexts

that influence the construction of these identities (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Jones,

2009; Stirratt et al., 2008). Weber (1998) noted the need for research that would explore the relationships between race, class, gender, and sexuality (as cited in Abes et al., 2007). Intersectionality promotes an understanding that identification with more than one social group will produce "new forms of subjective experience that are unique, non-additive, and not reducible to the original identities that went into them" (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008, p. 356). Subjective experiences provide meaning to social categories and challenge the thought that social categories promote a primary status (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Social construction theories historically focused on single dimensions of identity such as racial, ethnic, gender, or sexual identities and did not address the dynamics of intersecting identities of sexual minorities (Sherry et al., 2010). Jones and McEwen (2000) looked at integrating intersecting social aspects of self by using an integrated and unitary view of self.

In the postmodern theory of social constructionism, self is viewed as fluid and evolving. Diamond and Butterworth (2008) challenged the belief that women's sexuality is an early developing and stabile construct that identifies an individual over her lifetime. Though Diamond's (2007) work had exclusively focused on the sexuality of women, study results called into question essentialist theory of sexual development. In a 10-year longitudinal study of sexual minority women, Diamond (2008) presented a dynamical systems approach and reported nonlinear changes in sexual interest over time and unexpected and unique forms and reorganizations of sexual expression. Diamond also emphasized that social context influenced the fluidity of sexual desire, attractions, and expression (Diamond, 2009). It is important to note that while Diamond's (2007) studies

show fluidity in sexual expression and identity, Diamond asserts that sexual orientation did not change (Diamond, 2009). Participants of the study also felt that they could not choose their attractions but reported that they could choose if they acted on these attractions (Diamond, 2009). Diamond expressed concern that some have misrepresented the results of the study to indicate that sexual orientation can be changed (Diamond, 2009). Also, Diamond studied sexual minority women, and the results should not be extended to cover sexual minority men. Diamond's work points to social constructionist theory as a viable tool to investigate the interaction of competing sexual and spiritual identities. Sexual minorities who have competing sexual and spiritual identities may have increased difficulty in navigating these intersecting identities. Religious beliefs that portray same-sex activity as sinful and that promote a conversion to an opposite-sex sexual behavior have been linked to an experience of homophobia and homonegativity (Barton, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010). Spiritual identity can be a very important and salient construct (Lease et al., 2005; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a), and maintaining connection to one's faith community can be a priority for some (Hill et al., 2000; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). The relationship between the conservative Christian community and the gay community can be very antagonistic and this antinomy can produce prejudiced attitudes within the gay community toward same sex attracted Christians and make it difficult to come out as Christian in the gay community (Haldeman, 2002; Sherry et al., 2010).

Those experiencing SSA with competing spiritual and sexual identities may resolve this conflict by adopting a gay affirming identity and may become disenfranchised from organized religion, or they may adopt a gay affirming religious

community. A second way of resolving this conflict is to disidentify as gay, where a person may seek to change sexual orientation to opposite-sex attractions, or to accept that sexual attractions cannot be altered and attempt to live celibately in congruence with stated spiritual beliefs.
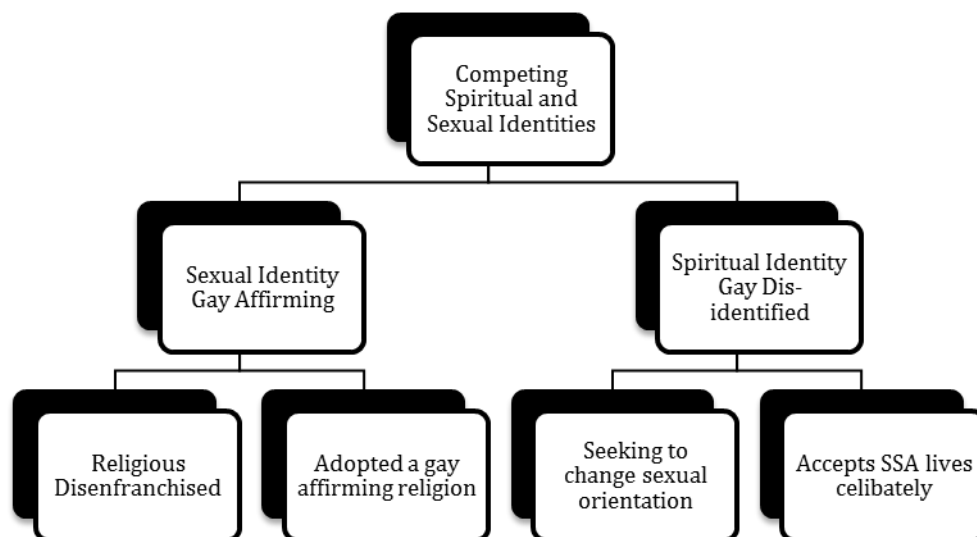
Figure 1. Resolving the conflict of competing identities

Literature Review Related to Key Variables

History of Psychoanalytic Treatment Approaches

The beginning of the modern day approach of understanding SSA has been noted as starting in the late nineteenth century (Conrad & Angell, 2004; Drescher, 2008). The public concern with same sex behavior was viewed in terms of morality, in which the practice of same sex behavior was illegal and criminalized (Drescher, 2012). Karl Heinrich Ulrichs and Karl Maria Kertbeny advocated a normalizing approach to same sex behavior and argued that SSA was congenital. Ulrichs believed that same sex attracted

men were born with a woman's spirit trapped in their bodies and believed that they

constituted a third sex (Conrad & Angell, 2004; Drescher, 2010) Kertbeny has been

credited with coining the terms "homosexual and homosexuality" (Drescher, 2012).

Richard Von Krafft-Ebbing, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Vienna,

popularized these terms in the medical community through writing a sexology text

entitled *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Drescher, 2012; Person, 2005). "Theorizing that

homosexuals had failed, due to genetic flaws, to move beyond the stage of fetal

bisexuality" (Person, 2005, p. 1259), Krafft-Ebbing pathologized SSAs, classifying

homosexuality as a neurological degenerative medical condition and therefore labeling

homosexuality as a disease (Drescher, 2008).

Freud's Congenital Bisexuality

Freud disagreed with the third sex and degenerative theories, and he postulated a

psychosexual development stage model of bisexual instincts (Drescher, 2008). Writing in

Interpretation of Dreams (1900) and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905),

Freud presented a psychosexual model in which bisexuality was viewed as a normal

process that all people traversed that would end with a mature heterosexual expression

(Drescher, 2012). He believed in the preexistence of sexual instinct that was driven by the

libido and "suggested that libido is to the sexual instinct as hunger is to the instinct of

nutrition" (Person, 2005, p. 1261). Believing that homosexuality was a normal part of the

sexual maturation process in which these expressions would be abandoned or repressed

(Conrad & Angell, 2004), Freud also thought that adult expression of homosexuality was

due to developmental arrest (Drescher, 2012). He believed that any adult sexual act apart

from heterosexual penile-vaginal intercourse to be expressions of immaturity suffering

from regressions or fixations (Drescher, 2008). Though Freud believed that

homosexuality was an immature expression, he did not view homosexuality as an illness,

and believed that homosexual activity was found among individuals from all strata of

society (Drescher, 2008; Person, 2005). Freud also believed that the attempt of changing

adult homosexuality would not be very successful (Conrad & Angell, 2004). In his

"Letter to an American Mother," he wrote:

> Homosexuality is assuredly no advantage, but it is nothing to be ashamed of, no
>
> vice, no degradation; it cannot be classified as an illness; we consider it to be a
>
> variation of the sexual function, produced by a certain arrest of sexual
>
> development . . . By asking me if I can help, you mean, I suppose, if I can abolish
>
> homosexuality and make normal heterosexuality take its place. The answer is, in a
>
> general way, we cannot promise to achieve it. In a certain number of cases we
>
> succeed in developing the blighted germs of heterosexual tendencies which are
>
> present in every homosexual, in the majority of cases it is no more possible.
>
> (Drescher, 2008, p. 446)

Neo-Freudian Model of Pathology

Freud's view that homosexuality was a normal part of the psychosexual process

was rejected by those who followed in his psychoanalytic footsteps. Twentieth century

analysts adopted rhetoric from Hungarian born Sandor Rado who believed that

homosexuality was an avoidant anxiety of the other sex thus making homosexuality an

anxiety disorder, and Rado believed that for some, homosexuality was a psychotic

disorder (Drescher, 2012; Kasuer, 2013). Three American analysts shaped the psychiatric

landscape by medicalizing homosexuality and promoting cures for the disorder: Edmund

Bergler, Irving Bieber, and Charles Socarides. (Conrad & Angell, 2004). Bergler's book

Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life? in 1956, *Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic*

Study by Bieber in 1962, and the 1968 book *The Overt Homosexual* by Socarides all

promoted a pathological cause for homosexuality. Homosexuality was seen as a

perversion of normal heterosexual development having pre-Oedipal origins, flawed

parental relationships in childhood, and a deep-seated shame from expressing same sex

behavior (Conrad & Angell, 2004). All believed that psychoanalytic treatment could help

change SSAs to opposite sex attractions. This pathological view of homosexuality also

meant that gays and lesbians could not be trained as psychoanalysts or other mental

health professionals (Drescher, 2008) because homosexuals were described by existing

psychoanalytical thought as "having less developed levels of psychological functioning

than others and described as "narcissistic" or "perverse" (Drescher, 2012).

Normal Variation of Sexuality

       This literature review began by noting midnineteenth century thought that

homosexuality was a normal variation of sexual behavior. While Freud promoted a

congenital bisexuality as a part of the normal process toward adult heterosexuality, he

saw adult homosexuality as a developmental arrest. In the early twentieth century

psychoanalytic followers of Freud medicalized homosexuality as a perversion of normal

heterosexual development in need of treatment and repair. While psychoanalytical

theorists utilized case studies of individuals in treatment to develop a psychoanalytical

theory of homosexuality, midtwentieth century sexologists took to the field researching

nonclinical patients noting SSAs as a normal variation of sexual behavior (Gates &

Viggiani, 2014; Knauer, 2013). After interviewing thousands of people, Kinsey et al.

published *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human*

Female (1953). These reports noted same sex behavior being more prominent in society

than previously thought (Bullough, 1998). Kinsey reported that same sex behavior

comprised about 10% of his interviewees, but today it is understood that same sex

behavior is between 1-4% of the human population (Drescher, 2012; Gates, 2014). Up to

this time in modern history, homosexuality was thought of as being a rare occurrence not

only in human relationships but in the animal kingdom as well (Drescher, 2012).

However, in 1951, associates of Kinsey, Ford and Beach, reported that same sex behavior

was found across all cultures and could be found in varies species of animals (Drescher,

2012; Spurlock, 2002). A highly important study published by Evelyn Hooker in 1951

showed no significant difference between gay and heterosexual men in regards to

psychopathology (Spurlock, 2002). The findings of Kinsey, Ford and Beach, and Hooker

that promoted a view of same sex behavior as a normal variant of sexual behavior did

little to diminish the prevailing analytic belief that adult same sex behavior was

pathological and in need of clinical treatment (Drescher, 2012; Spurlock, 2002). The

majority of clinical practitioners as well as the majority of the general public believed

that same sex behavior was not a variation of normal sexual behavior (Friedman &

Downey, 1998; Knauer, 2013). It would take the actions of nonprofessional gay political

activists to challenge the analytically driven Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) classification of homosexuality as a clinical disorder (Parker, 2009).

The Declassification of Homosexuality

The first edition of the DSM was published in 1952, and homosexuality was listed under the category of "psychopathic personality with pathologic sexuality" (Robertson, 2004). This classification resulted in hospitalization treatment for many gays and lesbians. Homosexuality was declassified as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 and by the American Psychological Association in 1975 (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Serovich et al., 2008; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002). This declassification has served as the spark that ignited the polarized debate concerning the therapy provided to individuals experiencing resistance to SSA (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Nicolosi, 2008; Panozzo, 2013). The movement behind the decision to declassify homosexuality has been credited to gay political activism as much as to scientific research (Drescher, 2012). The prevalent psychiatric theories concerning homosexuality were thought to be a contributing factor in producing homophobia and antihomosexual sentiments (Drescher, 2010), and gay activists began to challenge these prevalent theories and lobby for a nonpathological view of homosexuality. The spark for this gay political activism was in response to the "Stonewall Riots." In 1969, New York City police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar (Lee, 2013) located in the Greenwich Village neighborhood that was believed to be selling alcohol without a license. For several months prior to this raid, other gay bars were raided and closed by the police, and the tension between the patrons of these bars and police began to intensify. Police officers arrested employees and

some patrons of the bar because they were violating a New York City statute that

required an individual to be wearing at least three pieces of gender appropriate clothing

(http://www.truth-out.org/progressivepicks/item/31764-the-ghosts-of-stonewall-policing-

gender-policing-sex). In response to this action, the crowd outside the bar began to riot.

One of the results of the Stonewall Riots was the grassroots beginning of gay political

activism that targeted the 1970 and 1971 APA national conferences to protest

"psychiatry's pathologizing attitudes" (Drescher, 2008, p. 449). In response to the

protests at the APA national conferences, two panels were organized to address the

concerns related to psychiatric diagnosis of homosexuality. One panel was held in 1971

and the other in 1972 (Drescher, 2010). As a result of these panels, the APA

Nomenclature Committee reviewed the classification of homosexuality in the DSM and,

in 1973, recommended to the board of trustees that homosexuality be removed from the

diagnostic manual (Drescher, 2012; Meyer, 2013). The Board decided to accept this

recommendation, and removed homosexuality as a disorder from the diagnostic manual.

The clash between psychoanalytic theory, which regarded adult homosexuality as

abnormal development (Friedman & Downey, 1998) and sexologist research, which

viewed homosexuality as a normal variant of sexual behavior (Gates and Viggiani, 2014),

appeared to have been won in favor of the sexologist researchers. However,

psychoanalysts opposed to the removal petitioned the board for a referendum to be voted

on by the entire APA membership at the 1974 meeting. This vote resulted in a 58%

majority acceptance of the proposed change. This affirmative vote resulted in the

development and implementation of a gay affirming therapeutic response toward SSAs

and behavior (Drescher, 2012). The declassification of homosexuality and the

development of a gay affirming therapeutic response did not signal a capitulatory

response from the psychoanalytical community. Analysts trained in the traditional

analytic pathological approach to understanding homosexuality continued to promote the

pathological view, stating that the declassification was a result of political activism and

was not based on scientific research (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002). Some analysts believed

that promoting a gay affirming approach to therapy was utilizing a prohomosexual

approach and ignoring previous research that seemed to indicate that changing sexual

orientation from homosexual to heterosexual was possible (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002;

Serovich et. al., 2008). However, other researchers noted that these earlier studies were

not replicated due to ethical and legal concerns (Serovich et. al., 2008). It is important to

note that after homosexuality was removed from the DSM there was a significant

decrease in research studies that targeted orientation change, and those studies that were

conducted came under close examination (Silverstein, 2007). The American

Psychoanalytic Association issued several policies attempting to limit and even end the

practice of performing SOCE (APA, 2009). After the declassification of homosexuality

psychotherapists who believed in sexual orientation change found support in the

religious/church community that promoted the belief that SSAs and behaviors were

"sinful" and should be changed (Fjeistrom, 2013; Maccio, 2011). As a result, the

reparative therapy or conversion therapy approach was promoted and is now referred to

as sexual reorientation therapy (Maccio, 2011). This approach utilizes a strategy that

emphasizes "counseling, religious practices, behavioral modification, cognitive reframing, and other means" (Fjeistrom, 2013, p. 802).

Efficacy of Sexual Reorientation Therapy

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of same sex attracted men from conservative/evangelical churches with competing spiritual and sexual identities. This study did not examine if these men attempted a sexual orientation change or if any change occurred or if that change effort was effective. It is important to note, however, that since 1981, the peer reviewed literature "contains no rigorous intervention trials on changing same sex attractions" (APA, 2009, p. 27) and that since 1999 studies have been conducted to evaluate the effect on those individuals who participated in SOCE and who participated in religious based efforts (APA, 2009). Because the methodological standards have been called into question, definitive conclusions regarding efficacy or safety of SOCE cannot be determined (APA, 2009). Even though the APA cannot give a definitive answer to whether SOCE can be effective, the review of literature supports an understanding that any SOCE is limited and unsustainable, and this includes efforts using religious support and self-help groups (Byrd & Nicolosi, 2002; Gonsiorek, 2004; Jones & Yarhouse, 2011; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Serovich et al., 2008; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002; Weiss et al., 2010).

Who Seeks SOCE

There are several reasons why some individuals seek SOCE. Due to prejudices and heteronormative societal norms, some LGBTQ people seek therapy because of an internalized homonegative phobia (Dillon, & Vernaglia, 2002; Smith, Oades, &

McCarthy, 2012; Worthington et al., 2002). Others seek therapy due to sexual orientation identity development concerns. These concerns are related to both personal and group identity development. Individuals may question their own personal sexual identity and also question to what group they belong and identify (Tozer & Hayes, 2004). A third reason is due to an understanding that SSAs and behavior are not congruent with a person's religious or spiritual beliefs (Balkin, Schlosser, Levitt, & Heller, 2009; Jones & Yarhouse, 2011; Weiss et al., 2010). This study focused on those individuals who sought sexual orientation change due to religious and spiritual beliefs and did not attempt to answer whether change is possible or to determine the efficacy of the change attempted. The study focused on the lived experiences of men with competing sexual and spiritual identities.

Models of Sexual Development

A review of the literature on sexual development revealed that much research has been generated in understanding the development and coming out process of sexual orientation and identity. Identity development and the coming out process have historically been noted as being synonymous and understood as being integrated into a gay identity (Yarhouse, 2001; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a). The earlier models of homosexual development viewed development as linear stages utilizing an essentialist approach in which an individual develops a healthy private and public gay identity (Simpson & Carroll, 2008). Cass's (1979) six-stage model was among the earliest of stage model theories to be advanced. In this model, Cass suggested that gay and lesbian development followed from: (a) identity confusion, having questions about their identity

due to experiencing SSAs; (b) identity comparison, understanding that they are different from others because of having SSAs; (c) identity tolerance, beginning to think that they might be gay; (d) identity acceptance, that SSA means that they are gay; (e) identity pride of being homosexual; and (f) identity synthesis, having a self-identification of being gay and identifying with others who are gay (Cass, 1979). Troiden (1989) originally developed a four-stage model based on interviews with 150 gay men. Troiden gathered participants using a snowball technique, interviewing men known personally and men referred by those men (Troiden, 1989; Yarhouse, 2001) and presented the following four stages of identity development: sensitization, dissociation and signification, coming out, and commitment. Troiden later expanded this study noting a broader commitment of gay and lesbian persons using a "sociological analysis of homosexual identity formation" (Troiden, 1989, p. 49). The expanded four stages were: (a) sensitization, which are feelings of being different from others in childhood and "the significance of sensitization resides in the meanings attached subsequently to childhood experiences, rather than the experiences themselves" (p. 52); (b) identity confusion, in which the thought of being gay creates a sense of dissonance with the individual's earlier images of self creating "inner turmoil and uncertainty surrounding their sexual status" (p. 53); (c) identity assumption, where the individual begins self-identifying as homosexual, associating with other gay people, and beginning sexual experimentation; and (d) commitment, which refers to "self-acceptance and comfort with the homosexual identity and role" (p. 63).

As research of gay sexual development continued, the assumption of a unified theory that explained the development of both gay men and lesbians began to be

questioned (Diamond, 2007). Research began to show that gay men did not have an identical development as lesbians and that men and women of minority cultures developed differently than men and women in the dominate Caucasian culture (Diamond, 2007; Yarhouse, 2005a). New models of development continued to appear as older models failed to address the concerns of new groups of people (Yarhouse, 2005a). Over time the development of a same sex orientation was understood as increasingly diverse and a "multifactorial phenomenon, characterized by multiple causal factors, multiple developmental pathways, and multiple manifestations" (Diamond, 2007, p. 142). The apparent diversity of development and expression of same sex sexual orientation created a problem for believing that either the positivistic essentialist view or the postmodernist social constructionist view can stand alone as the only theory to explain sexual orientation construction (Diamond, 2007). The concept of multiple identities can be traced historically to the work of William James (1890), who thought of self as possessing a material, social, and spiritual self, and in the work of Mead (1934), who talked about interacting with varied self-concepts (Stirratt et al., 2008). Recent literature reviews addressed a common understanding of possessing multiple identities that include personal, relational, and collective identities and the concept of intersectionality (Stirratt, et. al., 2008). Intersectionality promotes: "(a) no social group is homogenous, (b) people must be located in terms of social structures that capture the power relations implied by those structures, and (c) there are unique, no-additive effects of identifying with more than one social group" (Stirratt, et. al., 2008, p. 90). Research studies utilizing quantitative measures have difficulty in dealing effectively with multiple identities and

intersectionality and necessitate a method that can better "conceptualize individuals at intersections of multiple identities" (Stirratt, et. al., 2008, p. 90). Intersectionality occurs when an individual identifies with more than one social group and generates new subjective experiences (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008).

Understanding orientation and identity from an existential approach with its emphasis on social structures and power relations has generated a new term to describe individuals who experience SSAs. Diamond (2007) uses the term "sexual minority" to describe any individual experiencing SSAs and behavior. Most people identify as having an opposite sex attraction and identify both privately and publicly as being heterosexual, and those reporting SSAs are in the minority (Yarhouse, et. al., 2009). The William's Institute on Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Law and Public Policy at UCLA School of Law published an executive summary of a comparison of four national population-based surveys reporting on the LGBT population. Those identifying as LGBT ranged from 2.2% to 4.0% (Gates, 2014). The review of literature shows a minority of people who identify as being gay or lesbian but does not address a small population of people who experience SSAs and who disidentify as being gay or lesbian (Yarhouse, et. al., 2009). One of the reasons individuals disidentify as being gay or lesbian is due to an attribution of being Christian desiring to identify with a Christian sexual ethic of a gendered heterosexual activity and the sanctification of sexual activity (Murray-Swank, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2005).

Understanding Multiple Intersecting Identities

Early theories of homosexual development utilized a stage model approach. In the first stage, a person begins to consider the possibility of being gay and will traverse to the final stage of acceptance and identification of being gay (Cass, 1979; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Stage models have an essentialist theoretical orientation in which the formation of a gay identity is seen as a persons' acceptance of their true self and real sexual orientation (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). Stage models postulate that as individuals come to acceptance of their sexual identity, they will attach a greater valence to their identity and integrate this identity into their self-concept (Stirratt et al., 2008). Self-identity is seen as an integration of the multiple constructs that make up an individual. That is, a person can be female, black, bisexual, American, and Baptist. From an essentialist stage model approach, these various constructs are integrated and harmonized into a fixed identity that is stabile and invariable over time (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). This essentialist explanation does not adequately describe the experience for some in their development of sexual identity (Crabtree, 2009; Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001). In a postmodern culture theories based on essentialism and biological determinism are unable to capture the complexities and variability of multiple identities (Crabtree, 2009; Jones, 2009; Stirratt et al., 2008).

William James (1890) maintained that the ''empirical self'' comprised a material, social, and spiritual self, and that each of these components contained its own set of multiple selves. Identity multiplicity is also evident in the work of Mead (1934), who

underscored the importance of social interactions with others in the development of varied self-concepts (Stirratt et al., 2008, p. 89-90).

A review of the literature revealed that research on intersectionality and multidimensions of multiple identities and the sociological contexts that influence the construction of these identities (Horowitz & Newcomb, 2001; Jones, 2009; Stirratt et al., 2008). Weber (1998) noted the need for further research that would explore the relationships between race, class, gender, and sexuality (as cited in Abes et al., 2007). Intersectionality promotes an understanding that identification with more than one social group will produce "new forms of subjective experience that are unique, non-additive, and not reducible to the original identities that went into them" (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008, p. 356). Subjective experiences provide meaning to social categories and challenge the thought that social categories promote a primary status (Diamond & Butterworth, 2008). Social construction theories historically focused on single dimensions of identity such as racial, ethnic, gender or sexual and do not address the dynamics of intersecting identities of sexual minorities (Sherry et al., 2010). Jones and McEwen (2000) looked at integrating intersecting social aspects of self by using an integrated and unitary view of self. The postmodern theory of social constructionism views self as fluid and evolving. In a ten-year longitudinal study on women's sexuality utilizing a dynamical systems approach, Diamond (2009) indicates that some sexual minority women reported a more fluid and later developing sexual identity that directly challenges Cass's and Troiden's early stage model findings. Diamond's findings did not suggest that these women reported sexual orientation change but reported fluidity of sexual desire, attractions, and

expression (Diamond, 2009). From these findings it can be suggested that the stage

model approach of Cass and Troiden do not give an answer to the sexual development of

all sexual minorities. It should be noted that Diamond studied sexual minority women,

and these results do not extend to sexual minority men. However, these findings lead to

questions concerning the outcome of a gay identity formation for all people who

experience SSAs and also support the use of the social constructionist theory as a viable

tool to investigate the interaction of competing sexual and spiritual identities.

Relevant Research to this Study

A literature review produced several research studies relevant to this study. Sherry

et al. (2010) conducted a mixed method study to investigate the relation between

religious and sexuality variables and its possible effects on LBG individuals. There were

a total of 422 respondents with 373 respondents completing the quantitative measures and

422 respondents completing a single qualitative question. Participants were identified

online from LGBT list serves and websites and were sent a questionnaire that included

quantitative and qualitative questions. The demographics of the participants were 41%

male, 58.2% were female, and .8% were classified as intersex. The age of respondents

ranged 16-83, with an average age of 31.9%. The predominate ethnicity of respondents

were European American (84.6%) with Latino/Latino American at (5.9%), Asian/Pacific

Islander/Asian American (3.8%), African/African American (2.7%), Native American

(1.9%) and Middle Eastern/Middle Eastern American (1.1%). Regarding partner status,

the participants identified as single (43.7%), married (15%), cohabitating (20.1%), not

cohabitating but in a committed relationship (15%), in more than one relationship (2.1%),

divorced (2.7%), widowed (1.1%), and separated (3%). The quantitative portion the study was concerned with predicting shame, guilt, and internalized homophobia by measuring how much religion was emphasized in childhood, the level of spiritual and religious well-being, and how conservative or liberal were the individuals' experiences in their church of origin.

The quantitative portion included the Religious Emphasis Scale, a 10-item measure on a 6-point Likert scale to identify how much emphasis one's parent made of religion. The internal consistency coefficient alpha estimate for the study was .94. The Quest Scale is a 12-item measure on a 9-point Likert scale that seeks to assess three facets of religious orientation: the readiness to face existential questions, the experience of self-criticism and religious doubts as positive, and an openness to change. The internal consistency alpha coefficient estimates for the existential scale were .62, .70 for the doubting as positive scale, and for the openness to change scale were .20. The Spiritual Well-Being Scale is a 20-item measure on a 6-point Likert scale that rates religious and existential well-being. The three scale scores of religious well-being, existential well-being, and total spiritual well-being is determined by summing all the items. The internal consistency alpha coefficient estimate was .94. The internalizing outcomes were measured by utilizing the Harder Personal Feelings Questionnaire, which is a 22-item measure on a 5-point Likert scale that asks respondents to rate how common feelings were to them. The internal consistency alpha coefficient estimate for the study was .86 for shame and .84 for guilt. The final scale used was the Internalized Homophobia Scale, which is a 26-item instrument scored on a 7-point Likert scale. The instrument has four

subscales and an overall scale. The internal consistency alpha coefficient estimate for the current sample was .75. There was only one qualitative question asked of the respondents: "Briefly describe your experience regarding religion and your sexual orientation." (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 114). The data was analyzed using a postmodern and constructivist consensual qualitative approach. Three judges from different religious and sexual orientation perspectives read the data independently and coded for themes. The initial themes were further analyzed and eight final themes were identified. The most common of the eight themes was that participants reported that sexual orientation made them question or change their religion. Sherry et al. (2010) cited previous research that indicated 69% of gay male participants turned away from organized religion, choosing to accept their sexual identity (Wagner et al., 1994).

The researchers utilized a mixed method design to investigate individuals with competing spiritual and sexual identities within the context of postmodern theory to better understand socially constructed identities that are in conflict and to add insight to how professional therapists may interact with religiously conflicted LGB clients. This study indicated a statistically significant result that individuals with higher levels of shame, guilt, and internalized homophobia believed it was wrong to doubt their religious beliefs, were conservative in their religious beliefs, displayed a greater sense of religious well-being, and exhibited a greater desire to deal with existential questions. The qualitative data provided the insight that 40% of the respondents indicated that sexual orientation was the spark that spawned doubt in religious beliefs. One of the conclusions of this study was that 40% of the respondents resolved the conflict of competing

identities by choosing a gay identity and changing from attending a nonaffirming to a gay affirming religious organization or rejecting religion and God altogether (Sherry et al., 2010).

Another significant study was a 6 to 7-year longitudinal study conducted by Jones and Yarhouse (2011) of 72 men and 26 women involved in various Christian ministries in order to change sexual orientation. The researchers solicited the Christian organization Exodus International, a worldwide interdenominational umbrella organization that provided support and accountability to their membership of independent Christian ministries designed to help Christians struggling with same-sex attractions. As noted earlier, Exodus International leaders shut down the organization in 2013, offering a public apology for supporting reparative approaches to anyone they may have harmed (Payne, 2013). Sixteen Exodus International ministries agreed to inform their members of the study. The core requirements of the study for participant inclusion were "(a) the participant be at least 18 years of age, and (b) same-sex attraction was a significant part of the motivation for their involvement with this Exodus ministry" (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011, p. 408). Jones & Yarhouse admitted that the methodology of their research failed to meet several ideal standards for longitudinal, prospective studies. Examples given related to the inability to conduct interviews with participants before they received any services by the Exodus ministry, the inability to determine how enrolled participants differed from all persons receiving services, and the inability to specify with any precision the methods the various ministries used in providing services (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). This was a naturalistic, quasi-experimental, longitudinal study that maximized external validity and

"compromised certain aspects of internal validity and rigor" (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011, p.

410), and the authors admitted that this did not allow for rigorous examination of

predictors or probabilities of change or differential effectiveness of change strategies. The

hypotheses of the study were that sexual orientation change was possible for some, and

the attempt to change, on average, was not harmful (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). These

hypotheses are not relevant to this current study, however. What is significant to this

study is the finding of successful chastity of 30% of the participants at the T6 sample

(Jones & Yarhouse, 2011).

Historically, there have been two typical responses from the professional

counseling community to those individuals struggling with spiritual and sexual identities.

The first is a gay-affirming approach that results in an acceptance of same-sex attractions

and the establishment of a gay identity. The resolution of spiritual and sexual identity

conflicts within the gay affirming approach is to change one's religion to a gay affirming

religion or to disidentify with God and religion (Sherry, et al., 2010). The second typical

approach is the reparative therapy or conversion approach that has been shown as

ineffective and potentially harming and the resolution of spiritual and sexual conflict is

experiencing psychological harm and staying in the gay nonaffirming religion, changing

to a gay affirming religion, and/or rejecting God and religion (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008;

Becstead, 2002; Ganzevoort et al., 2011; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Shidlo &

Schroeder, 2002). The results of Jones & Yarhouse (2011) indicated that some resolve

the conflict between spiritual and sexual identity by disidentifying as gay and choose to

subordinate sexual identity to their spiritual identity and live celibately within their non-

gay affirming religious system. This indicates the need for a third option that does not promote an out-gay or an ex-gay approach (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011). This third approach seeks an "open exploration of beliefs, values, identity, and behavior" (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011, p. 99), and facilitates congruence with the individual's behaviors and beliefs so the client develops an identity that reflects that congruence. Significant to this study is the individual living congruently by subordinating sexual identity to their spiritual identity. They have not altered or changed their sexual orientation and they still experience SSAs and have decided to live openly within their non-gay affirming religious communities as disidentified gay men (Yarhouse,2005;Yarhouse,Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005).

Summary and Conclusions

Sexual minorities with competing sexual and spiritual identities may have increased difficulty in navigating these intersecting identities due to being misunderstood by both their faith communities and the gay community (Sherry, et al., 2010). Spiritual identity can be a very important and salient construct (Lease et al., 2005; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a), and maintaining connection to one's faith community can be a priority for some (Hill et al., 2000; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). Religious beliefs that portray same sex activity as sinful and that promote a conversion to an opposite sex sexual behavior has been linked to an experience of homophobia and homonegativity (Barton, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010). Due to an antigay rhetoric that has been espoused by many within the conservative church in which gays are portrayed as perverse and seen as enemies of family values (Barton, 2010), the relationship between the conservative Christian

community and the gay community can be very antagonistic, and this antinomy can produce prejudiced attitudes within the gay community toward gay Christians and make it difficult to come out as Christian in the gay community (Haldeman, 2002; Sherry et al., 2010). Having a same sex attracted orientation not only places these men in the minority in a heterosexually dominated society, but their desire to subordinate their SSAs to their spiritual identity places them in a subminority of the gay minority (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). They can find that they are not accepted within their faith communities because they are unable to stop having SSAs and convert to a heterosexual orientation. They can also find that they are not accepted by the gay community and seen as not embracing their "true identity" (Sherry et al., 2010). Their community of faith tells them to have more faith, invest in deeper prayer, and just make the decision to stop sinning and become heterosexual. Many within the conservative church and the gay community cannot understand the struggle and cannot identify with the needs of these men to help them negotiate interacting with these intersecting identities (Heermann et al., 2007; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Sherry et al., 2010).

In this chapter, I presented a theoretical foundation of the postmodern social constructionist theory contrasting the essentialist biologically-driven view of sexual development that defined identity as predetermined, fixed, stable, and enduring over time (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) with the social construction theory of sexual identity development that views identity as fluid, evolving, and interacting with intersecting and competing identities that are influenced by the individual's valuative frameworks (Cox & Lyddon, 1997; Crabtree, 2009; Parker, 2009; Yarhouse, 2001). The

valuative framework of the conservative Christian view of sexuality includes belief in the importance of a "gendered" and "sanctified" expression of sexual behavior (Hernandez et al., 2011; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008) and the meaning-making of SSAs in relation to the theological belief of the "fall of man" and the "sin nature" (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007; Yarhouse & Sells, 2008). I traced the history of the theories of homosexual identity development beginning with the early stage model of Cass that proposed an integrated and public homosexual identity (Cass, 1979) and ending with the social constructionist view of multiple intersecting identities where identity is viewed as fluid, evolving, and influenced by the individual's culture, attributions, and meaning-making (Diamond, 2009; Stirratt et al., 2008). I concluded this section with a literature review presenting a brief overview of the history of the treatment of homosexuality within the professional psychology and counseling community. In conclusion, the development of sexual and spiritual identities is an important and needed topic for discussion and research. Each of these identities is a powerful and salient construct, and people can attach great meaning and importance to them (Bowers, Minichiello, & Plummer, 2010). The impact of how the professional psychology and counseling community, the organized church, the gay community, government at the local, state, and national levels, and society as a whole responds to these individuals struggling with intersecting competing identities can produce severe and life-harming consequences for these men. They can find themselves being marginalized by the gay community and ostracized by the conservative organized church. They are not only a sexual minority in a society dominated by people who are

sexually attracted to the opposite sex, but they are also a minority within the gay

community and within the conservative organized church.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Traditional stage model approaches to sexual development utilize a linear

approach in which an individual progresses from confusion about sexual orientation and

identity towards acceptance and identification of SSAs and a gay identity. Cass (1979)

postulated a six-stage approach of identity confusion, identity comparison, identity

tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis. Troiden (1989)

presented a four-stage model of sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and

commitment. However, these models do not appear to be appropriate for understanding

SSA development for all sexual minorities (Diamond, 2007). In a 10-year longitudinal

study investigating women's sexuality, Diamond reported nonlinear changes over time in

sexual interests as well as unexpected and unique forms of sexual expression (Diamond,

2009). Some women reported first experience of SSAs during adulthood as opposed to

puberty like many gay and bisexual identified men recalled (Diamond & Butterworth,

2008). It has also become more widely accepted that the sexual development for male

and female sexual minorities are vastly different (Diamond, 2007). Linear stage models

also appear to be inadequate in understanding the development of sexual minorities who

disidentify with a gay identity and identify with a strong spiritual identity (Jones &

Yarhouse, 2007; Sherry et al., 2010) instead of progressing through stages that produce

an integrated and unified self-identity in which individuals come to an acceptance of their

SSAs and "come out" in an affirming and openly gay identity. Some of these individuals

seek to change their orientation to an opposite sex attraction or, when failing to

accomplish a change, opt to live a life of celibacy. These linear models do not address the concepts of integrating the intersecting and competing aspects that define self-identity (Sherry et at., 2010). In order to better understand those individuals who choose a conservative theologically-driven spiritual identity, a qualitative collective case study was advocated in order to generate rich, in-depth information (Ponterotto, 2005; Yin, 2009) gleaned from interviewing this subpopulation of same sex attracted evangelical Christian men.

In this chapter, I restate the research questions as described in Chapter 1. I define the phenomenon of studying sexual minority men from conservative Christian churches with competing spiritual and sexual identities. I explain how that a qualitative collective case study design using a postmodern social construction paradigm was appropriate for this study. I define that my role as a researcher was as an outside observer, and I note any biases and other ethical issues in performing this research. A description of the methodology used for identifying and selecting participants, interview and data collection, and data coding and analysis follows. A discussion regarding the establishment of trustworthiness is accomplished by using the approaches of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

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Research Designs and Rationale

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Research Questions

RQ: What are the emergent core themes that are found to be associated with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

Issue Subquestions

SQ1: How has the response of the faith community of those with competing

spiritual and sexual identities affected their struggle with competing identities?

SQ2: How has the response of the gay community affected the struggle of those

with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

Topical Procedural Questions

TPQ1: What themes emerge from gathering information about these cases?

TPQ2: How might the conflict between sexual identity and spiritual identity be

described?

Rationale and Theoretical Framework

American society is heteronormative, and the majority of adult people experience

opposite sex attractions (Peterson, 2011; Toomey, McGuire, & Russell, 2012; Ward &

Schneider, 2009). The Williams Institute reported that between 2.2% and 4.0% of

American adults identified as LGBT and estimates that there are between 5.2 and 9.5

million LGBT adults in the United States (Gates, 2014). Individuals who engage in same

sex sexual behavior are the minority in American culture, and the development of a gay

identity is formed in a heteronormative culture amid a negative heterosexist stigma

(Szymanski, Kashubeck-West, Meyer, & Meyer, 2008). Because of this negative

heterosexist stigma, many LBG people "are likely to have some level of internalized

oppression related to their status as members of a stigmatized group" (Szymanski et al.,

2008, p. 510). For some same sex attracted individuals with competing spiritual and

sexual identities who disidentify with a gay identity (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011;

Yarhouse, Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005) and desire to change or limit these attractions, this stigmatization can be exacerbated (Sherry et al., 2010). Many religious organizations promote heteronormative values while condemning same sex behavior and create a homophobic environment (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011) that can increase the intensity and effect of competing identities (Sherry et al., 2010). Many people experiencing this struggle of identity discover that rejecting religious environments that celebrate heterosexuality as normative provides them a greater opportunity to develop a synthesis of these competing identities and to decrease harmful effects to their emotional and spiritual health (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Lease et al., 2005). Many within the LGB community express a prejudicial attitude toward gay Christians who choose to remain in conservative churches and subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual identity (Sherry et al., 2010; Bartoli & Gilliem, 2008). These sexual minorities "may find themselves not only unwelcome in the church because of their sexual orientation but they are also viewed as antithetical to the gay movement because they are religious" (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 113). To better understand this phenomenon of competing identities, a postmodern approach that views development of self as socially constructed with multiple intersecting dimensions (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008; Crabtree, 2009; Stirratt et al., 2008) and influenced by individual valuative frameworks and attributions (Yarhouse 2001; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005) was employed. Current research has utilized intersectionality to understand the multiplicity of identity and the creation of a distinctly individualized construction of self (Stirratt et al., 2008) that can be fluid and changing over time (Crabtree, 2009; Diamond, 2009).

Historically religion has not been welcomed or accepted as a positive influence in promoting an individual's psychological wellbeing. Freud believed that religion was created for weak-minded and immature people, while atheism was understood as being emotionally and psychologically healthy. Skinner saw religion as a tool to control and manipulate behavior, and Ellis thought that religious beliefs were irrational and produced dysfunctional behavior (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008). It has only been in recent history with the development of existential postmodern theories that religion has begun to find acceptance as a useful source for understanding human behavior (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008). This lack of acceptance and understanding of the positive influence of religion on self-identity was the norm in modern psychology. Erikson and Marcia appeared as lone voices promoting acceptance and understanding of spirituality and the development of spiritual identity (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, & Colwell, 2008). Unlike Freud, who saw religious people as being weak-minded and immature, Erikson believed that spirituality was a sign of healthy maturity. Marcia believed that religion should be included in the research of how identity is developed (Kiesling et al. 2008). Recently, the acceptance of spirituality as an important construct in an individual's development of identity has been robustly promoted. Wink and Dillion (2002) defined spirituality as "the self's existential search for ultimate meaning through an individualized understanding of the sacred" (p. 79). Sinnott (2002) called it "one's personal relations to the sacred or transcendent, a relation that then informs other relationships and the meaning of one's own life" (as cited in Keisling, p. 199). Kiesling et al., (2008) defined spiritual identity as an "individual construction of a relationship to the sacred and ultimate meaning" (p. 51)

and stressed the importance of understanding the individuality of spiritual identity located

structurally in a historical and social context that includes both overall general and

localized societal constructs. In a study on the exploration of the sense of spiritual self,

Kiesling et al. (2008) examined narratives about spiritual identity for role salience and

found that "role salience and role flexibility distinguish the ways individuals give

structure and content to their sense of spiritual identity" (p. 51). In relationship to identity

status categories, Kiesling et al. found that (a) spiritual identity provided a sense of

connection to community, (b) that meaning-making was constructed through interactions

with important people in individuals' lives, (c) that struggle was common in maintaining

valued concepts and motivated people to maintain connection with their spiritual

communities, (d) that spiritual identity focused attention on protecting values and beliefs,

and (e) that spiritual identity was fluid, displaying a degree of remaining the same and

changing. The extant literature provides an understanding that spiritual identity is an

individualized and intrinsic construct that can have a salient impact on a person's private

beliefs that can motivate and define public actions and behaviors (Bartoli & Gillem,

2008; Halkitis et al., 2009; Kiesling et al., 2008). Spiritual beliefs and meaning-making

can have such a strong influence and be defined as the core aspect of a person's identity

that the decision to deny the sexual identity and to disidentify as gay becomes an

acceptable sacrifice (Haldeman, 2004). Utilizing a postmodern social constructionist

approach in understanding the individualized and fluid development of spiritual identity

in which meaning-making and connection with a faith community are greatly valued is a

more appropriate tool for research than utilizing a positivistic quantitative approach

(Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes et al., 2007; Sherry et al., 2010).

Case Study Design

In this study on the lived experiences of men with competing sexual and spiritual

identities, I hoped to understand the meaning that these men make from their experiences

and the valuative frameworks that inform their decisions regarding SSAs. The qualitative

research design is the best tool to use when the researcher is examining multiple and

varied meanings and looking for the "complexity of views rather than narrow the

meaning into a few categories or ideas" (Creswell Hanson, Plano Clark, & Morales,

2007, p. 20). Quantitative research seeks to generalize from a larger sample of

participants who were randomly selected to the general population they represent

whereas qualitative research studies information rich cases "from which one can learn a

great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton,

2002, p. 46). Qualitative or social research analyzes text data instead of numerical data in

utilizing the qualitative research design and a social constructionist paradigm. The data

collected is the participant's view of the situation (Creswell et al., 2007). I interpreted the

data by understanding the subjective process of the participants' meaning-making and

attributions regarding SSAs, their interactions with their communities of faith, and their

personal application of their spiritual valuative frameworks.

There are many design options open to the qualitative researcher. Creswell et al.

(2007) presented these options in five approaches: narrative research, phenomenology,

grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Hays and Wood (2011) presented six

approaches, naming narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, consensual qualitative research, and participatory action research.

Grounded theory is a highly used method when performing qualitative study and its purpose is to generate data by moving beyond description to develop theory to help explain practice or to promote further study (Hays & Wood, 2011). "Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants" (Creswell et al., 2007, p. 63). The grounded theory approach was not an appropriate approach for this study because the outcome of this current study was to understand the meaning-making and attributions of men with competing sexual and spiritual identities and not to construct a theory that would note causal conditions and develop strategies for treatment. Narrative research originated in literature but has a history in several social and humanities disciplines (Creswell et al., 2007). The narrative design involves the stories of experiences giving an account of an event or action of a single individual, and this account can be spoken or written (Hays & Wood, 2011). This approach is used when the researcher wants to construct detailed stories of life events of a single individual or a specific group of individuals and the meaning comes from the story; the researcher is seeking to create an explanatory narrative (Creswell et al., 2007; Hays & Wood, 2011). In narrative research, the design is to use a variety of sampling methods and multiple sources of data (Hays & Wood, 2011). This method goes beyond the purpose of this study. Another possible option for performing qualitative research is to use phenomenology. Phenomenology seeks to describe, "depth and meaning of

participants' lived experiences" (Hays & Wood, 2011, p. 291). Furthermore, "the basic purpose of phenomenology is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). The phenomenological approach moves beyond the scope of this current study.

Primarily the case study design is used when researchers want to contribute to existing knowledge of a group or social phenomena, when the study questions attempt to explain the how or why of a social phenomenon circumstance, and when answering the study questions require an in-depth description of the phenomenon. The utilization of a case study design allows the researcher to "retain a holistic and real world perspective" (Yin, 2014, p. 4). Case study design is used in a variety of disciplines and has a prominent place within the discipline of psychology research (Yin, 2014). The benefit of utilizing the case study design in lieu of other research designs for this research on competing spiritual and sexual identities is that this design fits well with research questions that ask "how" and "why," research that does not require control of behavioral events, and research that focuses on contemporary events (Yin, 2014).

The Role of the Researcher

In qualitative research, data is mediated through the human element rather than through inventories or questionnaires, and the researcher should describe biases, assumptions, expectations, and experiences to demonstrate an ability to conduct the research (Tuli, 2011). The qualitative researcher should also explain whether the reasearcher's role in the study is "emic," that is, being an insider and participant, or "etic," being an outsider or observer of the activity (Gelo, Braakmann, & Benetka, 2008;

Morrow, 2005). The qualitative interview process promotes the use of a semistructured or

unstructured interview utilizing open-ended instead of closed-ended questions. Photo-

interviewing, when the researcher inserts photographs into the interview process to solicit

information and rich description has become a common tool used in qualitative research

(Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007). Analysis is inductive and accepts emerging themes from the

data that promote multiple subjective realities in understanding instead of a single

objective promoted by quantitative research (Gelo et al., 2008; Kisely & Kendall, 2011).

The emerging data is used to generate an in-depth assessment of the phenomena rather

than attempting to falsify a deductively driven hypothesis (Gelo et al., 2008). In this

format of allowing for emerging data that promotes multiple subjective realities, the

researcher becomes the instrument of data collection and assessment. It then becomes

necessary for the researcher to define and describe an ability to conduct the research

including assumptions, biases, expectations, and experiences (Kisely & Kendall, 2011).

In my role as the researcher, I positioned myself as an outsider performing an

"etic" role in data collection. I have a heterosexual identity, and I have not experienced

SSAs. I utilized a purposeful sampling approach and contacted a conservative Christian

organization designed to minister to individuals experiencing SSAs to identify the

participants of the study. I performed the role of researcher in my relationship to the

participants, and I did not have a counseling or personal relationship with them.

However, I am an ordained Baptist minister, and I have been actively involved in

conservative church ministry as a professional clergy or an actively involved layman for

over 40 years. My theological beliefs are aligned with the conservative interpretation of

the Bible that same sex sexual behavior is prohibited and that opposite sex sexual

behavior is promoted. I do have a daughter who is openly gay and is engaged in an

ongoing long-term relationship with her partner and now wife of more than 10 years. I

also have a long-term close relationship with a friend for 20 years who has been openly

gay for her entire adult life who also has a long-term same sex married relationship and

who has had moments in her life where she has struggled with competing spiritual and

sexual identities. With these facts in mind, I addressed any biases and assumptions

through the tool of reflexivity, and I maintained a reflexive journal during the research

phase. Reflexivity is considered to be the core foundation of qualitative research and

enhances the influence of the researcher, the quality of the research, and the interpretation

of data (Jootun, 2008; Ortlipp, 2008). This journaling clarified how my beliefs,

assumptions, experiences, and values have influenced my interest in this topic of research

and my interpretation of the data (Jootun, 2008; Ortlipp, 2008).

Participant Selection

Random sampling in quantitative research is the core foundation in the ability of

the research to be generalized from the sample group to a larger population (Creswell et

al., 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Patton, 2002). "Random sampling derives from

statistical probability theory" (Patton, 2002. p. 230) and increases confidence in

generalizing findings and necessitates the sample size have a large participant base

(Creswell et al. 2007). In qualitative research, "sampling has not been given the same

prominence" (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 105) and can be conducted with one or

several participants with a focus on information or rich data that would be considered

"bias" in quantitative research (Patton, 2002). The goal of qualitative research is to generate insights about a particular phenomenon by finding meaning from participant experiences (Creswell et al. 2007). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) note that participant words serve as units of data, and it is crucial for the researcher to collect a sufficient number of words (data) in order to make a legitimate representation (Polkinghorne, 2005). In this research study, I applied a purposeful random sampling approach. Simple random (probability) sampling allows for every person in the population to have the same probability of being selected (Patton, 2002; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Purposeful random sampling does not produce statistical generalization but highlights credibility and reduces suspicion about why certain cases were selected (Patton, 2002). The criteria for participant selection were that the individual had competing spiritual and sexual identities as defined by their participation in a Christian based support group and had attempted to subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual identity. In this case study, I used a single holistic case design that identified a single group of individuals (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I chose a single group of individuals identifying as conservative Christians who were attending a church-based Christian ministry seeking help in managing SSAs and a competing conservative faith. The single holistic case design allowed me to interview one individual or multiple individuals (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In describing the strategies used in negotiating the conflict between spiritual and sexual identities Ganzevoort et al. (2011) described the use of four modes: (a) choosing a religious lifestyle in which a complete denial of their same-sex attractions can occur, (b) choosing a gay lifestyle with a complete denial of their religious lifestyle, (c) belonging to both groups simultaneously

alternating between the two groups where both groups are kept separate and in secret, and (d) seeking an integration of both identities and living openly in both communities. Ganzevoort et al.'s first stage, choosing a religious lifestyle and Christian identity over a gay lifestyle and gay identity, is the stage of interest in this study. In this study, I identified men from a conservative evangelical background who had competing sexual and spiritual identities and who had chosen to disidentify as gay and to live integrally and in congruence with their stated Christian beliefs. The study did not include individuals who had identified as gay or individuals who were attending gay affirming churches.

Instrumentation

I personally collected the data utilizing a semistructured interview protocol (Appendix B). Semistructured interviewing is a widely used method in qualitative research and is also identified as the standardized open-ended interview (Turner, 2010). I verbally administered the interview questions using a list of predetermined open-ended questions, and each participant was asked identical questions. This open-ended format allowed participants to answer in as much detail as they desired and allowed for probing and follow-up questions (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Turner, 2010). The interview questions were developed to be effective in gaining maximally descriptive rich data using questions. The interview questions were open-ended, neutral in scope, asking "how" and "what," and worded clearly to avoid misunderstanding and ambiguity (Turner, 2010). I also utilized the photo-elicitation method, and presented each candidate with the same six photos (Appendix C) to prompt exploration of the lived experiences of competing identities (Kolb, 2008). Using photo-elicitation allows for the researcher and

participant to "mutually focus on visual objects of shared interest" (Padgett, Smith, Derejko, Henwood, & Tiderington, 2013, pg 1435). The photos can elicit memories, thoughts, and feelings that are invisible and ignored by the participant (Padgett et al., 2013). Each interview was between 60 and 90 minutes and was audio recorded and saved in my password protected personal computer.

Analysis and Coding of Data

Analyzing case study data is a challenge for researchers because analysis of data in case study design has not been greatly developed (Yin, 2014). In statistical analysis, researchers have access to fixed formulas that help guide them in the analysis of data that case study researchers do not have in analyzing data. The use of computer assisted software tools can help in case study analysis. These programs are tools that can give assistance in data analysis but cannot provide a finished analysis (Yin, 2014). In order to provide a rich description of the meaningful emerging patterns, the researcher will need to spend much time in thinking and analyzing post-computer generated themes. I utilized the use of writing memos and notes to myself about what I observed during the data collection, taking note of hints, clues, and suggestions that helped in my interpretation of data (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) suggests four general strategies that help in analyzing data: (a) relying on the theoretical propositions that have shaped the study; (b) working the data from the "ground up," which is in contrast to the first strategy (c) developing a case description/descriptive framework; and (d) examining plausible rival explanations. Yin also suggested five analytic techniques to use with these four general strategies. The five analytic techniques are pattern matching, explanation building, time series analysis, logic

models, and cross-case synthesis. In performing the study, I used a combination of all four general strategies and the analytic techniques of pattern matching and explanation building in analyzing the data. For data coding and analysis, I utilized a computer software program called Hyper-Research (Researchware, Inc. 2015)..

Issues of Trustworthiness

This study was a qualitative case study rooted in the postmodern constructivist paradigm. The methodology of qualitative research is idiographic and emic and centers attention on one or very few individuals (Morrow, 2005). Idiographic science has been explained as "(from the Greek *idios,* 'own,' 'private,' and *graphein,* 'to write,' 'to describe') consisting of the representation of an individual event of singular, temporally limited reality as completely as possible with the objective of recording, and comprehending it in its factuality (tendency to individualize)" (Gelo et al., 2008, p. 270-271). Idiographic science attempts to find "categories of meaning from the individuals studied" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). The data that is generated is socially constructed, meaning that it is produced collaboratively between the participant and the researcher (Lietz, Langer, & Furman, 2006). The researcher must establish confidence in the trustworthiness that this meaning represents the experience described by the participant (Houghton et al., 2012; Lietz et al., 2006). There are four approaches to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Houghton et al., 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Credibility concerns internal validity and establishes believability in how the research was conducted and interpreted. Credibility is achieved through the use of rich description, researcher

reflexivity, and participant checking (Houghton et al., 2012; Morrow, 2005; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Rich description involves not only a description of "participants experiences of phenomena but also of the contexts in which those experiences occur" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). This was accomplished in this study by taking quality field notes and by audio recording the participant interviews. To establish researcher reflexivity, I maintained a reflective journal during the data collecting, coding, and interpretive process. Researcher reflection is an important part of qualitative inquiry and allows the researcher to be transparent about any beliefs, assumptions, biases, or uncertainties that may arise during the research process (Carlson, 2010). The third approach that was utilized to establish credibility was member checking. Member checking is the process where participants are given an opportunity to reflect, share, and dialogue with the researcher about the study's findings and provides an opportunity for "collaboration and reflexive elaboration" (Tracy, 2010, p. 844).

Transferability relates to findings or methods being applied to another group context or situation (Houghton et al., 2012; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Tracy, 2010). Transferability occurs when readers "intuitively transfer research to their own action" and evokes a "vicarious emotional experience" (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). Ways to create transferability are to provide in-depth descriptions of the study participants including demographics and geographic boundaries and to use evocative storytelling (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Tracy, 2010). Dependability refers to demonstrating stable data that is considered to be "consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques" (Morrow, 2005, p. 252) and is connected to research repeatability. Dependability is determined by

keeping an audit trail where the researcher's decisions can be followed. The audit trail is basically a chronology examining the process of the researcher's activities and influences that affect the collection and analysis of the data (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The audit trail and reflexivity will provide confirmability and discernment concerning how interpretation was made (Houghton et al., 2012). The fourth approach used to establish trustworthiness is confirmability. It is similar to dependability and utilizes the audit trail and reflexivity, creates a sense of "awareness and openness" (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011, p. 154), and promotes an attitude of critical self-examination by the researcher.

Ethical Procedures and Protection of Human Participants

The researcher must understand ethical considerations for the protection of the participants before conducting the research begins. These considerations include developing and maintaining trust, protection of participant rights and confidentiality, and integrity of the research (Creswell, 2009). In this study I utilized a current and legal framework for protecting participants based on autonomy, beneficence, and justice. Protecting the autonomy of the participants was accomplished by adhering to the ACA Code of Ethics regarding informed consent in conducting research (G.2.a., ACA, 2014) and by providing participants with the informed consent form. The principle of beneficence was applied according to the ACA Ethicsl Code G.2.a., Informed Consent in Research, highlights the need for the researcher to be responsible for participant welfare throughout the research study and will take reasonable precautions to "avoid causing emotional, physical, or social harm" (p. 16). Justice was promoted by adhering to the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) regarding safeguarding confidentiality (Code G.2.d.) and

providing clients with full clarification of the research conducted and data collected (Code G.2.g.).

I approached a conservative Christian organization that ministers to individuals struggling with spiritual and sexual identity (see appendix A). Recruitment of participants utilized the following criteria: Ministry leadership identified those in the group who had a strong commitment to their conservative Christian faith, that viewed the practice of same sex sexual behavior as being "sinful" and opposite of the "will of God" for their lives, and had made the decision to subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual identity (Ganzevoort, et al., 2011; Giancola & Smith, 2011). Ministry leadership distributed a letter (see Appendix A) outlining the nature and the rationale of the study, the interview process, and how to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. After their initial contact stating their interest, I contacted each participant via telephone call and verbally explained the study and the interview process. After the telephone meeting, I sent informed consent information and forms via e-mail. Participants returned their signed consent forms to me via e-mail.

In the informed consent form information was presented regarding background information that the purpose of the study was to better understand the lived experiences of men with competing spiritual and sexual identities who disidentify with their same-sex attractions and have chosen to identify with their spiritual identity. It emphasized the voluntary nature of the study and the participants' right to participate or to not participate in the study. The individual privacy of each participant was addressed in the informed consent that participant personal information would not be used for any purposes outside

of the research project. I provided contact information to a community counseling agency as a referral for unanticipated counseling needs. Each participant acknowledged having a support person or network providing professional and personal counseling support.

Before conducting the interviews, I informed the participants of the nature of the study, why they were asked to participate, and I explained informed consent, confidentiality, and how the study results would be used. Recorded data was saved to a computer file, backed up to an external storage device, and transcribed. Data collected was confidential, and I utilized pseudonyms for participant identifiers. Data is stored on my personal computer that is password protected, and I will be the only individual with access to the material and data, which will be stored for a period of five years. A concerted attempt was made to conduct the interviews in an area that was free from distractions and in a location that was most suitable for the participant (Gill, et al., 2008). A second, subsequent interview was conducted to verify the transcript (Kisely & Kendall, 2011). In a qualitative case study, the process for gathering data is a single or possibly a secondary follow-up interview so participants will not have a prolonged exposure to any experimental procedures and there will be no need for participant exit debriefing procedures.

Summary

This research was a qualitative collective case study design utilizing a social constructionist paradigm that understands identity as being socially constructed with multiple intersecting dimensions (Bartoli & Gillem, 2008). My role as the researcher in this qualitative study was that of being the instrument that collected and interpreted the

data (Tuli, 2011). I positioned myself as an outsider in an "etic" manner. I utilized a

semistructured interview in which I verbally administered open-ended questions to obtain

description-rich data (Turner, 2010). Semistructured interviews were conducted using

interview questions and photo-elicitation. Participant interviews were between 60 to 90

minutes in length. Interviews were audio recorded, field notes were taken and a reflexive

journal was maintained. Trustworthiness was established using the qualitative approaches

of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A purposeful sampling

approach was utilized, with participants recruited from a conservative Christian

organization that ministers to sexual minority Christians. This study was conducted to

better understand the lived experiences of those individuals from a conservative Christian

church background with competing spiritual and sexual identities. A literature review

indicated that individuals with competing spiritual and sexual identities resolve this

conflict by affirming a gay identity or by establishing a gay disidentifying lifestyle

(Barton, 2010; Rodriguez, 2010; Tozer & Hayes, 2004). For those utilizing a gay

affirming identity, they will either disidentify with their previous Christian religion and

become nonreligious or they will adopt a new gay-affirming religious orientation. For

those who choose to disidentify with a gay identity, they will remain in a gay

disapproving religion and seek a reparative therapy approach that attempts to alter same-

sex attractions to a heterosexual attraction so they can live congruently with their

religious beliefs (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). Others who disidentify as gay believe their

same-sex attractions cannot be or may not be altered and choose to live congruently with

their religious beliefs by developing a celibate lifestyle (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011).

Chapter 4: Results

In this study I investigated the lived experiences of men with competing sexual and spiritual identities. These men acknowledged having persistent SSAs and engaged in same sex activity for many years of their lives. They also acknowledged having a persistent conservative Christian faith they have practiced for many years of their lives. The purpose of this study was to seek understanding of how men from a conservative Christian church background negotiate the intersection of competing sexual and spiritual identities. Chapter three included an explanation for how a qualitative collective case study design using a postmodern social construction paradigm was appropriate for this study. I defined my role as a researcher as an outside observer, noting any biases and other ethical issues in performing this research, and described the methodology used for identifying and selecting participants, interview and data collection, and data coding and analysis, Chapter four includes the results of the study.

During the study I utilized a qualitative inquiry to interview six participants. The data were collected using interview questions and responses to photo-elicitation. The interviews were divided into three sections: personal experiences, church experiences, and application of experiences. The photo-elicitation consisted of six photos and participants responded to each photo. I coded the semistructured interview responses separately from the photo-elicitation responses in the attempt to understand the process of their journey in experiencing conflict between spiritual and sexual identities and to identify their current understanding of the conflict through the use of photo-elicitation.

I used the interpreted data to answer the following research questions:

RQ: What are the emergent core themes that are found to be associated with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

SQ1: How has the response of the faith community affected the struggle of those with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

SQ2: How has the response of the gay community affected the struggle of those with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

TPQ1: What themes emerge from gathering information about these cases?

TPQ2: How might the conflict between sexual identity and spiritual identity be described?

In chapter one I listed three assumptions for the study:

1. The participants of this study will express a dominant spiritual identity with a subordinate sexual identity.

2. Because their spiritual identity is the more dominant construct, these individuals will have attempted sexual orientation change. Studies of SOCE have been shown to have little success (Shildo & Schroeder, 2002), so some of these individuals choose to live a celibate lifestyle.

3. This choice of not engaging in a meaningful and reciprocating relationship would have the potential for producing continued experiences of conflict between these two powerful and important identities.

In understanding competing sexual and spiritual identities of men from a conservative church background, the present study will make a contribution to the existing literature, may inform counselor understanding in meeting the needs of

individuals with competing identities, and may make a positive impact on social change in the counseling and church communities, as well as enhancing a better understanding in society at large.

Using a semistructured interview, data were collected from six participant interviews which were audio-recorded and later transcribed, analyzed, and coded into four emergent themes. Two participant interview recordings were lost when transferring files from the computer used to record to a new computer. I attempted to reconnect with these participants to conduct another interview. I was unable to reconnect with one of the participants, but was successful in connecting with the other and conducted another interview. I conducted five interviews lasting between 60 to 90 minutes. After identifying emergent themes, I further reduced the themes into common responses. The photo-elicitation responses were also analyzed and coded into themes. These data are presented according to the four emergent themes, their reduced themes, and according to the responses to the photo-elicitation. In order to maintain the voice of the participants and enable the reader to identify with participant responses, I used first-person to report participant responses. I solicited participants through a conservative Christian church-based ministry aimed at supporting individuals with competing sexual and spiritual identities. Each participant had engaged in an attempt to change his sexual attractions, and they all lived in a southern or southwestern state. Pseudonyms were used to protect each participant's identity and to ensure anonymity.

I utilized purposeful random sampling in selecting participants for the study. Purposeful random sampling does not produce statistical generalization but highlights

credibility and reduces suspicion about why certain cases were selected (Patton, 2002).

The criteria for participant selection were that the individual would have competing

spiritual and sexual identities as defined by their participation in a Christian-based

support group and had attempted to subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual

identity. I utilized a single holistic case design that could identify a single individual or a

single group of individuals (Baxter & Jack, 2008). I chose individuals who were engaged

in a Christian support group designed to help same sex attracted individuals in managing

competing identities.

There are four approaches to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research:

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Houghton et al., 2012;

Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). In Chapter 3, I referenced five analytic techniques—pattern

matching, explanation building, time series analysis, logic models, and cross case

synthesis—that are used in analyzing data generated using the qualitative case study

design. I proposed using pattern matching and explanation building in analyzing the data.

Pattern matching was accomplished in the within-case analysis. Pattern matching

compared the findings with the three basic assumptions: subordinating sexual identity to

spiritual identity, participating in SOSE, and experiencing continued conflict between

identities. Explanation building is a type of pattern matching that is used to build a

hypothesis to explain a phenomenon and to develop a causal link (Yin, 2014). Due to the

limited number of cases and time constraints related to producing this dissertation,

explanation building was not used. The cross-case synthesis technique was utilized to

strengthen the findings of this study. The cross-case analysis treated each case as a

separate study, which was similar to other research methods combining results of

multiple studies (Yin, 2014).

In order to establish trustworthiness, interviews were audibly recorded on my

laptop computer. I transcribed the interviews, and themes were generated using the

computer software program HyperResearch. The computer generated themes were

explored using analysis, note writing, and member checking to provide a rich description

of the meaning-making related to experiencing competing identities. After analysis of the

recorded interviews, I contacted each participant to schedule a member check interview.

Only two of the participants chose to respond and to give a member check interview. Ben

gave a member check interview, and this was audio recorded on my laptop computer and

the recording was saved in the same password protected file as his original interview.

Michael also gave a member check interview. While attempting to record this interview, I

was unable to record due to technical difficulty. I hand wrote his member check

interview. I typed the responses on a Word document, and it is on file with the other

interview transcriptions.

Using reflective journaling, I processed personal biases that emerged in the

research process. Respondents reported hearing sermons in which they perceived that

gays were treated disrespectfully. One participant noted receiving the following

demeaning message used in a sermon, "God made Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve".

I remembered that as a young pastor, I had made this statement in a sermon with the

intent of making fun of and ridiculing the gay lifestyle. As I reflected on this statement, I

processed the change in me as a pastor growing in my understanding regarding prejudice

and bias, noting the development of a better understanding of sexual identity

development and the enduring nature of sexual attractions. I made a note of this in my

journal.

Another journaling moment came as I listened to the stories of their youth noting

their struggle and feelings of being alone without a safe place to discuss their struggle. I

processed thoughts of my daughter's experience noting that she had not discussed her

experiences with me until after she moved away from home and moved in with her

partner. I processed thoughts of loneliness she might have felt as she struggled with her

competing identities. She and her partner have been together for 12 years and they

recently participated in a marriage ceremony. I reflected that even though she might have

felt alone during that period of her life, I am joyful that we have never been estranged and

we have a very positive, loving, and growing relationship today. The journaling process

enabled me to become better connected to the participants' experiences. As a researcher it

allowed me to become more of a part of their stories.

Within-Case Analysis

Originally, I interviewed six participants found through connection with a

conservative Christian faith-based ministry designed to help Christians identifying as

experiencing same-sex attractions with competing spiritual identities. Two participants

were living in Mississippi and these interviews were conducted face-to-face. Three

participants lived in Florida and one lived in Oklahoma. I conducted the latter four

interviews via Skype and Face Time computer mediums. Each participant chose the site

of the interview. The participants in Mississippi chose their private office at their

respective work sites for the interview. I conducted three interviews using the Skype program on my personal laptop. Two of the participants were located at their private residences and the other participant was located at his work site during the interview process. I conducted one interview using Face Time on my personal iPhone and the participant was located in his private home office. One of the interview recordings conducted face-to-face was lost due to technical failure during data transfer, as well as one Skype recorded interview.

Ben: Participant 1

    Confusion, hope, and self-definition. Ben lives in Florida and I conducted his interview via Skype while he was located at his private residence. I was alone at my home as I conducted the interview. Ben is a-52 year-old Caucasian male who reports he has been married for 33 years. He noted being "still married, just separated." In his member check-interview he admitted he and his wife are getting a divorce, and he is choosing to live celibately. He reported, "I got married at 19 thinking that would square away the same-sex attraction part" and he described "asking God to take that desire away and that part not happening."

    Confusion related to being a Christian and having SSAs emerged as a major theme for Ben. "Well, it's definitely been, just World War III as far as a supernatural battle against the mind, the will, the emotions." In describing how he made meaning of his sexual attractions, Ben responded, "It was confusing for a very long time. I felt initially like it meant like I was definitely different from any one of my peers." He also expressed confusion regarding experiencing an intense abiding faith and enduring sexual

attractions. Reconciling how both could be true, he stated, "My faith in God was the most important thing in my life. But I was always conflicted in that because I knew how much of my life was focused on the SSA part, like cancelling it [his faith] out". He expressed believing that his struggle with SSAs was different than the struggle of other believers. "It was confusing. For a very long time I felt initially like it meant . . . like, I was definitely different from any one of my peers. Not knowing what really they were struggling with, just assuming, that I was the only one that was in this spiritual battle."

A second theme emerging from the data was his faith is the source of hope in his battle of competing identities. In describing what his faith means to him he stated, "I still had all of those things in place [the practices of his faith] to growing spiritually regardless of where I was in my same sex attractions." He noted coming to an understanding that having SSAs was no different than any other spiritual battle noting, "This is a struggle like any other struggle like anyone else faces. It is not bigger or smaller in God's eyes. That God loves you unconditionally regardless of your struggle." Ben noted that his faith and his sexual attractions are enduring and will not change. He has learned to live with both of them, stating, "The choice is not having the attractions but about not acting on the attractions." Ben reconciled his confusion by choosing not to act on his sexual attractions.

The third theme that emerged was that Ben made a distinction between being gay and being same sex attracted. Ben articulated, "There is definitely a shift in my mind once I heard about being same sex attracted instead of being gay. Gay seems more hopeless, as something you can't overcome. Being same sex attracted makes it more of a

choice and more optional." Ben's struggle is no longer about his competing identities but rather about the choices he makes.

Dean: Participant 2

Self-loathing and a need for connection. Dean lives in Mississippi and his interview was conducted face-to-face. Dean chose to have his interview conducted at his office in the church he pastors. He is a Caucasian male in his late 40s. He reports being married, noting "God has healed my marriage," and he describes managing his competing identities as a struggle he and his wife have shared together. "I told my wife, and we began our journey together".

A major theme in Dean's meaning-making concerning his experience of competing identities was feelings of shame and self-hatred. Dean noted, "I never felt that what I was doing was right; I couldn't stop it, but I never felt that what I was doing was right." In describing the self-messages regarding his same sex activity, he reported, "I hated it, I hated myself, I hated that other person. I despised them. I wanted to get away as quickly as I could." Dean had feelings of self-hatred and he believed "God really didn't love me".

A subtheme emerging from the belief that God did not love him was Dean's belief that he would be rejected and would lose everything if others were to find out about his same sex activities. He stated, "I still thought, 'I'm going to lose everything and everyone' in their rejection."

A second theme was Dean's belief that his same sex activity was about meeting his needs of acceptance and getting love he did not get from his family. "I think that what

I'm putting together in my life is that I'm not having that interaction with my family. My family is not a hugging family. I've gone back and looked through picture albums and boxes of photos, and I never see anybody holding me. There's no pictures of my mom holding me; there's no pictures of my dad holding me." These thoughts of needing affection and connection informed Dean's identity of being same sex attracted and not as being gay. "I never identified myself as being gay. How I segmented that out in my mind, everything I did was same sex, but I never really said, 'Well, I'm gay.'"

Michael: Participant 3

  Accepting same sex attractions and focusing on choices. Michael is a 54-year-old Caucasian who noted he has been in a long term heterosexual marriage. He lives in Florida, and I conducted the interview via Skype. Michael was in his home, and I was alone in my home. Michael's wife was in the home at the time of the interview, but in another room. At one point she came to the door of the room Michael was in to ask a question. After she left, Michael waited a few moments before beginning to answer again to make sure she was not at the door. Michael's family of origin attended a conservative Christian church. He reported, "I grew up in a religious household and anything other than the traditional marriage would have been wrong." Before the interview began, Michael expressed a feeling of being anxious regarding the types of questions I was going to ask. He stated, "I have been doing good for the last 4 months, and I don't want to be triggered." I assured him that none of the questions were going to be sexually explicit in nature, and he agreed to begin the interview. I asked Michael if he had a counselor or someone he could talk with if he did become "triggered," and he reported

that he did have someone he could approach for help. I asked him several times during the interview if he was okay with the questions, and he responded, "I'm okay, we can keep going."

The theme that emerged in Michael's narrative was a feeling of being different than the other boys he knew. In responding to the questions regarding how he believed he came to experience SSAs, Michael stated, "But in the past I attributed it pretty much to the fact that other boys enjoyed sports and I didn't. So, I always felt different from a younger age. I realized around first and third grades, when other boys were playing sports and I didn't understand them, I wasn't interested in the teams, I wasn't interested in the baseball cards. So there was a difference there. Later, I started admiring guys who were more jock or more authoritative, or who knew what they were doing or were more muscular." For Michael, having SSA did not signal any type of self-hatred or sense of spiritual wrong. When reporting about his first same sex sexual experience he reminisced, "I enjoyed it, but I didn't want anybody to know about it. It meant that I was different than everybody else; that I wasn't normal." Michael has resolved his sense of being different than other men and stated, "I'm learning now that God made me a man just like anybody else. I can accept who he made me to be, and all those other men, they're all different, and they all have their issues. So, I'm seeing myself in a much different light than I have before."

Michael expressed an open acceptance of having same-sex attractions, reporting that he is no longer resisting having SSAs. "So for years I had this barrier between me and God. I was a Christian; I was very strong, and I was a believer, but this area would

not go away. I realized that the attractions will never go away, probably, but the way I react to them and the way I feel about them is changing. God's changing me for the first time in my life." Michael makes a distinction between having SSAs and participating in same sex activity.

Rafael: Participant 4

Isolation and a fear of being ridiculed. Rafael is a Hispanic male living in Florida who is in his middle 40s and has been married for 20 years. I conducted Rafael's interview via Skype while he was located at his work site, and I was alone in my home. Rafael's interview recording was lost during transfer of data from one computer to another, and a second interview was scheduled. Due to internet connection problems, Rafael's interview was interrupted three times, and the Skype connection had to be re-established each time. Rafael did not seem to be negatively affected by the technical difficulties, and he remained positively engaged in the interview process.

The first theme that emerged from Rafael's interview was having a distorted view of self, being afraid of not being understood, not accepted by others, and being ridiculed. Rafael noted, "I didn't want to be the one that people were laughing at or making jokes or ridiculing." Rafael explained that he did not have a safe place to question and seek answers for what he was experiencing and believed, "I would just be basically on my own to take care of things to live my life." Rafael's view of self produced thoughts of being "less than other men." He expressed a sense of isolation and being alone with no one to share his struggle. "So, I never felt that there was anybody in my family or friends that I could go to and express anything that was going on inside." He expressed having

thoughts of inadequacy. "I don't really belong in a group of men because there is always some feeling that I'm not an equal. Not that I'm not a man, per se, because I've never felt other than that, but I am not equal to other men." Rafael reported that these thoughts of isolation, aloneness, and inadequacy placed him outside of the two communities important to his identity. He reported he did not have a community he could rely on, noting, "So you feel like you are in limbo because you don't feel like you're really Christian and you don't feel like you're really gay, so you don't really fit anywhere."

Phillip: Participant 5

  Childhood sexual abuse and broken relationship with his father. Phillip is a 55-year-old Caucasian man living in Oklahoma who reported he identified as gay early in life. "I just embraced the idea that I must be gay. I embraced a gay identity from ages 14 to 22." I conducted the interview with Phillip via Face Time while he was in his private home office, and I was alone in my home. He reports he had a spiritual conversion at age 22 and for the past 33 years he has lived as a heterosexual male. He stated, "I am married and have been for 30 years. I have 3 adult children, and I have 2 grandchildren."

  Phillip believes his involvement in same sex activity is directly related to sexual abuse he suffered as a child and because of a broken relationship with his father. "I don't even think that I would have ventured into homosexuality had it not been for all these incidences of sexual abuse" and stating "I had a lot of rejection issues with my dad. Most males that deal with homosexuality have broken relationships with their same sex parents. That's true of all homosexuals. I've actually never met a homosexual that did not have some varying levels of distortion in relating with their same sex parent." Phillip is

clear in his belief that SSAs are a result of abuse and broken relationships and can be repaired through an encounter with God. Phillip is an ordained minister and he performs ministry to others who are struggling with SSAs and same sex activity.

In Phillip's youth, he had a Catholic background attending parochial school, and he experienced encounters with a gay priest he described as being "jaded" in his religious or spiritual beliefs. He admits he was "angry with God for making me gay." He stated, "The filter of having a relationship with God, that changed everything for me." He stated this change brought an understanding that "the idea of attraction to males is something that needs realignment inside of me, and I had to work on that." Phillip's Christian framework seemed to be more deeply seated than the other participants.

Cross-Case Analysis

In this section I will discuss themes within participant responses that emerged and the reduction of these themes into common responses as I conducted a cross-case analysis of the semistructured interview questions. Using cross-case analysis, I identified four emergent themes:

- conflict between competing sexual and spiritual identities;

- importance of faith;

- feelings of being alone, fearful, and misunderstood; and

- God is forgiving and loving.

The following themes and patterns emerged.

Theme One: Conflict Between Identities

In reducing theme one, I found four common responses:

- having negative beliefs about SSAs;

- experiencing spiritual confusion and doubt;

- believing that SSAs interfered with their spiritual walk or connection to God; and

- not identifying as being gay.

Receiving negative messages. When describing the negative messages that he received concerning same sex activity or being gay, Ben responded, "My church in my growing up years had the biblical view that homosexuality was a sin," and he described the conflict he experienced, stating, "It's definitely been World War III as far as a supernatural battle against the mind, the will, and the emotion." Dean reported a severe message in his youth that "homosexuality was so negative . . . controversial, it was condemned," and Rafael had a similar response, noting, "From a religious standpoint, you were pariah if you said anything about being homosexual." Being gay or having SSAs meant that you did not belong in the church. Michael described his church's view of "homosexuality as a lifestyle is wrong," and he received messages of "those people [gays] were in sin, and it isn't okay to be gay," and Phillip responded, "I went to parochial school, my environment, my home environment believed it [being homosexual] was something wrong or bad. In my religious upbringing, I knew it was wrong."

Spiritual Confusion and Doubt. Reporting spiritual confusion related to having SSAs and having a conservative Christian faith was another common response in this theme. In describing the meaning that he made of having SSAs, Ben reported "It was confusing for a very long time…I was different from any one of my peers…that I was the

only one that was in this spiritual battle…I didn't recognize a safe place I could go to find out how to work this out". He was confused noting peers having opposite sex attractions coupled with an understanding that the Bible condemned homosexuality as a sin. "I think it was pretty confusing for me in my teen years thinking, 'why am I attracted this way?' Asking God to take that desire away and that part not happening". He experienced being different from his peers and he was confused as he prayed, asking for the SSAs to go away and having them persist. Another area of confusion was he did not have a safe place to share about his struggle. Sharing his struggle with family or with those he shared spiritual faith did not feel like safe options. When describing what his first experience of SSAs meant to him he responded "It caused an inner turmoil an inner confusion".

Michael noted being confused regarding whether his faith was real stating, "there is a certain mentality in the church that when you become a Christian you are supposed to change…you are not supposed to have deep deep struggles with sin…I tried…I could not overcome my issues". In having unwanted SSAs, Michael felt that he did not measure up to other Christians, unable to meet the standard of being able to overcome. Rafael noted being confused and frustrated. He reported, "I was fairly young when I was saved and part of that whole process in my mind was I hope that I will be liberated from that whole part of my life. But needless to say, that's not what happened." Rafael was confused regarding why he was not "cured" as "other people that at least claim that God had cured them and so it was kind of like why not me." Dean also felt this confusion regarding spiritual victory, stating, "I couldn't stop it," and this lack of ability to stop produced feelings of self-hatred. "I hated it, I hated myself, I hated what I was doing . . . it was

almost every Sunday I went forward . . . out of guilt over what I was doing . . . I hated

myself . . . I hated that other person, I despised them." Living in feelings of self-hatred

was similar to Ben's belief that he did not have a safe place to go to talk about his

struggle. While attending church he had feelings of self-hatred and felt he had no one in

whom to confide.

      Felt spiritually disconnected. Regarding maintaining a spiritual walk and a

connection with God, Ben noted, "I was always conflicted in that because I knew how

much of my life was focused on the SSA part, like cancelling it [my walk of faith] out,"

and "When I was in the throes of acting out that I knew my spiritual walk was

hampered." He believed that when he engaged in same sex activity he was choosing his

sexuality over his faith and that expressing same sex activity negated or cancelled out his

faith. "My sexuality was an idol and I was choosing that . . . I was making that an idol

over my faith and my walk with Jesus Christ." His statement regarding sexuality being an

idol gives an insight that his belief was he couldn't worship God and worship his

sexuality at the same time. It is clear in Ben's response that having a close relationship

with God and living his faith meant that he could not engage in same sex activity. In

responding to the question, "How do you believe that God has experienced you in your

experience of SSAs," Michael stated, "I used to feel that God could never use me as

much as other men. They had it all together and I didn't . . . I still struggle with that, other

Christian men are more spiritual," and "I would feel like I wasn't worth as much [to God]

as they were." Rafael believed that by actively engaging in same sex activity others

would view him as "not living up to the beliefs of the church," and he noted, "I'm trying

to live up to my beliefs" by not acting on his SSAs. He added, "Somebody who is seen as struggling but celibate would be viewed very different from somebody who is not celibate." Celibacy is a lifestyle decision for Ben, who reported he and his wife are divorcing, and his plan is to live celibately wanting to honor his spiritual identity.

Disidentified as gay. The final reduction in theme one regarding conflict between identities is the thought that these men do not identify as being gay men. Ben reported that when he was younger, his thoughts were, "I must be gay because I like guys." However, he stated, "I never really specifically identified as gay. Responding to the question, "How do you believe you came to experience SSAs?" Dean noted, "I never identified myself as being gay. How I segmented that out in my mind was that everything I did was same sex . . . but I never really said, 'Well, I'm gay.'" Rafael reported, "I have always identified as heterosexual . . . I don't identify myself [as gay], sometimes I say, 'Yes, I'm a gay man,' but that just never feels right." In responding to the question, "In what ways would you like to challenge some of the messages you've received about your sexual identity?*"* Phillip noted, *"*You mean like from the world telling me that I am born gay? Yeah, I get that a lot from gay activists . . . The messages are really hateful . . . they are very intolerant of people who have come out of homosexuality . . . they hate us when we come forward and say, 'I used to be gay and I am not gay anymore.'" Men participating in this study differentiated between having SSAs and identifying publicly as being gay. They outwardly identified as Christians viewed as struggling with SSAs. Ben, Dean, and Rafael also identified as heterosexual men struggling with SSAs, whereas Michael identified as choosing to live celibately, enduring SSAs and not having opposite

sex attractions. Phillip on the other hand identified as an "ex-gay," noting, "I embraced a gay identity from age 14 to 22 . . . the very day that I gave my life over to the Lord, all of the sexual addictions stopped. It didn't stop necessarily my masturbation problems or fantasy." He viewed his openly gay identity and same sex practices as a sexual addiction, a result of childhood sexual abuse, and a distant relationship with his father. He noted that the addiction stopped the day he became a believer. However, he also noted that the masturbation and fantasy did not stop. He outwardly identifies as being ex-gay, but inwardly he still struggles with a same sex fantasy life.

Reduction of theme one, conflict between identities, produced the common responses of

- having negative beliefs about SSAs,

- experiencing spiritual confusion and doubt,

- believing that SSAs interfered with their spiritual walk or connection to God, and

- not identifying as being gay.

The respondents noted receiving negative messages about homosexuality from family and church communities. The messages received included a belief that homosexuality was a sin. If he engaged in same sex activity he could not be a part of the church, if he openly identified as being gay he would become an outcast from the church. Having SSAs produced confusion and some reported praying, asking for God to remove their SSA. They noted that the SSAs were enduring, hard to overcome, and noted a belief that this is a struggle that will never end and will be a lifelong spiritual battle. They

reported feelings of being different from other Christian men and having thoughts of not measuring up to the faith standard of being able to overcome sin. The participants also shared a common belief they did not have a safe place to share their struggle and receive help and find answers. Ben, Dean, and Rafael reported the belief that SSAs and activity hindered their faith walk and relationship with God. Ben thought that his same sex activity "cancelled out" his faith and believed same sex activity and practicing his faith to be antithetical and that he had to choose one over the other. For Rafael, being celibate from same sex activity was seen as "living up to my faith."

Finally, participants made a distinction between having SSAs and having an outward gay identity. Ben, Rafael, and Phillip made specific statements that they did not outwardly identify as gay, and Phillip noted he lived openly as gay for eight years and for 33 years has identified as an ex-gay. While Dean did not make a specific statement of identity, his responses clearly showed that he identified as a heterosexual Christian male, and Michael indicated that he was living as one who was same sex attracted but choosing a life of celibacy. Michael's plan was to live his life being single without having a relationship partner. He did not have any sexual attractions for women, and he waned to live in a manner consistent with his conservative Christian faith. The distinction of having SSAs and outwardly identifying as gay was important, and the respondents were choosing to live congruently with their stated Christian belief that engaging in same sex activity is biblically wrong or is sin.

Table 1

Conflict Between Identities

	Ben	Dean	Michael	Rafael	Phillip
Had negative beliefs about same SSA	X	X	X	X	X
Experienced spiritual confusion	X	X	X	X	
Felt that SSA interfered with his spiritual walk	X	X		X	
Did not identify as being gay	X			X	X

Theme Two: Importance of Faith

The second theme that emerged from the data was that participants' Christian faith was an important construct of identity. In this theme, three primary responses evolved:

- faith is my most important identity,

- faith prevented the growth of SSAs, and

- faith gives me personal strength.

Faith is most important identity. In describing the importance of his faith, Ben stated, "My faith in God was the most important thing in my life. . . . There has never been a time throughout all of this journey that I have ever walked away from my faith or my church." As noted in theme one, Ben reported experiencing SSAs from his youth,

understanding these attractions to be enduring and very difficult to change. He reported "asking God to take that desire away and that part not happening." He had a clear understanding that experiencing SSAs and a faith walk were enduring and important constructs in his life and they were antithetical in nature. He described making an intentional decision to promote his spiritual identity over his sexual attractions. "I think more and more that my spiritual identity is winning out over my same sex attractions." He reported that living his spiritual faith brought more personal fulfillment to his life than engaging in same sex relationships. "My faith has grown stronger . . . there is no fulfillment in this [same sex relationships] . . . the true fulfillment was going to come from being faithful . . . choosing righteousness, faithfulness I knew that would bring joy, fulfillment, and ultimate satisfaction."

Dean also noted making an intentional decision stating, "I think part of it is bringing out into the open [SSAs] and the other part is just learning about my identity in Christ" when describing how his faith has helped him in his experience of managing the SSAs. He described the decision to honor his faith identity over his sexual identity as living "free . . . he has given me the victory . . . including my sin of homosexuality." Dean described his faith as being the "reason that I am where I am today." In describing the role of meaning-making in his spiritual identity, Michael stated, "I have a relationship with God and He has revealed himself to me and I can't deny that and I will never be able to deny that. I really identify myself as being a Christian more than anything else." Like Dean, Michael noted his faith strengthened him in dealing with the difficulties of his life

"knowing that God is there in my life has strengthened me, God is able to help me get through periods of struggle."

Faith prevented same sex activity. A second common response within theme two was having a strong faith had prevented increased practice of same sex sexual activity and identifying as gay. When asked, "How has your faith hurt you as you coped with your experiences with SSAs?" Ben responded with a statement affirming his faith. "I think it kept me from going over the edge [deeper into same sex activity]. I had a spiritual foundation, and in a way, that's one of the things in my life that has kept me tethered to my dependence on Christ." Ben did not experience his faith as an interference with having and expressing SSAs but rather had the opposite mindset that the SSAs interfered with his faith. The thought that he was born gay and being in direct violation of his spiritual beliefs produced a sense of hopelessness and despair. He stated, "Without my faith in Jesus Christ I would probably just presume . . . more along the lines of that's how I was made, there's no option but seeing through the light of my spiritual faith walk. . . . I recognize that it's all about choices; it's about hope and not hopelessness." The choice for Ben was not about having SSAs but in not practicing the attractions and honoring his faith. Ben stated, "There's a part of me that always has that child-like faith that knowing that God was in control and it was just . . . the cross I was going to bear." As Ben struggled with trying to overcome the attractions, he realized the enduring nature they possessed, and by also understanding the enduring nature of his faith identity, he was accepting the continuing presence of SSAs, identifying them as "the cross I was going to bear."

Dean echoed a similar response. "Where I am today in my own dealing with my same sex attraction, temptation and faith is what helps me overcome and to live free from that. I still struggle but is nothing like it was. I'm not acting out. I'm not doing those things." Dean has come to an understanding that both the attractions and his faith are enduring constructs. His faith helps him to not "act out" and to "live free" from practicing same sex activity. Michael stated, "Knowing that God is there in my life has strengthened me, God is able to help me get through periods of struggle." There is an ongoing and enduring presence of this conflict as Michael noted the "periods of struggle" and his faith in God in overcoming these periods.

Faith provides personal strength. Michael noted that having SSAs served as a catalyst accelerating the growth of his spiritual identity, stating, "The way I see it now is that without this [SSA] I might never have become a Christian." Dean describes a similar understanding noting that as an ordained pastor he could not escape the reality of this ongoing conflict. While preparing and delivering sermons, he was confronted with a belief system that equated the practice of sin as a sign that a person does not have a relationship with God. Quoting a scripture reference that stated "he who practices sin is not born of God," Dean noted he is a seminary-trained ordained Southern Baptist pastor, and his continued practice of same sex activity brought him to the belief that "you have never been born again, you have never been saved." He noted this spiritual experience as he prayed to God. He stated, "I said, 'Lord, I have no idea what all is going to happen, but I agree and know what you are saying is true,' and that night is the night I was saved." He noted feeling different about practicing same sex acts "just learning about my

identity in Christ and that He has given me the victory over any sin including my sin of homosexuality." Dean reported that he still experiences SSAs, but he does not practice same sex activity.

Rafael, responding to the question "How has your faith/religion helped you as you experience SSAs?" stated, "I think that at times it has kept me sane where I haven't just lost my mind or lost myself in potentially destructive manner. God was still protecting me even though I was straying, but he didn't let me get too far. There was a certain point where I would have just gone on and on." He also noted, "Who knows where I would be if I had not held on to my religious beliefs," intimating he might have a deeper gay identity. Rafael also shared, "My beliefs are not a burden or punishment" and his faith "was always my anchor." When asked, "How has your faith influenced your involvement in same sex relationships?" Phillip responded, "It eradicated it." In describing how he makes meaning of SSAs, Phillip stated, "The idea of identifying him [a male he finds attractive] as a sexual object of desire, that is not a part of my life anymore." Phillip shared that he has had a "realignment of the thinking of gender and sexuality, the realignment of who I am as a created being."

In theme two, regarding the importance of faith, each respondent made a specific statement of the importance of faith over their sexual identity or they made a strong inference of the importance of their faith. Ben noted that the SSAs and his belief and faith in God were enduring constructs antithetical to each other that necessitated an intentional decision to choose one over the other. He made the specific statement, "My faith in God was the most important thing in my life." Rafael noted his faith was his anchor, Dean

described the decision to honor his faith identity over his sexual identity as living "free" and having "victory," and Michael reported he could "never deny" that God revealed himself to him. Both Michael and Dean noted that experiencing SSAs was the catalyst for developing their Christian faith, noting that experiencing SSAs convinced them of their need to belief in Christ and to develop a Christian identity. A common belief in describing the importance of faith was that faith arrested the practice of acting on same sex sexual impulses. The respondents noted the enduring nature of SSAs but noted their faith gave them strength to choose to not act upon them.

Table 2

Importance of Faith

	Ben	Dean	Michael	Rafael	Phillip
Faith is my most important identity	X	X	X	X	X
My faith prevented the growth of SSA	X		X	X	X
My faith gives me personal strength	X		X	X	

Theme Three: Feelings of Being Alone, Fearful, and Misunderstood

- Table 3 depicts the respondent's feelings of being alone, fearful, and misunderstood. In this theme, three primary responses evolved:

- feelings of being alone in his struggle,

- believing no one could understand his struggle, and

- fearing that others may find out.

Feelings of being alone. Each of the five participants expressed feeling alone in managing the conflict between experiencing SSAs and the desire to promote his spiritual identity. Each noted the belief of having no one in which to confide. Ben stated, "I didn't recognize a safe place I could go to find out how to work this out." He noted that he did not fear judgement as much as not having anyone to understand his conflict. "But if I came forward to say I am struggling with SSAs, I felt that no one would understand that or comprehend that." Dean had a similar view noting, "I would think no one understood," and "I was alone just weeping because I didn't know what to do with it all." Rafael recalled, "It was like loneliness and I would just be basically on my own." Being misunderstood also brought a fear of being rejected by other Christians and losing their standing in the church. Rafael noted, "I felt like it would be used against me." Ben's fear was "I would be viewed differently," and Michael noted, "It meant I was different than everybody else, that I wasn't normal." Rafael added the thought, "They [other Christians] just don't know what to do or to say." Ben responded, "Pastors or staff should have at least a baseline knowledge of SSA and a way to convey acceptance, grace, forgiveness, and to be a safe place to share if you are struggling."

The fear of being rejected was noted by the participants. Michael shared, "I was afraid of getting kicked out of the church." Dean thought, "My message in my mind [was] you are going to lose everything, everybody would turn their back on you." Based on the participants' experiences, they expressed an understanding that conservative Christianity has a belief that same sex activity is wrong, that the leadership of their church had a deficiency in understanding the development of SSAs, and leadership

lacked an understanding of their struggle between competing identities producing fear of

loneliness and rejection. Phillip internalized a gay identity. "I just embraced the idea that

I must be gay. I embraced a gay identity from age 14 to 22." Phillip's fear of being

rejected centered in his family. "I kept thinking that this is something that my parents will

hate. They will hate me. My dad being the Navy boxer and being career military. He was

rough, really the man's man. I was so disconnected with him anyhow." He felt that his

family would hate him and the revelation of being gay would further alienate him from

his father. Phillip did not experience fear in his relationship with church leaders but rather

felt anger and a sense of betrayal. "So my upbringing I had all of this God stuff so that

when I embraced homosexuality, I had these encounters with gay priests. It made me

angry, it made me jaded, and I didn't really have anything to do with the church." Phillip

experienced fear of being rejected by his family and being further alienated from his

father as well as a sense of disenchantment with religion.

Fear of being misunderstood. Ben's fear of being misunderstood did not center

around the thought of being rejected but of being seen as different than other Christians.

"I just felt like no one would understand, and I would be viewed differently." Michael

shared this feeling noting, "I felt I didn't have value in their eyes. I felt demeaned, put

down. I felt like I was made lesser in the way they would talk to me or interact with me."

Rafael stated, "You would be seen as not living up to the beliefs of the church." For Ben,

Michael, and Rafael, the fear was that their faith would be called into question and they

would be viewed as being less than, having less value, and not measuring up in their

spiritual walk because of experiencing SSAs. Worshiping in a heteronormative spiritual

culture, the fact of having SSAs placed them on the outer edge, and they feared being ostracized. Rafael feared he would be told, "You can't be here [in the church]," Ben expressed needing "a safe place to share." Michael feared "getting kicked out of the church." The perception shared by them was they did not have a safe place to share about their struggle without risking alienation.

        Fear of others finding out. Dean's fear reached a greater depth as he was an ordained practicing pastor, and he had two revelations to share with his family and church. He had to disclose that even though he was a seminary graduate and a pastor, he had never had a personal faith encounter with God.

> I went to seminary, finished my degrees, never told anybody even in my
> admissions, you know, they asked me those questions, and I just had to lie to get
> in and finish my master's degree, finish my Doctor of Ministry degree.

He came to believe,

> I felt like God said to me, "You have never been born again, you have never been
> saved." I just sat there, and I felt like God was right in what he said, but I didn't
> know how I was going to deal with it. As I'm working this process out, my
> message in my mind was, "You are going to lose everything, everybody would
> turn their back on you."

Dean's dilemma was that he not only understood that he might lose his marriage, his children, and be misunderstood in a heteronormative church culture, but he would also lose his vocational identity and be viewed as a fraud. "My message in my mind was, 'You are going to lose everything, and everybody would turn their back on you.'" Dean's

bleak reality was he did not have a safe place to work through his struggle and to find help in sharing the truth.

Needing a safe place to share. As noted in Table Three all five participants reported feelings of being alone, misunderstood, and being fearful that others would find out. Participants expressed a belief of not having a safe place to go to share their struggle or to find support and help. In considering specific suggestions of how the local church could support those experiencing SSAs Phillip pointed to the need of cultivating "a safe environment and community" within the church. He suggested an environment that "doesn't joke about gay people and really shows compassion towards people is imperative for someone to be able to find freedom." Dean noted, "Churches become places where homosexuality and homosexuals are not condemned, not made fun of. I have been in lots of church services where the preacher talks about it's Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. I think that's demeaning; I think that's harmful." Ben verbalized the need to generate "a message of no matter what you are walking through, we are going to walk through it with you. Not feeling ostracized or alone, no matter what it is." Michael suggested that churches would see the need of "being open and not having a judgmental attitude" and of refraining from a condemning way of preaching against homosexuality. Rafael noted, "You hear a condemning sort of sermon about homosexuality, it is like stabbing you in the heart."

Using nonjudgmental sermons. Another suggestion that emerged from the responses was that creating a safe church environment begins by providing sermons that are not demeaning in nature and tone. Ben noted pastors need to give "a grace message

that would be attractive to people like me who are wanting to overcome [and would] feel

safe in doing that." In noting suggestions that he would give to churches, Phillip stated,

"They do not need to make it about the homosexuality. They need to make it about a

deeper relationship with Jesus Christ." Phillip expressed, "When you hear a condemning

sort of sermon about homosexuality, it is like stabbing you in the heart." Each of the

participants had a biblical belief that same sex activity is against what the Bible states is

right. However, each of them noted degrading comments and condemning attitudes were

hurtful to those who were struggling with competing identities and produced a belief that

church was not a safe place to open up and share about your struggle. Instead of using

condemning language and preaching sermons that flippantly dealt with the topic of SSAs

and activity, sermons should be redemptive in tone. Ben shared the need for sermons

exhibiting "a grace message that would be attractive to people like me who are wanting

to overcome and feel safe in doing that." Dean noted, "Churches need to be redemptive,

walking alongside people, provide support, encouragement, and strategies how to live

free in Christ." Michael shared the need to hear sermons that "let them know that God

loves them and that Christ died for each individual. To help them realize that they are

forgiven."

Michael posited that "the church should not be so much against stuff as for stuff,"

meaning that instead of speaking out against SSAs, the church should promote a

relationship to Christ. Dean stated, "I think that we have got to put all sexual sin on the

same category" and promoted the need to "understand that homosexuality is not an

unpardonable sin." In giving specific suggestions of how the local church could serve as

a source of support, Phillip stated, "The first is they do not need to make it about the homosexuality. They need to make it about a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. And then, as people feel open enough to discuss what they are feeling tempted with, to have people feel safe enough to confess." He emphasized the need to "show compassion towards people" helping them "to find freedom." Rafael explained that when he hears condemning messages, he feels "in limbo." He noted, "Because you don't feel like you're really Christian, and you don't feel like you're really gay, so you don't really fit anywhere." This may produce feelings of being marginalized in both settings and reduces thoughts of having freedom to confess and to share.

Teaching a biblical understanding of sexuality. Another way Phillip stressed the role of the church in providing support was found in his suggestion to teach "a biblical understanding of human sexuality." Dean noted, "I think the church talking about healthy sexuality and what is healthy sexuality is really important." When asked to describe how the topic of same sex activity was handled in his church, Ben noted, "I don't recall sermons specifically on homosexuality" and recalled being a teenager reporting that "in youth groups the subject of homosexuality never came up, sexuality as a whole really wasn't addressed." Bart added that churches need to share with "teenagers and students helping them to understand [about sexuality]".

Table 3

Feeling Alone, Fearful, and Misunderstood

	Ben	Dean	Michael	Rafael	Phillip
Feelings of being alone in his struggle	X	X		X	X
Believed no one could understand his struggle	X	X	X	X	X
Fearful of others finding out	X	X	X	X	X

Theme Four: God Is Forgiving and Loving

The fourth theme that emerged from the data was the belief that God is forgiving and loving. While the study participants reported being in church settings that did not produce a sense of safety to openly share, noting that they heard sermons that condemned and made fun of having SSAs and engaging in same sex activity, there was also a belief that God was loving and forgiving. When asked to consider how his faith has helped him during his struggle with competing identities, Ben reported knowing "that God is forgiving, caring, loving, of loving me regardless of my choices," and even though there were times he couldn't trust the church he was attending and openly share his conflicts, he had an enduring faith in God. In describing the role of meaning-making in the construction of his spiritual identity, Michael stated, "The biggest thing is that I know that I'm forgiven," and noted, "I just need to focus on my relationship with God, he loves me." When asked what advice he would share with another Christian struggling with competing identities, he responded, "Let them know that God loves them and help them

realize they are forgiven." Phillip responded, "First and foremost, there is hope in God,

that he loves them, that he will strengthen them." Dean noted his belief that "I felt that

God really didn't love me" when describing how he thought God experienced him as he

experienced SSAs, and he would ask God, "Why didn't you strike me dead, you had

plenty of time to do that." He states his understanding now is that "I know God loves

everybody." Rafael's response to what advice he would give to another Christian who is

struggling was "letting them know that God loves them and has forgiveness for them."

Table 4

God is Forgiving and Loving

	Ben	Dean	Michael	Rafael	Phillip
God is forgiving/loving	X	X	X	X	X

Each participant openly admitted to having SSAs and practiced same sex activity

for many years. Each participant also had engaged in an attempt to alter or stop having

SSAs. Phillip and Dean would identify as having overcome all same sex sexual activity

while admitting to having continued attractions. Both are married to women, they have

children, and they are leaders in ministry that helps others in their struggle with

competing identities. Michael and Rafael are also married to women. They admit that

they have had some success in not engaging in same sex relationships but do not consider

themselves as having overcome. They note they are sexually attracted to their wives but

not to other women, and they are in the process of healing their marriage relationships.

They also admit to having enduring SSAs. Ben reports that he is not attracted to woman,

not even his wife, and they are in the process of divorcing. He has committed himself to living celibately to honor his spiritual identity.

<div style="text-align:center">Photo-Elicitation</div>

The second source of data collection was the use of photo-elicitation. I showed participants the same six photos and asked each to respond to what they viewed. The photos shown included: (a) two men kissing, (b) a gay marriage ceremony, (c) a gay pride rally, (d) a man and woman kissing, (e) a traditional heterosexual marriage ceremony, and (f) a gay hate protest (Appendix C).

The photos elicited responses that mirrored the conflict between their competing identities and matched the level of their change process. The pictures were perceived through a personal perspective and through a religious/biblical perspective. I will describe each photo and the elicited responses noted. I chose to present the photo-elicitation responses separately to allow readers to have a clearer understanding of the participants' competing identities by contrasting personal perspective with their religious/biblical perspective.

Two Men Kissing Photo

Personal perspective. Ben was reminded of past relationships and he stated, "[It] reminds me that in my own personal life, it was a way for me to think that I was getting affection from a man." Rafael found the photo as a "very tender moment," noting, "I'm not disgusted by it, but it's also not something that gives me all the warm and fuzzy feelings sort of thing." Michael noted, "Well, I like it, it's arousing to me, it's fun, it's love." Michael's response elicited a personal connection to love and relationship noting it

was something he liked in the present moment. Rafael conceptualized the photo as a tender moment in a relationship, but did not self-identify with it by stating, "It's not something that gives me all warm and fuzzy feelings." Ben was reminded of past personal relationships, but also added, "This is not a healthy way to obtain relationship." For both Ben and Rafael, the photo elicited a response that was reflective of their struggle with competing identities. It was similar for Michael, however it was evident that the strength of the SSAs was greater than for Ben and Rafael.

Religious/biblical response. This photo did not elicit a personal connection for either Dean or Phillip. Dean stated, "My initial reaction is that it is wrong." Dean also noted that his involvement in same sex activity was more about having sex rather than finding a relationship. "I never considered myself ever wanting any kind of relationship. Because I put all of the focus on the sexual experience," and he added, "My place of acting out was rest areas on the interstate, highways, parks, mall restrooms." His response was devoid of any personal connection. This was similar for Phillip as he replied, "I find that very sad, that's the first thing that comes across my mind. Deception and sadness." In describing his gay-identity, he noted, "I was believing a lie," and he considered himself as being an "ex-gay . . . I used to be gay, and I am not gay anymore." For both Dean and Phillip, the photo elicited a religious or theological response regarding the morality of the act. They noted two people acting against God's will and did not see two people in a relationship.

Man and Woman Kissing Photo

  Personal perspective. Ben was able to connect emotionally, stating, "I can relate to the emotion of this photo as well because of time shared with my wife." Phillip contrasted this photo with the photo of two men kissing, noting, "This is just as affectionate as the picture of two men kissing." He was able to acknowledge he might sound contradictory to his religious beliefs as he stated, "There's not one that I prefer over the other, the tender moment in the first picture of two men kissing and this one as one being right and the other one wrong." Both photos elicited an acceptance of relationship. Rafael identified with his stated belief system that same sex behavior was wrong, but he also was able to connect with people being in relationship. He seemed to promote that his struggle with competing identities was not just about his relationship with God but his relationship with people. He summed up his thoughts noting, "Did I disapprove of the first one [two men kissing] and approve of this one [man and woman kissing], yes, but I'm not going to lash out and condemn the two men in the first picture. I think that everybody has to get to their place on their own, and you can't be forced to it." Rafael appears to have achieved a balance in his competing identities showing acceptance for each one. Displaying being at peace with himself and with his decision to honor his spiritual identity over his sexual identity.

  Religious/biblical perspective. While stating his belief that this is what God intended for a relationship, Ben promoted the Christian belief of having a gendered creation. "How we are created differently and yet those differences are what makes us a complete picture of what God would have for a husband and a wife." As stated earlier,

conservative Christians have a gendered understanding of humanity and relationship. The belief is that gender has a significant role in meaning-making in relationship, that gender differences are necessary and complimentary in nature. Michael and Dean both simply stated, "This is right, the way God intended it to be," and Phillip mused. "That's beautiful, very nice, attractive."

Gay Marriage Photo

Personal perspective. Only Rafael had a personal connection to this photo. He stated, "I am kind of torn on that. I think that as far as civic life if two people want to be together and they want to be bound in some sort of legal way then okay." Rafael seemed to understand that not everyone agrees with his theological beliefs, and he made a distinction between church and civil marriages. "I think that we can have a clear distinction between what is civil or government related versus what is religious or Christian." His religious belief is that "this is not right or biblical"; however, he concedes that two people seeking a civil union is "okay." In response to a photo of a heterosexual marriage ceremony, Rafael makes a distinction between a marriage and a wedding. "The first picture was a wedding, but it wasn't a marriage. This is a marriage."

Religious/biblical perspective. Irrespective of their level of strength of attractions and strength of conflict between the competing identities, Ben, Michael, Dean, and Phillip reported a strong religious perspective regarding the gay marriage photo. This photo elicited a strong emotional response. Ben stated, "My view is marriage is only ever between a man and a woman. Society can legalize same sex marriage, but I think that in God's eyes that would never be honored." He also noted that being in a same sex

marriage was not something he ever thought about. Michael stated, "This is wrong, it does not seem natural." Dean replied, "I am repulsed by this. I am opposed to gay marriage." In describing the attributions he made concerning his same sex behavior, Dean noted, "Whenever I acted out and when it was over with whether it was by myself or with someone else, I hated it, I hated myself, I hated that other person, I despised them." Dean reports having no personal attachment to those with whom he practiced same sex behavior. Phillip also had strong emotional response, stating ,"This is deception; gay marriage is a perverse covenant."

Heterosexual Marriage Photo

    Personal perspective. Dean expressed, "A man and woman expressing affection, that is what I want above any struggle that I have." Dean appears to be promoting the positive quality of building a relationship and not focusing on stopping or changing his struggle. He is noting the importance of building a relationship with his wife.

    Religious/biblical perspective. This photo elicited a strong, religiously motivated response from Ben, Michael, Rafael, and Phillip. Ben noted, "The only option for marriage," and Michael simply stated, "That is right the way it should be." Phillip's response was basically a theological one. "First thing that comes to mind is Imago Dei in the image of God. I see truth, not deception," and Rafael made a distinction between marriage and a wedding. "The word marriage has a meaning, and it's had a meaning for centuries, and it's now being changed. The first picture was a wedding, but it wasn't a marriage. This is a marriage." Rafael exhibited the belief that same sex marriage is taking away from the traditional understanding.

Gay Pride Parade Photo

     Personal perspective. Identifying with this picture was difficult for the

respondents. Each of the respondents identify as ex-gay, same sex attracted, or openly

heterosexual. Ben reflected that he spent most of his life being afraid to let others know

that he was struggling with SSAs, so identifying openly as gay is a concept that does not

resonate with him. "I could never imagine myself being out and proud." Dean expressed,

"I never wanted to identify myself with an outward gay community. I think some of that

is my fear I didn't want anybody to know." Dean lived in fear of others finding out about

the conflict believing that he would lose everything he had—his wife, children, and

vocation as a pastor. Rafael expressed the same thought that in his past he would not

attend a gay pride parade for fear that "someone might think I was gay," but he also

noted, "not that I wouldn't do so now." This again shows that Rafael is more accepting of

his competing identities. He expressed a belief that "I think that at some pride parades it

is so sexualized . . . and I find the whole concept of some of these things of being gay is

just strictly sexual and that bothers me." He also noted he does not like any public sexual

displays whether straight or gay. "Being proud of who you are as an individual shouldn't

have anything to do with sexuality".

     Religious/biblical perspective. This photo elicited a defensive response from

Michael. "They are trying to push their views on me. Taking away our rights to believe

gay marriage is wrong." Michael became protective of religious freedom, feeling that

society's open acceptance of gays as trying to take away his personal belief system. His

perspective is that gay activists "are trying to push their views on me." He expressed he

did not understand the need "to celebrate it or to be given social status just because you are same sex attracted." He noted that he gets labeled a "homophobe" because he does not give social status to gays. Phillip reported, "I have pity on these people because they are in absolute deception." He noted those who accept their gay identity as having spiritual deception. These responses indicate a fear that conservative Christian beliefs are under attack, and Christians will not be able to openly practice their beliefs.

Anti-Gay Rally Photo

Personal perspective. This photo elicited a common response of disdain for anti-gay protests. Ben verbalized, "This is sad" in describing his perspective of the photo. Phillip stated, "These people are not very nice" and "I feel angry because they are being mean and unkind." Dean responded, "It's wrong, and I despise that too," and Michael retorted, "Definitely wrong." Just as the respondents did not want to be recognized as a militant gay, they did not want to be associated with the militant Christians.

Religious/biblical response. Each respondent identified with the thought that the militant anti-gay protesters did not have a good understanding of God's view of gays. Ben stated that Christians should "show that God is full of mercy and grace and show God's love." Dean shared, "I know that God loves everybody." He noted his past life of trying to live a "double life" presenting as heterosexual and practicing same sex behavior "is worse in my opinion than the out and open gay person." In openly admitting his struggle with SSAs, Dean was attempting to live without hypocrisy. This picture depicted an individual with a sign stating, "God Hates Fags." Rafael noted, "Well, I have a certain

disdain for the word fag and the negative connotations of people talking about all that. But I don't think that God hates fags." He stated, "God cares for all people."

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

In Chapter Four I discussed themes of participant responses that emerged and the reduction of these themes into common responses as I conducted within-case analysis and cross-case analysis of the semistructured interview questions and analysis of the photo-elicitations. In the within-case analysis, I presented demographic information to help the reader come to a better understanding of each participant's background and to present a clearer understanding of the context of their experiences. Using a cross-case analysis, I identified four emergent themes including (a) conflict between competing sexual and spiritual identities; (b) importance of faith; (c) feelings of being alone, fearful, and misunderstood; and (d) God is forgiving and loving. An analysis of the photo-elicitations was conducted using the participants' personal and religious/biblical perspective lenses.

Four major themes were identified in answering the research question:

RQ: What are the emergent core themes that are found to be associated with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

- Participants expressed a consistent conflict between identities.

- Participants expressed an importance of faith.

- Participants expressed feelings of being alone, misunderstood, and fearful of others finding out about their struggle.

- Participants expressed a belief that God is loving and forgiving.

The first research subquestion was:

SQ1; How has the response of the faith community of those with competing

spiritual and sexual identities affected their struggle with competing identities?

One theme identified was about receiving messages that same sex activity is

sinful and expressly forbidden in the Bible. Another theme was that experiencing this

conflict reflected as a lack of faith. Participants experienced others as having an inability

to identify with their struggle, and they felt isolated and vulnerable in their church

community.

The second research subquestion was:

SQ2: How has the response of the gay community affected the struggle of those

with competing spiritual and sexual identities?

Participants expressed not being affected by the gay community. This was

because they did not identify as gay, and they did not consider themselves as a part of the

gay community.

Chapter 4 presented the results of the qualitative case study seeking to understand

how men from a conservative Christian church background negotiate the intersection of

competing sexual and spiritual identities. I identified the data through the use of a

semistructured interview process utilizing interview questions and photo-elicitation. I

utilized within-case and cross-case analysis to identify emergent themes. In Chapter 5, I

reiterate the purpose and nature of this study and why it was conducted. I summarize the

findings describing the ways they confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge of what has

been found in the reviewed literature. I describe the limitations of the study and describe

recommendations for further research, methodological, theoretical, and/or empirical implications, and professional practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of this study and the themes generated from the data collected. I provided with-in case and cross-case analysis as well as analysis of photo-elicitation responses. In this chapter, I reiterate the purpose and nature of the study and why it was conducted. I summarize the key findings comparing them with information found from the literature review described in Chapter 2. This chapter also addresses the emerging themes and subthemes as well as the significance of the limitations and possible contributions of the study.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the lived experiences of men from conservative Christian churches with competing spiritual and sexual identities. Sexual minorities with competing spiritual and sexual identities may have increased difficulty in navigating these intersecting identities due to being misunderstood by both their faith community and the gay community (Sherry, et al., 2010). Spiritual identity can be a very important and salient construct (Lease et al., 2005; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005a), and maintaining connection to a person's faith community can be a priority for some (Hill et al., 2000; Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). Sexual minorities may find themselves marginalized by the gay community and ostracized by the conservative organized church. They are not only a sexual minority in a society dominated by people who are sexually attracted to the opposite sex, but they are also a minority within the gay community as they choose to not act on their SSAs and within the conservative organized church as they find it difficult to alter their SSAs.

The findings of this study reflect the lived experiences of men from conservative Christian churches experiencing competing spiritual and sexual identities. Data were collected from interviewing five participants. These men acknowledged having persistent SSAs and that they had engaged in same sex activity for many years of their lives. They also acknowledged having a persistent conservative Christian faith they had practiced for many years of their lives. Each participant had engaged in an attempt to change his sexual attractions, and they all lived in a southern or southwestern state. The findings are reported utilizing within-case analysis, across-case analysis, and analysis of photo-elicitation responses.

Within-case analysis generated themes of confusion between abiding faith and enduring attractions, disidentifying as gay and using a self-attribution of being same sex attracted, experiencing self-loathing and a hatred for engaging in same sex activity, attributing SSAs and activity to overcoming a lack of connection with family of origin and childhood sexual abuse, experiencing isolation from their faith community and the gay community, and having a fear of being ridiculed for being gay or same sex attracted. Across-case analysis generated four emergent themes: (a) conflict between competing sexual and spiritual identities; (b) importance of faith; (c) feelings of being alone, fearful, and misunderstood; and (d) God is forgiving and loving. The responses to the photo-elicitation produced a contrast between the participants' personal perspective and their religious/biblical perspective.

Interpretation of the Findings

The literature did not find attempts in changing sexual orientation to be effective in changing or altering SSAs (Weiss et al., 2010), and some individuals chose to live celibately instead of trying to maintain opposite sex relationships or to engage in same sex relationships (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011). Data that emerged from this study supported these findings. Ben reported being unsuccessful in attempting to alter his SSAs. Ben noted, "The choice is not having the attractions but about not acting on the attractions." Michael had a similar experience, reporting, "I realize that the attractions will never go away, but the way I react to them and the way I feel about them is changing." Raphael also noted, "As I got older, I felt I would just simply be dealing with these feelings or these attractions, but I wouldn't act on them." The participants reported having the desire to change having SSAs to experiencing opposite sex attractions. None of the five participants reported having complete success with this desire. Phillip and Dean appeared to be the most successful, reporting having good relationships with their wives and experiencing minimal thoughts of SSAs. Both Phillip and Dean believed they had overcome their SSAs. Phillip and Dean were both ordained ministers, giving support and help to others desiring to alter SSAs. Michael and Raphael both reported "working on" their marriages, noting they were attracted to their wives but not to other women. They also indicated they have continued SSAs and are attending a Christian support group to help them in this ongoing struggle. Ben reported that his SSAs are strong, and his marriage has not been able to survive. He is divorcing his wife, and he hopes to live celibately to honor his Christian beliefs and faith. Ben attempted sexual orientation

change and was not able to alter experiencing SSAs. Ben's Christian valuative

framework has imprinted the belief that sexual relationship and marriage is a gendered

and sanctified design between a man and a woman. Sexual sanctification for the

conservative Christian is defined as perceiving an aspect of life as having divine

character and significance (Hernandez et al., 2011). Ben did not identify as being gay but

rather identified as being same sex attracted, stating, "I still consider myself as being

same sex attracted, I don't identify as gay."

Another theme from the literature review that is corroborated in these findings is

an understanding that religion and spirituality can have an important impact on a person's

beliefs, experiences, and values in constructing a self-identity (Rose et. al., 2008). Ben

noted, "My walk of faith, my faith in God was the most important thing in my life." He

reported his faith was a comfort to him as he struggled with SSAs, and he proclaimed,

"My Christianity was more important than my SSAs." Dean stated, "My faith is what

helps me overcome," and "My faith is the very reason that I feel that I am where I am

today." Michael believes his struggle is an attempt "to get me to deny Christ through the

SSAs," and he averred, "I really identify myself as being Christian more than anything

else." Phillip proclaimed having a strong "biblical orthodox worldview . . . I view all of

that within the vein or the filter of scripture, the filter of having a relationship with God."

He noted his change in SSAs is a "realignment of the thinking of gender and sexuality."

Raphael noted, "My beliefs are not a burden or a punishment," and "living my faith was

not unattainable." The five participants reported their faith was the more important

construct in their self-identity, and they choose to subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual identity.

The men in this study do not have an essentialist view of being born gay, but believe they were designed by God to experience fulfillment in a gendered sanctified relationship. Rafael described himself as a heterosexual man living with SSAs. For these men, their SSAs were no different than any other temptation or "sin" that all Christians struggle with in life. Being in a sanctified relationship with God demanded a realignment of thinking that affected every area of their lives, which included managing sexual attractions and activity.

Another theme suggested in the reviewed literature was the attributions assigned to experiencing SSAs. In studying conflict, dialogue, and religious identity strategies, Ganzevoort et al. (2011) reported identity is ascribed by the understanding of not only "who I am" but also "whom I want to belong to" (p. 217). This attributional identity results in disidentifying as gay, identifying as being same sex attracted, and identifying with a gendered sanctification of sexual activity (Murray-Swank et al., 2005). Ben noted, "Without my faith in Jesus Christ, I would probably go more along the lines of that's how I was made [so] there's no option. But seeing it through the light of my spiritual faith walk, I recognize it's about choices." Ben believes he is "same sex attracted, I don't identify as gay." Ben also noted having a gendered understanding to sexuality in his response to a photo of heterosexual marriage. "It's a more accurate picture of God's plan for a man and a woman. How we are created differently and yet those differences make us a complete picture of what God would have for a husband and a wife." Dean also

expressed a gendered understanding of sexuality, stating, "That's how God created us, that's what he wants, a man and a woman expressing affection." Dean noted, "I have every right to my Christian world view and my understanding of my faith." In noting his Christian identification, Michael stated, "I have a relationship with Him [God], and I can't deny that." His understanding of a gendered sexuality is supported in his response to a photo of a gay wedding. "It does not seem natural for two men to get married, it feels wrong to me. Marriage is between a man and a woman, God blesses that." Raphael continued to support reviewed literature, stating, "I don't identify myself as gay. I feel more comfortable that even though I have same sex attractions, I am a heterosexual man." Raphael noted that he would describe himself as "a man who has same sex attractions" but identifies as heterosexual. "I'm still married, I still have my wife, my children, my family." Raphael also noted having a gendered understanding of sexuality in describing his thoughts on heterosexual marriage. He stated, "This is more in line with my religious standpoint with what God has for man and woman." Phillip expressed, "The ideal of attraction to males is something that needs realignment in me," and in describing his ministry with others, he reported, "The people I minister to is the realignment of the will, the realignment of the thinking of gender and sexuality, the realignment of who they are as created beings." These attributional statements align with findings in the literature that report individuals as disidentifying as gay and living in alignment of a gendered sexuality (Jones & Yarhouse, 2008).

The approach of traditional stage models of gay sexual development do not appear to be appropriate for understanding SSA development for all sexual minorities

(Diamond, 2007, Beckstead & Yarhouse, 2011). The traditional stage model promotes an

essentialist view in which the formation of a gay identity is seen as one's acceptance of a

true self and real sexual orientation. Identity constructs are integrated and harmonized

into a fixed identity that is stable and invariable over time and are unable to capture the

complexities and variability of multiple identities. Linear stage models appear to be

inadequate at understanding the development of sexual minorities who disidentify with a

gay identity and identify with a strong spiritual identity (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007) as they

do not address the concepts of integrating the intersecting and competing aspects that

define self-identity (Sherry et al., 2010). Those with enduring SSAs and salient

conservative Christian belief are unable to integrate these intersecting identities into a gay

identity. That is, they cannot be gay and acting on their SSAs and live as Christian

honoring a sanctified gendered relationship. These are antithetical identities that cannot

exist in an integrated harmony. The study participants did not identify as gay but rather

identified as heterosexual men who experience SSAs. They viewed SSAs as being no

different than any other struggle that Christians manage in maintaining their faith.

Conflict Between Identities

The literature reviewed and reported in Chapter 2 indicated that competing

spiritual and sexual identities produce a conflict that engage two distinct and powerful

ideologies (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011). For the participants in this study, their

Christian faith informed them they were designed to engage in sanctified gendered

relationships (Ganzevoort, et al., 2011; Giancola & Smith, 2011). However, they were

different than the heteronormative environment of the conservative Christian church. in

their experience in a way their heterosexual peers could not understand, their experience of SSAs. They received negative messages regarding being gay and engaging in same sex activity. Dean reported that "homosexuality was condemned."; Rafael noted, "From a religious standpoint, you were pariah if you said anything about being homosexual"; Ben's church taught that gays "were in sin and it isn't okay to be gay"; and Phillip reported going to parochial school where he received the message that being gay "was wrong." The expectation of their faith community was that they could and should overcome their SSAs and become heterosexual. Because they could not alter or change their enduring attractions, they experienced the fear of being misunderstood and even ostracized by their faith communities.

The participants also received negative messages regarding choosing to disidentify as being gay. Phillip stated, "People who live their lives congruent with a faith in God, they [gay activists] hate us when we come forward and say, 'I used to be gay and I am not gay anymore.'" Rafael noted feeling being alone, not belonging in the church or in the gay community as he stated, "So you feel like you are in limbo because you don't feel like you're really Christian, and you don't feel like you're really gay, so you don't really fit anywhere." This thought of not belonging in either community is consistent with reviewed literature (Sherry, et al., 2010). The importance of this for professional counselors is to understand the need of creating a safe and secure environment in which both aspects are given importance. Ben stated that his advice to professional counselors is "give hope to the person who is struggling; let them know they are not alone." The participants expressed a fear that professional counselors would attempt to make them

accept being gay and to let go of their faith beliefs. Dean expressed, "I have every right to

my Christian worldview and my understanding of my faith." Raphael stated, "You got to

accept that some people don't want to be homosexual, the answer is not well you should

be." Phillip believes that gay activists "are very intolerant of people who are ex-gay . . .

they are really hateful." Employing a gay affirming counseling approach may ostracize

the conservative Christian client. When counseling conservative Christians with

competing identities, professional counselors could adopt an informed and affirming

stance that recognizes the client's desire to subordinate their sexual attractions to their

Christian valuative framework (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011).

Experiencing personal doubt was manifested in four of the five participants.

Michael reported having doubt regarding meeting expectations of other Christians

because he could not overcome and change having SSAs. Michael noted, "When you

become a Christian, you are supposed to change . . . I could not overcome my issues."

Rafael was confused as to why his faith could not "cure" him. "Other people claim that

God had cured them . . . why not me?" Dean lamented, "I couldn't stop it . . . I hated

myself." These men found it difficult to experience peace because their faith had not

overcome the persistent SSAs, which is consistent with previous findings (Gagnon,

2005). This interference with their faith walk was expressed by Ben noting, "Much of my

life was focused on the same sex attractions . . . I knew my spiritual walk was hampered."

This conflict is consistent with the findings of Sherry (2010) in reporting that individuals

with competing identities do not feel a part of their faith community. Understanding this

is important for the Christian counselor to see the need to create an atmosphere that does

not cast doubt about the faith commitment of the person struggling with competing identities.

Having a faith belief that engaging in same sex activity was a sin and not what God had designed (Yarhouse & Jones, 2007; Ginicola & Smith, 2011) and having enduring persistent SSAs produced personal confusion and conflict. Meaning-making and self-attributions became a way of reducing this confusion and helped in reconciling the competing identities. In meaning-making and personal attributions, the respondents chose to disidentify with being gay and chose to identify with being heterosexual with SSAs. This is consistent with Yarhouse and Jones' (2011) literature findings indicating that some individuals with competing identities choose to disidentify as gay and to subordinate their sexual identity to their spiritual identity. Dean noted, "I never identified myself as being gay. How I segmented that out in my mind was that everything I did was same sex." Ben stated, "Being gay seems more hopeless, as something you can't overcome, and being same sex attracted makes it more of a choice and more optional." It is important for the professional counselor to understand this distinction between identifying as same sex attracted and being gay. Being born gay is antinomic to the valuative and attributional framework of the Christian as being designed to engage in sanctified gendered relationships. To the committed conservative Christian, this antinomy is irreconcilable. The attempt to use a gay affirming counseling approach may be viewed as an attack upon their faith belief system.

Importance of Faith

Rose (2008) provides an understanding that religion and spirituality can have an important impact on a person's beliefs, experiences, and values, and that Americans can place great emphasis on spirituality in constructing a self-identity. The findings in this study were congruent with this understanding. Ben declared, "My faith in God was the most important thing in my life." Michael averred, "I really identify myself as being a Christian more than anything else." Ben credited his faith with giving him the strength to chose not to act on his attractions in that "through the light of my spiritual walk, I recognize that it's all about choices, it's about hope and not hopelessness." The powerful and salient construct of their faith produced a dominant spiritual identity. Rafael described his faith as "my anchor." His faith prevented him from continuing in same sex relationships: "There was a certain point where I would have just gone on and on." Phillip declared his faith produced "a realignment of the thinking of gender and sexuality, the realignment of who I am as a created being." Phillip lived 8 years identifying as gay and openly having same sex relationships. For the past 33 years, he had identified as an "ex-gay" who was married to a woman. In accordance with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), when expressing an understanding of the conservative Christian's value system, the professional counselor could engage in respecting the values of the clients and their wishes concerning the direction for their lives and their self-definition of happiness.

Feelings of Being Alone, Fearful, and Misunderstood

Four of the five participants in this study reported feeling alone in his struggle of competing identities. All five participants reported believing no one could understand his

struggle and being fearful of others finding out about having SSAs. Ben reported, "I didn't have a safe place I could go to find out how to work this out," Dean lamented, "I was alone just weeping because I didn't know what to do . . . the message in my mind was you are going to lose everything," and Rafael noted, "I felt like it would be used against me." The participants expressed having a fear of being rejected by their faith communities. Michael stated, "I was afraid of getting kicked out of the church." Ben feared he would be misunderstood by other believers, stating, "I would be seen as different." Dean shared, "I felt I didn't have value in their [fellow Christians'] eyes." These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating such individuals experiencing isolation resulting in depression, anxiety, and confusion (Gonsioreck, 2004; Sherry et al., 2010; Yarhouse & Jones, 2007). In accordance with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014) It would be important for the professional counselor in working with the client to consider enlisting their support network including family and faith community in promoting a safe and inclusive treatment plan .

God is Loving and Forgiving

All five participants reported they had been in church settings that did not produce a sense of safety to openly share and to seek help for their struggle with competing spiritual and sexual identities. Four of the participants experienced a relationship with God in which they perceived Him as being loving and forgiving. Ben expressed knowing "that God is forgiving, caring, loving, me regardless of my choices." Michael noted, "I know that I'm forgiven and he loves me" as being "the biggest thing" in describing the construction of his spiritual identity. Phillip would encourage others who were struggling

with competing identities to know that "God loves them" and that "they are forgiven."
This encouragement of love and forgiveness was the advice that Rafael stated he would
want others who are struggling to realize. The emergence of this theme was not
anticipated and was not suggested in previous research. Even though the participants
reported feeling misunderstood, alone, fearful, and at times felt they did not have a
community in which to identify, they also expressed experiencing an overall sense of
forgiveness and love in their personal relationship and connection with God. This would
suggest that for some, their personal experience with God transcends their connection to
their specific faith community.

Limitations of the Study

There were possible limitations to this study. The study focused exclusively on
men from conservative Christian churches with competing spiritual and sexual identities
who had chosen to disidentify as gay, subordinating sexual identity to spiritual identity.
This study excluded men from a conservative Christian background who had chosen to
subordinate their conservative spiritual identity to openly identify as gay. Focusing on
men who have chosen to disidentify as gay narrowed the research in an attempt to
highlight needs of this disenfranchised group of men. This study did not include men who
identified as being a "gay Christian," who identified as being gay and restructured their
spiritual beliefs to align with their practices and lifestyle.

Another limitation was that participants lived in southern states, excluding other
geographical locations in the United States. Identifying possible difference of experiences
between men in southern Bible Belt communities and men from other regions of the

United States limits the generalizability of this study. Another limitation is this study was that it focused exclusively on men and did not consider women disidentifying as lesbian and was therefore gender restrictive.

Recommendations

This study focused on men from southern states or the Bible Belt region. It did not consider men living in other areas, nor did it consider men from specific Christian denominations. It is likely that churches and faith communities in other regions and in particular denominations may have differing experiences due to denominational specific beliefs and cultural differences. Therefore, further research in the area of men who choose to disidentify as gay and subordinate sexual identity to spiritual identity is needed. Additional research should be conducted on the experience of men from other areas of the United States outside of the southern states region. Future studies focusing on the differences of men with enduring SSAs who choose to continue living in opposite sex relationships and those men who chose to live celibately as same sex attracted is also indicated. The scope of this study was limited to men experiencing competing identities. Research on the lived experiences of women who choose to disidentify as lesbian would be beneficial in understanding the scope of the phenomenon of subordinating sexual identity to spiritual identity. Another area indicated for further research is understanding professional counselors' reactions and relationships to clients of this disenfranchised group and the implications for counseling education and supervision programs.

Implications

Possible positive social change indicated as a result of this study include the following. First, an increased understanding within conservative Christian churches and their leadership of the conflict these men experience may result, creating atmospheres of safety where open dialogue regarding experiencing SSAs can occur. Promoting sexual orientation change is common within conservative Christian churches. Research studies have indicated that there are some attempting sexual orientation change that are successful (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011); however, research studies have also indicated that change attempts for many have not been successful and for some who have indicated success in change have experienced a return of SSAs (Fjiestrom, 2013). This present study supported this research as three of the five participants continued enduring SSAs. This supports the need for conservative Christian churches to promote understanding and acceptance of individuals experiencing enduring SSAs.

Secondly, an increased understanding within the gay community that spiritual identity for some is an extremely important construct and that some people choose to disidentify as gay and desire to live as heterosexual or as celibate to honor their faith. Individuals in this study indicated they feel outside both the church and the gay community, which supports findings of the literature review (Sherry, et al., (2010). Finally, this study implies a need for professional counselors to move beyond promoting all clients coming to an open gay identity. It is important that professional counselors realize the importance of spiritual identity and to honor the autonomy of the client in choosing the course of their life and to help them live congruently with this choice.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to seek a better understanding of the lived experiences of men from conservative Christian backgrounds with competing spiritual and sexual identities. This study did not seek an understanding of how sexual attraction or sexual identity is developed and did not seek to answer if sexual orientation or sexual attraction can be changed or altered. Spiritual and sexual identities are both powerful and salient constructs of identity (Sherry et al., 2010; Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2011). The study participants identified experiencing SSAs in their youth that have endured to their middle-aged years and a salient and powerful spiritual faith that was important and life defining. The five participants made the choice to subordinate sexual attraction to a faith commitment, and all five participants disidentified as gay, viewing themselves as being same sex attracted. Two participants presented as being successful at subordinating SSAs. Phillip noted "the filter of having a relationship with God . . . changed everything for me and made to where the idea of attraction to males is something that needs realignment inside of me . . . that changed everything about the way I view attraction with men and women." Four of the participants are in long-term marriages with a woman, with one participant reporting that he and his wife are divorcing, and he is choosing to live celibately.

This study viewed the intersection of the competing identities from postmodern existential theory in which identity is not comprised of isolated constructs that have developed into a unified whole but are fluid constructs influenced by social, cultural, and religious valuative frameworks (Crabtree, 2009; Narvaez et al., 2009). The participants of

this study reported a conservative Christian valuative framework of a gendered and sanctified belief that governs their sexual relationships. Sanctified defines sexuality as having divine character and significance (Hernandez et al., 2011). For these men, sexual activity and relationships are governed by a salient belief in a literal interpretation of the Christian Bible that is the core construct of spiritual and sexual identity. The belief that a man and a woman are intentionally designed to complete each other in a sanctified relationship governs the identity they promote and aspire to attain.

In answering the question, "What advice would you give to a professional counselor who is dealing with someone who is experiencing SSAs and competing spiritual identity?" the participants responded that they wanted professional counselors to not promote them coming to a gay identity. Rafael stated "some people don't want to be afflicted or don't want to be homosexual." Dean noted, "I have every right to my Christian worldview and my understanding of my faith," and Michael stated that counselors should "not try to get people to change." The participants averred their faith was the most important construct that gave purpose to their lives and expressed the belief that those who wish to help would need to understand and to honor this valuative framework.

The participants in this study chose to align their behavior and identity with their beliefs and values. Yarhouse (2010) refers to this as developing an identity in Christ script. Instead of developing a "gay" script in which SSAs signal an intended or naturally occurring design indicating who the individual is as a person. In the gay script, the emphasis is on discovery and self-actualization of matching behavior with sexual

attraction, which is crucial for self-fulfillment (Yarhouse, 2010). The Christian who aligns beliefs to sexual identity would be defined as using a gay script. The Christian who aligns sexual identity and behavior to beliefs is using the identity in Christian script. In this script, SSAs are understood as "it's not supposed to be this way," they do not define identity, and the central definition of identity is their relationship with Christ (Yarhouse, 2010). The contrast is that in the gay script, the individual is attempting to find the self by moving from the experience of SSAs to openly accepting and living a gay identity, and in the identity in Christ script, the individual is attempting to define the self by the belief in and relationship to Christ. Understanding this distinction can be helpful to the professional counselor. Making this distinction allows the counselor to create a better assessment in treatment planning. Helping clients to have a better understanding of their identity scripts will greatly assist in a successful counseling outcome.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter to Potential Candidates

To Whom It May Concern:

You are invited to participate in a research study of men from a conservative Christian church background who are experiencing competing spiritual and sexual identities. You were identified as a potential participant through your involvement with Refuge 461. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Robert Hedge, a doctoral candidate at Walden University, is conducting this study.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of men with competing spiritual and sexual identities who disidentify with their same sex attractions and choose to identify with their spiritual identity.

Procedures: If you are interested in participating in this study please contact me by phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by e-mail: XXXhedge@XXXXX.com. The interview process will include two separate interviews. In the first interview you will be asked to answer open-ended questions designed to help you describe your personal experiences. The second interview will give you the opportunity to verify the transcript of the initial interview. Both interviews will be video recorded to help ensure the trustworthiness of the study. The research records will be kept for five years in a video file on a computer that is password protected and to which only the researcher has access.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Your participation in the study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time during the process of completing the study. Your decision to participate in this study or your decision to withdraw from the study will not affect your involvement in Refuge 461. If you feel that you are in need of counseling services during or following your involvement in this study, you can contact Community Counseling Services at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. Community Counseling Services is an independent counseling provider that is not connected with this research project.

Risks and Benefits: This research seeks to inform professional counselors' understanding in order to better provide therapeutic services to provide appropriate and ethical services to individuals seeking to disidentify with their same-sex attractions and to identify with their spiritual framework and attributions. The risks may include re-experiencing emotional discomfort of depression, grief, and anxiety as you re-live the experiences of the struggle between these two powerful and salient identities. The possible benefit is that you may gain a better understanding of the attributions and meaning-making related to these competing identities.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Church Experiences

How would you describe your church's view of homosexuality?

Can you describe how the subject of homosexuality is handled in your church both publicly and privately?

What were some of the messages you received from your religion about identifying as gay?

What would you perceive as being supportive from your church leadership and from other church members when you first experienced same sex attractions?

Consider how your religion/faith helped you as you experienced same sex attraction. How has your religion/faith hurt you as it pertained to coping with experiences of same sex attraction?

Personal Experiences

Can you describe what your first experiences of same sex attraction meant to you?

How do you believe that you came to experience same sex attractions?

How would you describe and make meaning of your sexual orientation identity?

What is the role of meaning-making in the construction of your spiritual identity and its interaction with other dimensions of identity?

In what ways do you understand your sexual identity differently than when you first thought of yourself when you first experienced same sex attraction?

Many people who are sorting out experiencing same sex attraction talk about negative feelings they may have toward God, feelings such as confusion or frustration. How about you?

What is your motivation for remaining faithful to your religious beliefs?

Does the dimension of spiritual identity influence how you describe and make meaning of your sexual orientation identity? If so, how?

Looking back on your first experiences of same sex attraction, what did your experiences mean to you?

How do you perceive that God experiences you in your experiencing same-sex attraction?

How has your religion/faith influenced your involvement in same sex relationships?

Application of Experiences

Consider specific suggestions for how the local church could formally support persons who experience same-sex attraction.

What advice would you share with another Christian/fellow believer who is struggling with same-sex attraction?

In what ways would you like to challenge some of the messages you've received about your sexual identity?

Appendix C: Photo Elicitation Interview Introduction

During the photo elicitation interview, I showed each participant these photos one at a time and asked each participant to reflect on the photo and to verbalize his thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and experiences that might relate to each photo.

Photo 1: Two men kissing:

Photo 2: Gay marriage:

Photo 3: Gay pride rally:

Photo 4: Man and woman kissing:
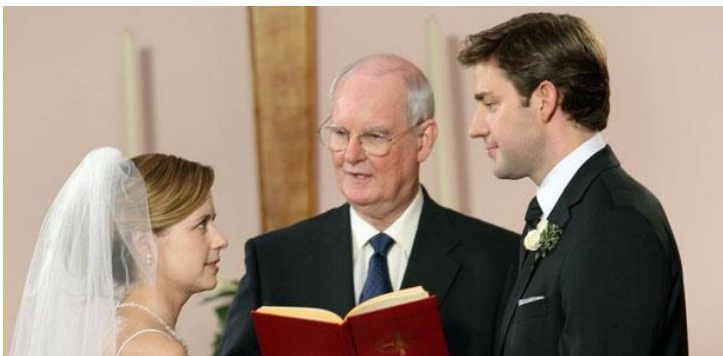

Photo 5: Man and woman marriage:

Photo 6: Anti-gay rally: