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Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance in LGBTQQ People

Teresa O'Flynne
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Teresa O'Flynne

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Review Committee
Dr. Stephen Rice, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. James Brown, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Barbara Chappell, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

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Abstract

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M.M., Fontbonne University, 1998

B.S., Fontbonne University, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Cognitive dissonance between learned spirituality and opposing behaviors is called

spiritual cognitive dissonance (SCD). SCD has been successfully proven in former

research; however, to date, it has yet to offer descriptions of specific incidents of SCD

and/or how it effects the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning

(LGBTQQ) individual. A qualitative phenomenological study in which eight participants

were interviewed was employed to collect data. The study revealed how SCD manifested

in their lives, specifically those who were raised within conservative, heteronormative

spiritual homes. All participants were LGBTQQ and believed they had experienced

SCD. The data collected during each interview were meticulously analyzed to find

similarities with other participant answers and then codified for similar ideas expressed.

Each individual experienced SCD in different ways. Most of the participants experienced

fear, guilt and/or shame when they began to live authentically as LGBTQQ. Many

revealed they had experienced suicidal ideations. Because of the danger of suicide

associated with this disorder, it is important that intervention programs be developed to

properly recognize and treat this illness. Places of worship should spearhead educational

opportunities specifically targeting SCD in the LGBTQQ community. Secular offerings

should include education at both the secondary and collegiate levels. Additionally, since

SCD is not limited to the LGBTQQ community, this data may also assist therapists who

aid heterosexual individuals in coping with spiritual cognitive dissonance.

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Dedication

I dedicate this body of work to my daughter, Abigail Bradberry, to my brother Paul Kenton Brandon-Fritzius, and to my mother, Jeannie Loughin-Herrera.

My daughter and mother neither agree with my sexuality nor my choice in a place to worship. They have, however, supported me as a person and have never stopped believing that I could finish this body of work and complete my degree program. They regularly lift me up in prayer and ask about the project without judging the content.

My brother, Kenton, was the person who introduced me to the Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis. He actually drove me there for the first two or three visits. Once I joined the choir, he drove me to choir on multiple occasions. He has always been my biggest fan, constantly telling people how much he admires his big sister. He has always hoped for my success.

Thank you all for your support and love during this seemingly never-ending process. I could not have done this without all of you.

Acknowledgments

I want to acknowledge the support of the United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. I was able to work with both the local branch as well as branches in other U.S. cities. This opportunity gave me the chance to speak with LGBTQQ people from many walks of life which strengthened this research and enhanced my personal experience as well. Similarly, I would like to acknowledge the help given by Patricia A. Sartini for her suggestions which informed this project from a counselor's perspective.

I would also like to thank the members of the dissertation committee for their input and concern during the dissertation development process. Dr. Debra Davenport, my original committee chair, constantly offered excellent ideas for improvement. Dr. Stephen Rice, originally my second committee member and, following Dr. Davenport's departure, the committee chair, was especially helpful in urging me to delve deeper into the subject. He suggested the concept of a phenomenological study which has proven an excellent method of research for this project. Dr. Jimmy Brown took on this project even though he knew little about the issue. He asked a great deal of questions which led me to better express the information contained herein. Finally, many thanks to Dr. Barbara Chappell as University Research Reviewer and Timothy McIndoo, Form and Style Reviewer, for holding my feet to the proverbial fire of the dissertation path. I thank you all for your encouragement and help muddling through this lengthy process. You have all been terrific resources and it has been greatly appreciated.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Spiritual cognitive dissonance (SCD) is a condition wherein a person holds conflicting thoughts about their spiritual beliefs and their behavioral patterns (Festinger, 1957). Historical literature speaks to the existence of SCD. Indeed, much research has been conducted to prove its existence and to document the effects.

The theory of cognitive dissonance is supported by various studies with a vast amount of literature confirming the condition. Recent research (De Vries, Byrne, & Kehoe, 2015) has included actual brain studies using fMRI imaging. These analyses illuminate how cognitive dissonance affects the brain. De Vries, Byrne and Kehoe conducted a study with 125 participants. Those participants who were prompted toward dissonant thought processes showed "higher levels of activation in several brain regions. Specifically, dissonance was associated with increased neuro activation in key brain regions, including the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC), anterior insula, inferior frontal gyrus, and precuneus." So, cognitive dissonance can be uncomfortable psychologically, and physiologically.

Spiritual cognitive dissonance can be debilitating and can thwart one's social and spiritual journey. If the dissonance is not resolved, it can contribute to other emotional disorders such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These disorders could have dire consequences to the person suffering therefrom. The literature

has shed light on the phenomenon, but it is remiss in documenting the actual events that surround an encounter with SCD.

This study specifically examines phenomenon which present when SCD is felt within the LGBTQQ community; when long-held spiritual beliefs come into conflict with the individual's sexuality. Former research has offered that spiritual cognitive dissonance does exist, but it is limited to proving the condition occurs. Existing data does not describe the symptoms or events of an SCD episode, nor does it give any suggestions of how such a condition might be overcome. It is this researcher's hope that a description of various SCD incidents will reveal commonalities. Further, when speaking to those who have lived with SCD, it is likely some may have found solutions which allow them to cope with the condition. By illuminating SCD and potentially revealing ideas for coping therewith, this writer will bring to light information which could potentially assist others suffering therefrom.

Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance

Festinger (1957) identified conflict between cognitions as cognitive dissonance (CD). Festinger described the conflict as one attitude or cognition being in disagreement with another attitude, cognition, or behavior. This lack of harmony or discord is referred to as dissonance. In musical terms, dissonance occurs when one note is struck with another, non-harmonizing note. It produces a sound that seems off-key or out of place. Usually, songs end in chords that harmonize or fit well with the previous chords played. Sometimes a song ends with a dissonant chord, for example, one that seems out of place

of makes the song feel unfinished. When a person experiences cognitive dissonance, it can seem as if something is out of place or as if there is a conflict between one or more cognitions. Such dissonance may stimulate actions to reduce the friction between the two cognitions or behaviors. The subject of my research is cognitive dissonance as it relates to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning (LGBTQQ) individuals and their experiences with organized religion. This study will examine the phenomena associated with those moments of cognitive dissonance one might experience as a result of a conservative religious upbringing as it clashes with new religious beliefs and practices. Specifically, I am seeking out how that dissonance presents within the LGBTQQ community.

Former research has offered that SCD does exist, but it is limited to proving the condition happens; the data do not describe the occurrences of SCD, nor do they give any suggestions of how such a condition might be overcome. It is my hope that a description of various SCD incidents will reveal commonalities. Further, when speaking to those who have lived with SCD, it is likely some may have found solutions that allow the individuals to cope with the condition. By illuminating the condition and potentially revealing ideas for coping with SCD, this writer will bring to light information which will assist others who suffer with SCD. I will be using the term SCD to refer to that conflict between spiritual and sexual/gender identities. The term "church" is used within to mean all religious entities (Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist, etc.) as part of a greater religious entity (see Definition subsection later in this chapter.) Individual doctrines and

spiritual practices are not discussed, except to note the doctrines to which research participants currently or previously ascribe.

Human beings have an innate desire to live free of limitations (Brehm, 1966). As a person becomes aware of her or his sexual/gender identity, it is important for that person to feel as if he or she can openly live as desired. When a person is unable to express his/her sexual and/or gender identity, it can engender a state of internal conflict or cognitive dissonance. If the dissonance is not resolved, it can lead to cognitive distress, anger, fear, distrust, depression, and even suicidal ideation (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). Cognitive dissonance and distress, especially in relation to how a person views spirituality, has been documented to some degree in that there are data to support the existence of SCD and that many LGBTQQ people experience dissonance between their sexual and spiritual selves. That being said, the literature seems inadequate in qualitative data, specifically in describing what individuals experience during the moment(s) of dissonance.

Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) studied how LGBTQQ people feel within heteronormative congregations but did not describe any specific SCD incidents. Schuck and Liddle (2005) also described LGBTQQ congregants as feeling segregated within their heteronormative congregations. They did not refer to SCD or describe any occurrences either. Halkitis et al. (2009) offered the consequences LGBTQQ that individuals face when attending non-welcoming or non-affirming churches. Still there were no scenarios offered in the literature which explicitly explored SCD incidents or

how the person feels during moments of SCD. Halkitis et al.'s description, like the other authors referenced above, offers a glimpse into the consequences which may occur when religious beliefs are in conflict, but do not describe individual occurrences of SCD. Further, none of the researchers offered any solutions to the LGBTQQ community, except to refrain from attending heteronormative places of worship.

Dahl and Galliher (2009) recommended additional research be conducted to better understand the processes involved in religious disidentification. Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, and Quick (2010) actually measured the likelihood of one experiencing SCD and detailed some measures that sufferers used to diminish the feelings associated thereto. Their study, however, was quantitative and failed to describe specific episodes of SCD. They did add to the literature by giving ideas regarding remedy and this information will be taken into account during this research study. This body of research will describe the internal conflict between the sexual and spiritual cognitions that often occurs when LGBTQQ individuals begin to self-identify as such. It is my hope that as we understand what the individual is experiencing, we can determine opportunities for healing and reconcilement. Additional information regarding these theories, as well as contributing theories, that is, appraisal and reactance theories, will be described later in this chapter and the literature review to follow.

As very few of the over 2,500 religious organizations in the United States sanction homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered lifestyles (Dahl & Galliher, 2006), spiritually minded LGBTQQ people will likely experience some type of conflict between

long-held religious beliefs and their sexual/gender identities. SCD can occur when

spiritual beliefs conflict with one's self-identity (Halkitis et al, 2009). Sherry, Adelman,

Whilde, and Quick (2010) conducted research which measured the likelihood of the

occurrence of SCD in LGBTQQ individuals, as well as the process utilized by

participants to diminish this type of dissonance. This study will take the former studies

one step further, delving into bona fide experiences themselves in hopes of gaining

knowledge regarding actual manifestations of SCD, that is, what happens when a person

experiences SCD. As mentioned previously, this research will describe the phenomena

associated with SCD experiences. Many of those who have studied this type of

dissonance describe what could occur when an LGBTQQ person attends a

heteronormative place of worship. The consequences of this situation are that the

LGBTQQ individual may feel segregated or left out of many family-oriented activities.

There will likely be some difficulties with church members who disagree with how an

LGBTQQ person lives his or her life. There may be strife and friction.

Sherry, Adelman, While, and Quick (2010) came closest to describing SCD when

they studied the likelihood of an LGBTQQ person to experience cognitive dissonance

(CD) within a church setting. They relayed the methods prescribed by participants to

lessen the dissonance. Still, there was a gap in the literature describing the actual

phenomena experienced by their participants. Previous studies regarding cognitive

dissonance and religiosity have largely been quantifiable in nature (Schuck & Liddle,

2001; Rosario, Hunter, Yali & Gwadz, 2006; Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Halkitis et al., 2009;

and Sherkat, 2009). Participants in the noted studies were surveyed and measured to predict the likelihood of the existence of SCD or the ramifications thereof. To my knowledge, there have been no studies which seek to qualify the actual experience of SCD, that is, the description of what one experiences during a moment of SCD (the events leading up to the experience; what, if any, cognitive thoughts are manifested; how often these episodes occur; and what the individual emotionally feels during the SCD event.) This study endeavored to describe the phenomena associated with SCD occurrences so that those who suffer from it may garner a better understanding of this phenomenon. There may be some similarities in SCD experiences and scenarios which the research could uncover. Further, I will speak to potential therapeutic or restorative methods utilized by participants and compare these efforts to those presented by Sherry, Adelman, While, and Quick. It is my hope that in describing the incidents of SCD, LGBTQQ readers may find a better understanding of what they might be feeling. This research aims to qualify the previous researchers' efforts by describing the scenarios behind the numbers. Additionally, when and if applicable, it is hoped that participants who may have found resolution for these feelings will share what they have learned. Such information can only serve to augment the research and improve the likelihood that those experiencing SCD can find restorative assistance.

<center>**Background of the Problem**</center>

According to the United States Religion Census of 2010 (Religious Congregations & Membership Study, 2010) there are approximately 350,000 religious congregations in

the United States, representing about 2,500 different denominations (Dahl & Galliher, 2009). Of those 350,000 places of worship, approximately 314,000 are Protestant, 24,000 are Catholic and the remaining 12,000 are non-Christian religious organizations. Only a small percentage, some 33 organizations (Religious Congregations & Membership Study, 2010), are LGBTQQ-accepting or -affirming congregations (*accepting* meaning those churches that allow LGBTQQ members to attend and accept them as they are; *affirming* meaning that not only are they accepted or welcomed but are also invited to be a part of church leadership and serve in ministerial positions.) Accepting congregations allow LGBTQQ people to come and worship (but rarely can they participate in ministry.) Affirming constitutes a more positive attitude toward LGBTQQ members in that they are believed to be as viable a congregant as any other, and they are allowed to serve in ministry roles. Those remaining non-accepting/non-affirming religious organizations reject any form of non-heterosexual behavior and consider homosexuality to be a moral sin condemned by their faith doctrine (Sherkat, 2002). Maher (2006) even maintained most pagan groups report as heterosexist in their beliefs, which is contrary to the common belief about such groups. In other words, most religious entities in the United States do not embrace, much less tolerate, homosexual, bisexual, or transgendered people (Ford, Brignall, VanValey, & Macaluso, 2009; Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007).

There are some doctrines and faiths, for example, Unity, the United Church of Christ, the Universal Life Church, the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the United Universal Association, some Presbyterian and Episcopalian

congregations, and the B'Hai Faith fellowships, which accept LGBTQQ people. Some

even allow their LGBTQQ members to hold places of authority or ministry (Newman,

2002). Other churches, such as the United Methodist Church, tolerate LGBTQQ

congregants but do not allow them to hold leadership positions (Heermann, Wiggins, &

Rutter, 2007). To hold a place of authority or ministry within these types of

congregations, the LGBTQQ person must remain closeted about their gender or sexual

identification and/or celibate in relationships. Of course, celibacy is a requirement for

most nonmarried individuals within conservative churches. However, even those

LGBTQQ couples who have had union ceremonies would not be able to consummate

their relationships if one or both wishes to serve in a leadership capacity in a church that

is merely accepting or tolerant of LGBTQQ members. Although marriages between

homosexual partners is considered legal in all 50 states, the sexual act between these

couples could still be considered a sin as such marriages are not considered biblically

sound by most conservative religions. Consummating such a union would be considered

to be fornication or sinful. In contrast, a married heterosexual minister would not be

prohibited from consummating his or her marriage. Non-heterosexual ministers, however,

must behave in a hetero-normative manner if they wish to continue ministering in the

church (Maher, 2006). In this scenario, the LGBTQQ person could not embrace his or her

own sexual identity completely.

There are several offshoot associations within various doctrines that are

LGBTQQ-affirming. For example, the Catholic Church has a group called Dignity, and

the Episcopal Church has two groups: Integrity and Oasis. According to the 2010 U.S. Religious Census Report, even conservative doctrines such as Pentecostals, Quakers, Lutherans, Greek Orthodox, Mennonites, and Islam have LGBTQQ-affirming congregations. These congregations, however, encompass only a tiny percentage of the overall denominations they represent (Dahl & Galliher, 2009).

LGBTQQ congregants who attend any church that fails to accept homosexuals or transgendered people run the risk of encountering exclusion, ridicule, expulsion, shunning, (Macaulay, 2010), or excommunication, if their sexual preference or transgender identity becomes known. They are not allowed to live openly without ramification. Their religious and sexual/gender identities can often become conflicted in these scenarios (Halkitis et al., 2009). Further, oppositional psychological conditions or CD, can result when a person has conflicting cognitions between learned/expected behavioral norms and lived contradictory behavioral patterns (Festinger, 1956). As it relates to this study, oppositional psychological conditions manifest when individuals have a conservative religious education which is in conflict with non-conservative values, specifically homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgenderism. Conservative religion usually condemns such behaviors as being, at the least, inappropriate, and at worst, deserving of hell and damnation. When a person lives in a manner that is contradictory to the religious beliefs the individual has learned and with which he or she has been expected to comply, the person will likely experience CD between the two behavioral patterns.

As Festinger (1956) initially explained his theory of CD, he related it to the belief in something despite evidence to the contrary. As an example of this type of thinking, Festinger's original study examined a religious group that prophesied the end of the world. The group vehemently proclaimed they had been shown a vision of the apocalypse and had been given the exact date as to when it would occur. When the world did not end on the declared date, the group rallied together and concluded they had managed to forestall the earth's destruction through their vigilant prayers. In other words, they believed in their original conviction despite the world having remained intact. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) supports this behavior. Social identity theory offers that when members of a group perceive a threat to that group, they will have a tendency to defend the group and its philosophies and will derogate out-group individuals or theories to preserve their social identity within the group (Bilewicz & Kofta, 2011).

Translating Festinger's description of CD to this study I draw an inverse comparison. Just as many heterosexual people grow up attending church, the LGBTQQ person may have attended church. Likely the LGBTQQ person attended a heteronormative place of worship due to their prevalence in our society. Purdue University College of Liberal Arts defines heteronormativity as the societal, familial, and legal rules that influence a person to adapt hegemonic, heterosexual identity standards. These standards include how one behaves, with whom one associates, and what one perceives to be normal. Heteronormativity is the assumption that the world, in general, operates according to a heterosexual world view. For example, men and women can hold

hands in public without scrutiny, but two people of the same gender cannot hold hands in public without judgment. It is a system which allows the dominant power (in this case, the heterosexual viewpoint) to remain in dominance over its opposition (the non-heterosexual viewpoint). In this research, the idea of heteronormativity would be those societal rules which benefit heterosexual people and keep the LGBTQQ person at a disadvantage. These societal rules include marriage rights, designation of spousal death benefits; public displays of affection; media depictions of marriage and coupling. Stereotyping LGBTQQ couples as having one person being more "masculine" and the other being more "feminine" can also be considered as heteronormative. Heteronormativity is a broad topic, but it is the assumption that there is a man and a woman linked together. Heteronormative behavior assumes there is a spouse of the opposite sex at home. Ironically, heteronormative behavior often assumes LGBTQQ people have the same rights as straight people. It does not recognize the non-heteronormative behavior as a viable entity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

The definition given here of heteronormativity is for the benefit of those who do not understand the concept and to shed light on how it can manifest within our society. Heteronormativity can be exclusive of non-heteronormative people. It often segregates members of other sexual proclivities and thus make it difficult for non-heterosexual individuals to express their sexuality. Further, if one has been raised within such an environment, he or she may have CD regarding conflicting sexual desires. If an LGBTQQ person has grown up in a heteronormative congregation, he or she has likely

assumed heteronormative behavioral pattern consistent with the congregation's doctrine. Tajfel's (1982) social identity theory suggests that the LGBTQQ person is likely to strive for designation as a member of the in-group (the majority or the heteronormative people) as far as his or her spiritual identity is concerned. When, however, the LGBTQQ person chooses to behave in a manner which is contradictory to the learned heteronormative behavior, he or she may experience a cognitive conflict, or dissonance between the two cognitions, that is, learned/expected behavior versus actual/practiced behavior. By behaving in a manner that is in conflict with learned acceptable behavior codes the person has virtually removed him or herself from the in-group (Bilewicz & Kofta, 2011). Once one is no longer a part of the in-group or is no longer "in the closet," one might feel like an outcast, separated from former social connections. In-group members will tend to close ranks and increase group efforts to differentiate themselves from out-group members. The person going through this transition between in-group status and out-group status is then motivated to resolve the conflict being experienced in order to maintain an equilibrium (Festinger, 1956).

Appraisal theory (Lazarus, 1991) indicates there will be an emotional response to any judgmental encounter experienced. Sometimes these emotional responses are internalized and result in an inner conflict. The inner conflict or SCD that may be experienced by the LGBTQQ person can engender feelings of guilt, fear of retribution or punishment, and even self-loathing (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Internalized homophobia (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007) is commonplace in the midst of such conflict

(Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). When people develop negative feelings toward

themselves, it can produce shame, depression, sexual dysfunction, and suicidal ideations

(Maccio, 2010; Schuck & Liddle, 2001). If the LGBTQQ congregant reveals his or her

nonconformity, it may produce serious results. Schuck and Liddle (2001) noted that

LGBTQQ congregants often feel segregated and uncomfortable within their church walls.

With the primary focus being on heterosexual families and relationships, the LGBTQQ

person may frequently feel as if his or her life is of little value (Tan, 2005). Lease, Horne,

and Noffsinger-Frazier noted in their 2005 study that often heteronormative

congregations will refuse to embrace an LGBTQQ person even if it is not specifically

condemned. This may leave the LGBTQQ congregant, their partners, and family feeling

unrecognized and invisible.

For many people religion influences nearly every aspect of daily life (Rosario,

Hunter, Yali, & Gwadz, 2000). Relationships are built around it; often families attend

church together with children being baptized, confirmed, and eventually married all in the

same place of worship. The congregations themselves serve as extended families. If the

LGBTQQ person emotionally invests in a non-welcoming/affirming church, he or she

faces an enormous risk of loss when choosing to live openly (Halkitis et al., 2009). He or

she may be ostracized or may even be asked to leave. Since leaving the church may be

extremely difficult, the LGBTQQ congregant may choose instead to separate his or her

religious identity from his or her sexual/gender identity, effectively compartmentalizing

these two life facets. The congregant is thereby committing a type of detached hypocrisy

(Wollschleger & Beach, 2011; Halkitis et al., 2009). The LGBTQQ congregant must reject or deny his or her sexual/gender identity to be accepted by fellow congregants or endure condemnation for living a life in turpitude. Staying in a non-affirming place of worship may result in an unending flow of stigmatizing messages (Pitt, 2010). In turn, the congregant may remain in constant conflict, developing a self-hatred or homophobia (Halkitis et al., 2009) as he or she tries to behave in a heteronormative manner. This sets up a situation which is neither healthy nor sustainable (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). While compartmentalizing may work for some people, others will experience guilt and remorse every time they behave in a manner that contradicts their doctrinal beliefs (Wilcox, 2006). They may remain in a constant state of SCD (Yip, 1997) which, as has already been noted, can cause life-threatening psychological and psychosexual damage.

Living authentically or living a façade then becomes a choice for the LGBTQQ person. What does this mean for the LGBTQQ individual? What does it mean to anyone? If a person within a congregation is having an affair or is cheating on his or her taxes, it would be contrary to most religious tenets. The person will likely feel shame, guilt, and fear of exposure (Lane & Wegner, 1995). If the person chooses to divulge the indiscretion, he or she risks condemnation, segregation, and loss of support from friends. LGBTQQ congregants face these same challenges if they choose to live authentically and honestly. Are these consequences worse than living an inauthentic life? Gortmaker and Brown (2006) suggested that living in a closeted manner, failing to acknowledge contrary beliefs or trying to pass as heterosexual, can lead to psychological trauma.

Lane and Wegner posit that keeping a secret is cognitively and emotionally exhausting; it takes a great deal of energy. It can take a toll on a person's physical health and mental well-being. Pennebaker, Barger, and Tiebout (1989) conducted a study on Holocaust survivors. They asked the survivors to tell their stories – experiences they had rarely divulged. Fourteen months following the interviews, they found the survivors were in better health in direct correlation to the degree to which they had been forthcoming in the previous interviews. One could, therefore, conclude that keeping secrets is psychologically stressful and that revealing the truth is therapeutic (Lane & Wegner). The study of Holocaust victims is not unlike what is being proposed, in that the Holocaust survivors were interviewed and asked to tell their stories. The difference between Pennebaker, Barger, and Tiebout's study and what is proposed here is related to the type of phenomena being studied, the type of interview conducted, and the categorization of reported data. In the former study, participants were survivors of war atrocities and crimes perpetrated against a large proportion of a cultural group.

Victims of the Holocaust reported, in narrative format, what happened to them during the Nazi regime's hold over Germany. While this study sought to document what has happened during SCD moments, it does not stop at the recording of a narrative. I will direct the interview to answer questions relating to: (a) circumstances; (b) frequency; (c) environmental contributions; (d) emotional states; (e) affect; and (f) any type of resolution of the SCD experiences being relayed. This research is not intended to prove

or disprove the existence of SCD within the LGBTQQ community; its intent is to categorically document the phenomena associated with SCD experiences.

Another way to relieve CD would be to incorporate new philosophies or cognitions that diminish the effect of formerly held beliefs (Festinger, 1956). For example, congregants may seek alternative interpretations to those scriptures which condemn LGBTQQ behavior, thereby rationalizing the contradictory behavior and building new cognition patterns. This, however, may or may not decrease the SCD. As Festinger (1956) pointed out in his study of the aforementioned doomsday group, despite the fact that Earth was not destroyed, members maintained their belief the world was due to end as predicted. Of course, the group Festinger studied would be considered to be on the fringe or extremist edge of conservative religious organizations. Their behavior, however, exhibits how conflicting cognitions can cause people to redirect their cognitions in order to dissipate the dissonance. They altered their perception of the prediction allowing for God to have forestalled Earth's destruction because of their prayers, their belief in the prediction remained firm. The deadline was merely postponed due to their faithfulness.

Festinger and Carlsmith (1959) recommended distancing oneself from the conditions which underpin the dissonance. Following this recommendation, the LGBTQQ congregant would need to leave the non-affirming church. As discussed earlier, leaving the church may be detrimental for some congregants since it offers a familiar place to worship with friends and family. The connections are often difficult, if

not impossible to sever. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) offers that people tend to form their identities from participation within a group. Rotter's (1954) social learning theory posits people will learn how to behave within a group and will go on to teach others how to behave as they become more ensconced within said group. If a person chooses to leave a group in which his or her identity was formed and in which he or she is ensconced, the person will likely experience fear, loss, and loneliness. A person in this situation may feel as if there is nowhere to turn (Yip, 1997). The desire to maintain a relationship with a religious community can be tied to the interpersonal triad sphere of motivation (Forbes, 2011). While a person might desire to change his or her environment to accommodate sexual/gender identity, the need to belong or keep current relationships may be stronger. In other words, the need to belong can sometimes outweigh the need for spiritual and sexual/gender consonance.

No matter the method chosen to decrease the dissonance, often there are psychological damages associated with the situations causing the dissonance. Garcia, Gray-Stanley, and Ramirez-Valles (2008) pointed out that an individual's moral identity may be traumatized by the homo-negativity expressed within various religious groups and, in turn, this can lead to complete dissociation with religion altogether. Eventually, the LGBTQQ person may feel unwelcome and might even question their relationship with God, weakening his or her resolve and undercutting personal security (Miller, 2005). They may question their right to participate within a religious community and whether or not their worship of God is acceptable. Garcia, Gray-Stanley, and Ramirez-Valles suggest

that pervasive changes are required to overcome such conflict. In other words, the person must (a) realize that homosexuality exists naturally; (ii) recognize homosexual stereotypes; (iii) discover what it means to be gay; (iv) disclose his or her sexual identity, and (v) build new social relationships. Discovering what it means to be gay in a heteronormative society may take a lifetime, according to Garcia, Gray-Stanley, and Ramirez-Valles. LGBTQQ people who have been raised within heteronormative places of worship may have experienced years of castigating sermons that may cause a sense of alienation and guilt.

This study will illuminate the feelings and experiences of those who are living with SCD. It is my hope that data obtained via this study will contribute to the existing body of work which asserts the existence of CD. By describing the actual SCD incidents the participants face, we can gain a better understanding of this condition. This study is a phenomenological study to examine the actual occurrences of SCD. I sought to document the phenomena associated with this condition. As the related literature states, the condition exists, but the phenomena surrounding moments of SCD have not been studied. For example, do individuals have most of their experiences when reading the Bible, or in church, or at any time during their day? Do certain words trigger the condition? How does the event make the individual feel? Some researchers have offered remedies, but I am seeking the description of the experience so that it can be properly documented and thereby increase knowledge of the condition as a society. It is my hope that LGBTQQ

people will come to understand what they are experiencing and seek treatment

accordingly.

Statement of the Problem

When spiritual LGBTQQ people choose to live their lives openly, they face the

possibility of rejection from friends and family, both in the secular and spiritual arenas.

Because most U.S. religious congregations are heteronormative, the LGBTQQ person

may feel uncomfortable within these religious settings. He or she may attempt to conceal

any non-conformity. The LGBTQQ person may begin to experience frustration and even

self-hatred because he or she does not feel acceptable to family, friends, and even God.

These feelings may lead the religious LGBTQQ person to experience a lack of harmony

between what he or she is feeling and what has been previously learned about

homosexuality and transgender inclinations. This lack of harmony or dissonance can

stymie a person's psychosexual well-being (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). If and

when dissonant feelings are resolved, there will still likely be scars. Finding an

equilibrium between spirituality and sexual/gender identity may be an ongoing battle. To

make matters worse, if the LGBTQQ person chooses to leave his or her non-affirming

congregation there will likely be a tendency to isolate from former support systems, that

is, friends and family (Schuck & Liddle, 2001), thus reducing the person's ability to

recover effectively.

Tully (2005) cited the controversy over the ordination of Bishop Gene Robinson,

an openly gay minister to the Episcopal Church as an example of how a religious entity

has accommodated its LGBTQQ members. When Reverend Robinson was appointed as bishop, some members of the world-wide Episcopal Church affirmed his ordination; others objected. Tully likened the church's reactions to the reactions of a familial unit. Similar to familial reactions, the church at large received news of the ordination and reacted much like a family might react to a child's announcement that he or she was gay. The first response a family will likely have is denial, that is, if we ignore the situation it may eventually go away. The second stage is shock. During this stage, the parents may blame themselves for son or daughter who does not conform to heterosexual norms. The Church (as a whole) reacted similarly to the ordination of Bishop Robinson. They were dumbfounded that the Episcopal Church could allow such a situation to occur (Tully). Several other denominations condemned the Episcopal leadership for their acceptance and promotion of a gay clergy member. During this period of time, many ministers from various denominations preached against Robinson's ordination from their pulpits, and it was attacked by heads of nearly every Christian denomination. Several dioceses split from the Episcopal Church (Quincy, Illinois; Fresno, California; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Fort Worth, Texas) over the controversial move (New York Times, 2008).

The third stage is one of toleration and limited acceptance (Tully, 2005). The greater religious population realized the situation was not going to change and tolerated Bishop Robinson's position within the Episcopal Church. Representatives from the Episcopal denomination, however, were asked to refrain from attending certain functions.

Further, Bishop Robinson was not permitted to bring his partner to various gatherings normally populated by clergy spouses, as attendance might cause some discomfort. Just as some families react positively to a son or daughter's announcement of the LGBTQQ standing, some factions of the greater religious population learned to embrace the Episcopal Church's decision to ordain Bishop Robinson. Others recoiled, endeavoring to keep themselves separate from the Episcopal Church and LGBTQQ people, in general.

The literature presents clear evidence that SCD exists. It does not, however, describe what the individual feels when he or she experiences SCD. When an individual is unaware of what he or she is facing or how it is defined, it may lead the person to believe there is no real problem and avoid treatment. In other words, the person may find they get depressed or angry when attending religious services but does not know the root cause. If the phenomenon can be properly documented, it would increase our understanding of the condition and what treatments are more likely to benefit the individual. This study should provide insight as to how SCD manifests so that those exhibiting symptoms may gain some relief. One can infer from the body of research that SCD occurrences are disturbing and cause discomfort. Why these incidents are disturbing or uncomfortable lies within the description of the event. The effects of SCD may be related to the religious tenets learned throughout the person's life and how that individual currently relates to their spiritual journey. Reviewed literature does not delve into descriptions of SCD events; it merely reports the existence of SCD or how individuals juggle the dissonant emotions arising therefrom. Gross (2008) conducted research with

French LGBT citizens; it explored how these individuals processed the dissonance between sexuality and spirituality. The survey revealed how many LGBT community members navigated these seemingly incongruent viewpoints. Barbosa, Torres, Silva, and Khan (2010) developed an intervention program to assist participants in their efforts to overcome SCD but did not explain their individual experiences with SCD. Dahl and Galliher (2009) researched the existence of SCD. Similarly, Halkitis et al. surveyed LGBTQ people to determine the viability of SCD.

The literature to date has not provided specific descriptions of the phenomena associated with moments of SCD. It does not state if there are any commonalities in the descriptions given by those who have experienced SCD. The literature does not reveal how a person feels during such an event. No demographic data has been collected in regard to times of day, locations, and situations that occur before and after an SCD event. There appears to be no empirical data collected which address the aforementioned gaps within the literature. It is, therefore, pertinent to the field of knowledge and to society in general to study the events of SCD and how these occurrences are experienced or felt by the individual.

Nature of the Study

This study will focus on religious LGBTQQ people with SCD and what methods, if any, were incorporated to reduce this dissonance. As Rodriguez' 2010 literature review suggested, this research will augment previous studies by uncovering the actual manifestation of SCD, for example, when and where it seems to occur; what

circumstances seem to initiate SCD episodes; how the individual feels when SCD

phenomena present; and how he or she copes with SCD events. This type of

phenomenological study appears yet to be performed. As previously stated, various

studies have been conducted which address the existence of SCD (Yip, 1997; Dahl &

Galliher, 2009: Halkitis et al., 2009), the ramifications of the condition (Lease, Horne, &

Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Gross, 2008; Ream & Savin-Williams, 2005; Tan, 2005;

Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Sherkat, 2002), and possible resolutions (Garcia, Gray-Stanley,

& Ramirez-Valles, 2008; Barbosa, Torres, Silva, & Khan, 2010; Stapel & van der Linde,

2011), but I did not find a study that specifically examined the actual events of SCD

within participants' lives.

Mahaffy (1996) conducted a study to determine the existence of SCD. His

empirical study, as with others, seems to prove its existence. Mahaffy suggested that

future research should be conducted to find the point of dissonance at which one will

seek resolution. This seems to imply there should be additional research conducted to

determine specific details of SCD events. I believe that such an in-depth examination will

likely enhance existing research, address the complexities of SCD from the congregants'

perspectives, and increase understanding of SCD.

As with most cognitive behaviors, growth and clearer understanding of the

phenomena associated with the cognition can allow a society to better address those

individuals experiencing SCD. Those LGBTQQ people who are suffering from

conflicting religious cognitions may benefit from this research in that they may find

similar phenomena in the stories of the interviewees. Some comfort may be found in the similarities. The research may also yield information as to how SCD manifests and thereby contributes to CD theory as a whole.

Participants completed a demographic questionnaire so that I might acquire background and demographic information, that is, age, gender, religious upbringing, sexual/gender identity, etc. (see Appendix A). The questionnaire offered a definition of SCD. Participants were then be asked whether or not they had had such experiences. This question was for confirmation purposes only, as I interviewed only people who had previously disclosed their experiences with SCD. Participants were then be asked to complete three data-collection standardized test questionnaires: Preference for Consistency Scale (Appendix B); Internalized Heterosexism (Appendix C); and Cognitive Dissonance Inventory (Appendix D). The final inventory was the Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance Survey (Appendix E). These questionnaires measured the participants' ability to cope with change, the level of dissonance experienced, and their degree of self-acceptance.

The final questionnaire assessed the participants' spiritual background and SCD levels. While this was not a mix-methods study, garnering this information adds to my understanding of the participants' experiences with SCD and conflicting cognitions. It elicits more comprehensive answers from participants about their spiritual upbringing and how SCD has manifested in their lives. All interviewed participants were asked the same questions with responses recorded for accuracy. All participants were offered information

regarding local counseling services and programs which may be effective in reducing their SCD. Participants could request a recess during the interview. Should the interview cause undo anxiety, the participant was free to terminate the discussion as needed.

<div align="center">**Research Questions and Hypotheses**</div>

Former researchers have studied various ethnic and gender-related experiences with SCD. Mahaffy (1996) discovered that lesbians who hailed from more conservative, heteronormative congregations suffered more dissonant cognitions than those who were from less conservative religious backgrounds. The research also showed those who self-identified as lesbian near the age of 40 were less likely to balance the dissonant cognitions as well as those who identified as lesbian earlier in life.

Pitt (2010) published his study of African American gay males and how they were more likely to remain in their churches of origin, despite the CD. Pitt posited that some LGBTQQ congregants rationalize their homosexuality as being no more sinful than any other doctrine-contrary behavior, e.g. lying, infidelity, or gluttony. Pitt suggested there is a general deflection of the issue onto clergy member improprieties, that is, a lack of clergy perfection, offsets the issue of gay sexual activity. He offers that gay African American men continue within the same church setting because of the ties to friends and family. They hide their sexual/gender identities.

The research question at the forefront is: How does SCD manifest in the lives of LGBTQQ people (no matter their religious affiliations)? Following the initial questionnaires, the interview section of each meeting consisted of free-flowing with

open-ended questions. These types of open-ended questions allowed the participant to

describe as completely as possible any and all experiences they have had with SCD with

regard to being LGBTQQ. The participant was also asked when these phenomena have

occurred, and what seems to have triggered the SCD episodes.

Phenomenological research, in its purest endeavor, seeks to describe phenomena

rather than explain it (Lester, 1999). Ideally, phenomenological studies are free from pre-

conceived hypotheses and merely illuminate or identify the phenomenon being examined

(Lester). A central question, however, is the basis for any qualitative study (Creswell,

1998). The central question for the LGBTQQ participants in this study would be as

follows: What do LGBTQQ people who encountered a heteronormative spiritual

upbringing experience when they worship as an openly LGBTQQ person?

Additional questions that may further illuminate potential SCD experiences will

be asked of the LGBTQQ participants. They are as follows:

- What did your heteronormative spiritual upbringing teach you about living as

  an LGBTQQ person?

- How do those former teachings influence your current spirituality?

- Have you experienced any internal conflict concerning your former spiritual

  upbringing and your current spirituality?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the proposed research was two-fold. The interviews were

conducted with LGBTQQ people to determine how SCD is experienced in their lives

concerning formerly held religious beliefs that may be in conflict with their lifestyles. LGBTQQ people often live with SCD because of their spiritual and religious history, that is, because their desires conflict with conservative or heteronormative spiritual teachings they likely heard throughout their formative years (Halkitis et al., 2009).

The research may yield information about how LGBTQQ people have coped with any perceived dissonance. While phenomenological research is not a method of study from which one can draw accurate correlations, it may reveal if there are similarities in the causes of SCD phenomena and what methods might be employed to dissipate the condition. I sought to learn whether and what LGBTQQ people utilized as coping mechanisms to balance the dissonant cognitions. For examples, do extended family and/or relationships offer the best solution or does a reintegration of cognitions via research and education make a greater impact? Would LGBTQQ people be open to informational forums to build connections which span the gap between fundamental mindsets and the LGBTQQ lifestyle? Tan (2005) posited that people who possess an understanding of their purpose in life and feel as if their lives have meaning will likely balance dissonance more effectively than those individuals who have yet to reconcile their spiritual and sexual cognitions. It is hoped that data will indicate effective methods to reduce SCD and pinpoint the commonalities faced by individuals experiencing SCD.

Theoretical Framework

Motivational theories such as social identity and learning theories, CD theory, reactance theory, hierarchy of needs theory, and appraisal theory informed this research

project. Motivational theory describes individual motivational drive and pursuit of change (Forbes, 2011). Reducing dissonance involves making some type of change, whether it is rationalizing or moving away from the source of dissonance. People are highly motivated to resolve dissonant cognitions and regain psychological harmony (Festinger, Reicken, & Schachter, 1956).

Festinger (1957) posited that a person will encounter CD when one or more perceptions are in disagreement with each other. For example, when an individual is presented evidence that his or her belief in something is incorrect, rather than accepting that he or she is wrong, the individual will have a tendency to hold stronger to that original belief, despite contradictory evidence (Festinger, Reicken, & Schachter, 1956). The inverse has been indicated in the 2010 study by Sherry, Alderman, Whilde, and Quick, that is, when faced with SCD an LGBTQQ person often seeks resolution through rationalization, compartmentalization, or circumvention.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) certainly contributes to this research as it identifies how a person's needs are ordered by their importance in life. The most essential needs to be met are the physiological needs such as food and shelter. Once those needs are met, a person will seek to meet their safety needs. The need to belong and be loved follows the need for safety.

Self-esteem hinges on all four of the previous needs being met. Schuck and Liddle's 2001 study found that LGBTQQ participants experienced doctrine-generated guilt and shame, negative church environments, and fear of exposure in their places of

worship. Safety, belonging, and self-esteem needs were not met. Considering the

hierarchy of needs, if a person does not feel safe within his or her religious environment,

he or she will not develop a sense of belonging and positive self-esteem. Further, the lack

of safety, or feeling as if one does not belong, and low self-esteem may stunt an

individual's ability to grow spiritually. If basic needs for safety, belonging, and increased

self-esteem are stymied in inhospitable places of worship, a person will be less likely to

reach a state of self-actualization (Sirgy, 1986). It is likely impossible for an LGBTQQ

person to reach his or her full potential in the midst of homo-negativity and self-

deprecation. When basic needs are not met, other self-actualization needs are less salient

(Sirgy, 1986).

Lazarus (1991) describes appraisal theory as the emotional response experienced

in relation to evaluative judgments. Appraisal theory offers that one will evaluate a

situation and determine the consequences or benefits prior to reacting emotionally.

According to Lazarus, there are two steps in the appraisal process: the primary appraisal

and the secondary appraisal. In the primary appraisal a person evaluates a situation to

determine its significance. The person can perceive the situation as being beneficial or

threatening. During the secondary appraisal, the individual determines how to best

manage the situation, that is, whether to cope with or take advantage of the

circumstances. Appraisal theory is a map of the cognitive processes involved in reacting

to a condition, event, or situation. It illustrates how people form emotional responses to

the environments in which they find themselves. In contrast to some emotion reactance

theories, appraisal theory posits that there are steps involved in the generation of an emotion rather than immediate, noncognizant reactions. Appraisal theory was utilized in this research project to evaluate the emotional and dissonant responses LGBTQQ individuals may experience in a heteronormative religious society. In other words, during the interview process, participants were asked to reveal their emotional responses to worship experiences and further, to look at the steps that may have led to the responses.

Social learning theory (Rotter, 1954) offers that learning is not merely an internal process. Social learning theory holds that external factors are constantly at play in the advancement of learning. Rotter's research showed that people have a tendency to learn how to behave through their immersion in various social groups. For example, a person will likely behave differently at work than when socializing with friends afterward. Fox (2006) discussed the likelihood of people learning through social settings as if said settings were apprenticeships. The new person to the social group comes in as an outsider, learning how the group behaves. Eventually, he or she understands the group dynamics and begins to behave similarly to fit in better. Eventually, the new member is an insider and can help new, outsider members to learn the group norms. Group or social learning allows the group members to form a strong connection with their fellow group members and strengthens their commitment to the ideas advanced by said group (Fox, 2006). It will be especially relevant to reflect on the social learning theory as a causal factor contributing to SCD. Church tenets and religious underpinnings emphasize loving others as a primary factor of positive spiritual growth. Religious positions that

marginalize individuals for any reason could be viewed as being in direct conflict with an emphasis on loving others. One might expect SCD to form in such a learning environment.

Brehm's (1966) reactance theory suggested that human beings need to perceive themselves as free and are thus compelled to react negatively toward any observed limitations. As LGBTQQ people come to identify as such, they risk losing attachments within their religious settings. While it is Brehm's theory that predicts an LGBTQQ person will be compelled to live openly as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, or questioning, such exposure could imperil the person's standing within his or her church community. Reactance theory and cognitive dissonance theory are inextricably linked in this study. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests a person feels uncomfortable when behaving in a manner that is inconsistent with learned normative conduct. A negative reaction may be expected if a person is not free to behave in a manner he or she chooses because of CD.

Managing emotional experiences such as SCD can be a daunting task. Since SCD is likely to produce a negative effect, the accompanying emotions could cause the person to become despondent, depressed, angry, frustrated, or worse (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Caprara, Di Giunta, Pastorelli, and Eisenberg (2010) suggested that the degree to which a person feels capable of surmounting life's challenges regulates the person's affect or emotional state during difficult challenges. In other words, if a person has a positive self-efficacy, they are more likely to recover from negative emotional experiences. Forbes

(2011) theory of an intra-psychic triad of needs suggests that the more empowered, engaged, and successful one is, the more comfortable one is within his or her environment. The triad includes social aspirations such as belonging, encouragement and self-esteem. Forbes posited that these desires directly affect a person's social development and security. Forbes took this idea one step further. He proposed that if one is unable to achieve a sense of belonging, security, and empowerment he or she may, in fact, deteriorate.

Schuck and Liddle (2001) believed that when a person encounters SCD it can result in personal insecurity, hopelessness, and even suicidal ideations from the negative reactions from family, friends, and fellow congregants. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007), Macaulay (2010, and Yip (1997) all concluded that when a person is rejected by those who have previously offered stability and protection the result could jeopardize the person's life. Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982) proposed that people tend to build their identities via the social groups with which they associate. A person may show one side of our personality within certain social groups and other facets of our personality in other settings. If someone is associated with a group which accepts and affirms the person's place and status within the group, the person will tend to thrive. If, however, the group ostracizes and rejects a person it can cause the individual to question his or her opinions. People will tend to question themselves or even reject formerly held opinions in order to be included in a group again. There is a need within most individuals to fit within their social groups. Being an outsider is uncomfortable, lonely, and one may feel a sense of

powerlessness. Ford, Brignall, VanValey, and Macaluso (2009) posited that LGBTQQ

people will be more likely to accept themselves and hold a higher self-esteem if they are

encouraged to do so within a safe and secure environment or social group.

Negative messages from the pulpit of a place of worship can be especially

harmful (Dahl & Galliher, 2009). When a place of worship does not accept or affirm the

LGBTQQ person, the congregation is in effect rejecting the person for who that person is.

Non-accepting places of worship may go as far as to suggest the LGBTQQ person is

going to hell for his or her sin. Homosexuality and being transgendered would be thought

of as overtly sinful; however, in very conservative churches, even thinking about sinful

acts, such as a questioning person might, would be considered a sin. The English

Standard Version of the Bible states: "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a

woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart."

(Matthew 5:28), and "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within,

out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality." (Mark 7:20.) When a

person decides to reveal that he or she is questioning his or her sexuality or gender, it is

oft times detrimental. Even if a person never openly admits to LGBTQQ status, he or she

could become an outsider, depending on how the congregants and pastoral staff feel

about such matters. There is likely no longer any sense of security within that social

group. The person may, therefore, be unable to adequately develop on a spiritual level.

Dahl and Galliher go on to offer that in such circumstances, the person is likely to

suppress his or her LGBTQQ status. He or she might lose faith in the spiritual leaders

formerly held in high esteem. The way the person expresses his or her spirituality may also change as a result of the lack of group security. However, when a person is accepted and affirmed within a place of worship, or any social group, it allows the person to more fully develop a social identity, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Caprara, Di Giunta, Pastorelli, & Eisenberg, 2013).

Definitions of Terms

Church: An overall encompassing organization. All doctrinal entities will be considered part of or departments of the global church.

Clergy: For the purpose of this study, the term clergy will denote any person who has been ordained or commissioned to minister within a formal religious environment.

Congregation: A religious collective which holds similar beliefs in a higher power and practices similar rituals in their worship thereof. A congregation is a group of believers which meet to worship, gain inspiration, receive knowledge, and experience spiritual community and sociability.

Conservative religion: A religious background which is not open and affirming to LGBTQQ individuals. For the purposes of this study, all religions will be considered as conservative if they exclude LGBTQQ individuals or condemn homosexuality in the tenets of their doctrine.

Heteronormative: This term is used within to describe situations or experiences which involve heterosexual lifestyles, or male/female sexual relationship norms. A heteronormative environment is one in which those who participate are presumed to be heterosexual. Further, an LGBTQQ person would not likely be requested to participate.

Heterosexism: Different from heteronormative, heterosexism brings in a negative bias or attitude in regard to any sexuality that differs from heterosexual or male/female sexual relationships. It involves prejudice in favor of opposite sex sexuality. Heterosexism can be as overt as picketing same-sex functions or as covert as choosing brand A over brand B because brand B's company supports same-sex marriage. For example, Chic-fil-A has a conservative Christian founder, Dan Cathy. Mr. Cathy has been an advocate of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and was sorely disappointed when key parts of DOMA were struck down in 2012. He was quoted to have said, it was "a sad day for our nation," and "the founding fathers would be ashamed of our generation" (Haley, 2014). Right-wing conservatives have staunchly supported Mr. Cathy and left-wing liberals have boycotted his facilities. Nanaimo, British Columbia City Council members voted 8-1 to cancel an event scheduled for May 2014 when they discovered Chic-fil-A was a sponsoring organization for said event. In their written statement regarding the ruling, council members said, "[A]s owners of the facility any events that are associated with organizations or people that promote or have a history of divisiveness, homophobia, or other expressions of hate [will] not be permitted [by the City]" (Haley).

On the other side of the coin, conservative Christian leaders and worshippers have often picketed gay Pride parades and have boycotted companies which promote the 'gay agenda'. For example, when the television shows *Will & Grace* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* first aired, the conservative, right-wing group American Family Association (AFA) urged their member base to boycott the shows. Further, they asked their members to boycott any advertisers who sold products during the show's airtime. Proctor and Gamble was particularly targeted. The Walt Disney Company was boycotted for nine years when Disney announced it would offer benefits to same-sex couples within its employ (Henneman, 2006). Neither boycott significantly impacted the companies involved. More recently the AFA urged member to boycott JC Penney stores because they chose Ellen DeGeneres, an openly gay comedienne, actress, and talk-show host, as their spokesperson. One Million Moms, founded by the AFA protested on their website in February 2012 when JC Penney announced DeGeneres would be featured in their advertising. The first advertisement featuring DeGeneres did not occur until December of 2012, at which time One Million Moms called for a boycott of the department store chain. JC Penney did not cave to the pressures undergone during the boycott and, in fact, aired a commercial for Father's Day, 2012 with two gay dads (Sieczkowski, 2012).

Ford Motor Company did not fare so well with their brief association with the AFA. Ford had a strong reputation with LGBT groups on account of the organization's pro-LGBT advertising and benefit structure for partners of its gay employees. That is, they were doing well until November 2005 when the company briefly agreed to stop

advertising its Jaguar and Land Rover brands in The Advocate, an LGBT supportive

magazine. Ford then became the recipient of angry phone calls and LGBT groups who

were threatening to boycott Ford for their change of face. After meeting with

representatives of several LGBT groups, Ford reversed its decision to pull their

advertising from the Advocate (Henneman, 2006).

Paralinguistic: The unspoken non-verbal elements of communication, including

volume, tone, pitch, the manner of delivery, and other accompanying sounds included

within a message being relayed.

Phenomenological Research: The study of phenomena as it is perceived by the

person to whom it presents. The information gathered is subjective to the individual's

perspective of the world and the phenomena being researched. Phenomenological

research is "concerned with the study of experience from the perspective of the

individual" (Lester, 1999, p. 1).

Religion: Any organized religious or spiritual teaching. Generally speaking, a

doctrinal cooperative is considered a religion. Organized religion purports similar beliefs

about a higher power and extrinsic organizational rituals are connected to belonging to

that body of believers (Barbosa, 2010). A "Religious" person will refer to someone who

regularly attends a faith-based gathering, whether that is once per week or once per year,

and who identifies with a specific doctrinal cooperative.

Spirituality: Intrinsic, intimate, personal experiences of faith. People may

consider themselves to be spiritual and not religious in that they have a belief in a higher

power, but do not participate in any organized doctrinal cooperative. Spirituality is an

individual's quest for life's deeper meanings (Dahl & Galliher, 2009).

Worship: Any activity which is ultimately meant to glorify a higher power. For

example, prayer or meditation may be considered worship; singing hymns or listening to

a religious leader may also be considered worship. Worship may be an individual

activity, or it may be a corporate effort. A service or meeting at a church may involve

several different activities which may be considered worship. From the pastor's welcome

at the beginning of a gathering to the closing prayer – all are considered worship

activities.

Assumptions, Scope, Limitations and Delimitations

Assumptions

It is assumed that LGBTQQ people who still participate in non-affirming

religious groups will be less likely to participate in this study as such participation will

compromise hidden sexual and gender identities. This study, therefore, did solicit

members of non-affirming congregations. It is also assumed that participants who take

part in this research will accurately reflect their experiences with SCD. Only those

individuals who have encountered SCD will be chosen for this study.

As the literature indicated, SCD exists and there are ways the dissonance can be reduced or diminished. According to Yip (1997) CD may never be completely eliminated. Past cognitions may resurface causing the dissonance to reoccur. Scars from the emotional conflict exacted by homosexually negative places of worship and the resulting isolation experienced by LGBTQQ people who lost connections with friends and even family members within those places of worship may never completely heal (Yip, 1997; Schuck &Liddle, 2001). It is, therefore, assumed that the study will not reveal any true remedy for SCD.

Limitations

This study is limited in scope to members of Metropolitan Community Church. While the research would be more complete if every doctrinal cooperative were significantly represented, the likelihood of such a representation is impossible. I solicited LGBTQQ people and clergy members who have experienced SCD. In order to determine if the participant has had SCD experiences it was necessary to explain the meaning of SCD and to give an example of how one might experience SCD. This explanation was to the participant up front as part of the screening process. Participants received an informational sheet with definitions and descriptions along with the demographic survey and consent form upon arriving at the designated interview location. The participant was given ample time to review the information and ask any questions they had about the topic and process.

Creswell (1998) cited Polkinghorne (1989) who recommended interviewing between 5 and 25 people for phenomenological studies. Participants were all from a Christian background. There were no other religions of origin represented in this study. Those interviewed were selected were volunteers who responded to a news item in an MCCGSL informational email or through recommendations from colleagues. The data revealed were limited to those phenomena experienced by the participants and may not be representative of all SCD phenomena experienced. Further, data collected in this study were from the participants' points of view and were, therefore, subjective.

The data collected in this phenomenological study may not transfer all those experiencing SCD. The data will describe the experiences of those who participate and may not relate to every individual who has had moments of CD. The data will likely be transferrable, however, within a community of religious LGBTQQ people who have grown up in fairly conservative religious doctrines. The more conservative the religious background a person has experienced, the more likely the data will transfer to those currently affected by SCD.

This data may be transferrable to other conservative organizations. Whether or not an organization stems from a conservative religious base, or is merely conservative regarding its world view, such organizations may engender cognitively dissonant events. For example, many families from the southern region of the United States do not embrace their LGBTQQ family members. These families may not be overtly religious and yet being LGBTQQ is unacceptable. Many business organizations which focus on the

company's conservative values or outward appearance are less likely to promote their

LGBTQQ personnel for fear of losing conservative clientele. The data collected within

this study may transfer well within these types of environments.

Significance of the Study

This research should yield information about the effects of organized religious

beliefs on LGBTQQ people. It may also yield information on how LGBTQQ people cope

with the SCD they experience. Data representing the magnitude of SCD experienced by

LGBTQQ people will be collected to illustrate how SCD manifests itself. By focusing on

the actual experiences of those experiencing SCD and the cognitions involved, it is

expected that the research will contribute to cognitive dissonance theory in general.

While this study focused on spiritual and sexual/gender identities concerning

SCD, there are potential correlations for LGBTQQ people within other industries as well.

CD is experienced within secular organizations as well as spiritual organizations. It is

conceivable that the processes utilized to reduce CD within religious settings can be

translated to other settings.

Summary

This phenomenological study was conducted to offer insight as to how LGBTQQ

people process the SCD they experience upon self-identifying as LGBTQQ. Participants

from conservative religious backgrounds were invited to take part in the study. There was

no specific age or gender requirements. To participate, individuals must have described

themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, or questioning and must have believed they experienced SCD.

Participants were asked to complete various surveys and questionnaires related to their spiritual background. They were asked to relay demographic data as well. Following the receipt of the surveys, participants were scheduled for personal interviews. The interviews took place in a comfortable location, decided upon by both the participant and interviewer. Each participant was asked to give descriptions of their encounters with SCD and under what circumstances these events occurred.

A total of eight people were interviewed for this study. They all came from conservative Christian religious backgrounds and ranged in age from 35 – 65. Although each participant experienced SCD, no two experiences were the same. All interviews were transcribed and codified. Their encounters with SCD are described in later chapters, including quotes from actual interviews. While some participants have found some relief from the conditions, others are still dealing with SCD. Information gleaned from this study may be used to assist LGBTQQ individuals suffering from SCD and could be used by congregations that offer inclusive programs for their LGBTQQ members. I hope that the information presented in this study will increase congregational and individual understanding of the ramifications of SCD and subsequently offer processes to decrease the dissonance.

Chapter 2, which follows, constitutes a review of the existing literature that informed this research. The history of non-heterosexuality is examined, along with

descriptions of existing literature which informs this research. Various cognitive theories

are presented as a backdrop for understanding how cognitive dissonance can manifest.

Religious connotations are examined along with scientific explanations for how SCD is

perceived within the human psyche.

The methodology used to conduct the research is outlined in Chapter 3. Each

survey and questionnaire are thoroughly discussed, as well as interview protocols and

participant selection. The collection of data is outlined, and ethical procedures used are

conveyed. Storage of data, use of coding for data sources are also presented. The results

of the research are examined in Chapter 4 of this study. Demographic data are outlined

for comparison purposes. Each research question is touched upon individually and the

answers given by each participant is examined. Excerpts from participant interviews are

organized and rendered within said chapter.

Finally, in Chapter 5 the data is discussed within the larger arena of world view.

The research is culminated into how it may serve the community in which we live.

Conclusions are drawn as to how the collected data compares with anticipated results.

Recommendations for future research are outlined, as well.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect phenomenological data about Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance (SCD.) While the literature reviewed indicated the likelihood of SCD, it did not provide descriptions of how these events felt to the individual experiencing them, nor did it provide the settings where such incidents might occur. This study provided a more in-depth look at SCD experiences as well as the scenarios in which they develop. In this chapter the study is augmented by a review of existing literature in reference to cognitive dissonance, spiritual cognitive dissonance, and an in depth look at how history has viewed non-heterosexuality in general. It is important to review the historical view of homosexuality in order to understand how SCD might be formed within the minds of those who suffer therefrom.

Herek (2000) offered that, similar to any prejudice, sexual prejudice or intolerance has more than one motivation. Some motivations are rooted in fear and others are associated with a lack of knowledge. Often fear and lack of knowledge travel hand-in-hand. Herek noted motivations such as: (a) fear of sexual feelings, (b) past negative experiences with homosexual people, (c) fear of the repercussions from in-group associates, or (d) religious and familial morality codes that are in conflict with same-gender relationships can all contribute to homo-negativity and prejudice. Any of these motivations could lead individuals and even communities to convey a negative attitude toward LGBTQQ people. Prejudice of any sort has three chief components: (a) it has a

judgmental or evaluative attitude; (b) it targets a group of people and those who belong to it; and (c) it is hostile or destructive in nature (Herek, 2000).

Search Strategy

The strategy utilized for this literature review was to search for the terms and expressions related to SCD. It was an attempt to find what may have been written before along these lines. The goal was to find how SCD had been treated within previous studies, if it had been addressed at all. Most of the search was conducted using collegiate databases. Google Scholar was also used.

The terms used within the numerous searches included: "homosexuality," "the church and homosexuality," "cognitive dissonance," "spirituality and homosexuality," "LGBTQ history," "how to pray the gay away," "prejudice," "cognitive motivation," "sexuality inventories," "historical view regarding homosexuality," religion and homosexuality," the bible and LGBTQ status," "symptoms of cognitive dissonance," "symptoms of spiritual cognitive dissonance," "examples of spiritual cognitive dissonance," etc. These were the main searches used for the study at hand. There were several other, finer points to the review of existing literature searched as well. This list of researched words and phrases is not an exhaustive list; it merely represents the wider nets cast to bring in the biggest catches.

Of the approximate total of 250 articles reviewed, only 104 were included in this research. Some of the articles did not offer any newer information or were not on point and were thus eliminated from the contributing list of literature. Additionally, near the

end of this process, there were other data found regarding the more global stage of this topic. They were not included in this body of work but may be made part of future research efforts.

The data from the selected articles and books was analyzed through critical review. Initially only the abstracts were read to determine if the articles were on point. After the list of literary works was narrowed down, and specific to this study, the entire article would be read. Books were not read in their entirety; chapters pertaining to this study were read. Since this was a phenomenological study, the most important sections were those which portrayed either the term cognitive dissonance, spiritual cognitive dissonance, prejudice, or interviews with participants. Most of the literature was of either a quantitative or mix-method style of research. The figures used to calculate any percentages thought to be of relevance to this body of work was critically scrutinized to determine its viability for use in this project.

LGBTQQ Historical Context

Homosexual and transgender people have been on Earth for thousands of years. In 1998 archeologists in Egypt discovered the grave site of what may have been a same-gender couple (McCoy, 1998). The two males were buried in a similar fashion to a married couple, that is, nose-to-nose, in a close embrace. The two men, Niankhkhnum and Khnumhotep were manicurists to the royal court and likely lived around 2500 BCE according to Egyptologist G. Reeder. In 2011 Czech Republic archeologists unearthed the tomb of a skeleton (dating from around 2800 – 2500 BCE) which could possibly have

been transgendered, or "third gender(ed)" (Gast & Aathun). The grave was discovered in

Prague. Archeologists explained that the male's remains were buried on his left side with

his head facing west. This was a burial ritual reserved for women during that time period.

Further, the remains were buried with accoutrements normally associated with female

burial sites, e.g. an egg holder, rather than with tools and weaponry which are usually

found with male remains from the Neolithic Age.

Boswell (1980) offered an extensive study regarding homosexuality in the ancient

Roman and Greek societies, where it appears same-gender relationships, although the

minority, were commonplace within both cultures. Boswell mentioned several high-

profile citizens of the Roman Empire who were romantically linked to members of the

same sex. Nero, for example, married two men in succession. Nero's second marriage, to

a man named Sporus, was officially recognized by both Rome and Greece. Sporus

attended social functions with Nero and was by his side when Nero died many years later.

What Boswell points out is that in ancient Rome and Greece, same-gender relationships

were not considered taboo by the populous. Greece declined while Rome rose over a

period of several generations (from 30 BC through 1 BC). Recognition of same-sex

relationships in both cultures was important. Literature of the time points to same-gender

relationships between both males and females. The writings of Plato reflect a belief that

only love between two people of the same gender could reach a closeness which would

rise above the intimacy of a sexual relationship.

Even ancient Islamic Sufi literature praises the morality of the same-gender relationship (Boswell, 1980). Same-gender relationships were equated with the relationship between God and man and many of the Persian poets used this type of relationship as examples of integrity and virtue. Boswell further noted that ancient Chinese literature also mentions same-gender relationships, citing the oft-told story of Emperor Ai-Ti and his expressed love for his male lover. It was deemed "the love of the cut sleeve" (p. 27). The term stems from an ancient story in which Emperor Ai-Ti was called to an audience or meeting. His lover, Tung Hsien had fallen asleep across Emperor Ai-Ti's garment. Rather than wake his lover, Emperor Ai-Ti chose to cut off the sleeve of his coat so Tung Hsien could remain undisturbed. Emperor Ai-Ti loved Tung Hsien so much he'd rather damage his garment than cause his lover's sleep to be interrupted.

Cicero (Boswell, 1980) declared that same-gender relationships were not a crime. In fact, throughout the first three centuries of the Roman Empire, same-gender relationships were not at all unusual. In Augustan Rome male prostitutes were taxed like any other business; they were even afforded a national holiday. Romans appeared supportive of same-sex relationship between two citizens as long as they were consensual. There seemed to be a lack of respect for men who were more effeminate, but overall, the idea of same-sex relationships was accepted.

There are some references in the Roman historical literature to punishment of individuals involved in same-gender sexual relations. The notations, however, were less about the same-gender aspect of these relationships as they were concerned about forced

sexual advances on Roman citizens (Boswell, 1980). One particular case from the 4th

century involved a Roman citizen who had been enslaved for the payment of a debt. The

slave's master made sexual advances toward the slave who, in turn, rejected them. The

master then severely beat the non-complying slave. The courts ruled that the master

should not have beaten the slave as he was a Roman citizen. There were no ramifications

regarding the sexual advances that had been made. A law was subsequently enacted

which prohibited Roman citizens from being enslaved to pay their debts.

Throughout the first three centuries of the Christian era, there is no evidence of

same-gender sexual relationships being viewed as anything but ordinary (Boswell, 1980).

There was some prejudice concerning male Roman citizens taking the more passive

position within the relationship because it was considered to be a relinquishment of

power. Some felt that taking on the more submissive role was tantamount to effeminacy.

The Roman populous would have viewed this stance as emasculating. Only slaves,

prostitutes, or boys were considered appropriate recipients of a Roman man's sexual

passion. If the passive male lover was a Roman citizen, he would likely have been

ridiculed. For example, Julius Caesar was rumored to have had an affair with Nicomedes,

the king of Bithynia. As the passive member of the relationship, Caesar was referred to

by the populous as the "queen of Bithynia" (Author, p. 75) and his army supposedly

murmured, Caesar conquered Gaul, Nicomedes, Caesar," at his triumph following the

war with Gaul. Boswell notes, however, that words like effeminacy and unmanliness are

to be used with caution in reference to the ancient Roman culture. They are terms which

refer more to a lack of strength and greater self-indulgence, than referencing gender roles as we know them today. According to Boswell, even a heterosexual man might be perceived as passive in ancient Rome if he was too stylish or extravagantly groomed.

Cultural Changes

According to Boswell (1980) the hierarchy of Roman civilization began changing in the late third and early fourth centuries. The Roman Empire's concept of two-power rule (Emperor and Senate) was crumbling. Individual responsibility was abandoned, and more and more non-Roman citizens entered into authority positions. The Roman legion, once entirely populated by Roman citizens, had become a mixed bag of ethnic groups. The Empire began to take on a more totalitarian nature. By the late fourth century, most citizens were told what they would do for their living; where they would worship; in what region they could live; and even for which athletic team to cheer. It was in this environment that the first law prohibiting same-gender marriage was enacted. In 342, same-gender marriages became illegal under Roman law.

Many people tend to cast blame for anti-homosexual legislature on the emergence of the Christian church during this period. Boswell (1980), however, attributes the shift in laws regarding same-gender unions as having more to do with the changes in the Roman republic itself than with fourth century church edicts. Boswell posited changes in same-gender relationship status were brought on due to alterations in the Roman Empire. The Empire was constantly at war and eventually the hierarchy was overthrown. As mentioned previously, instead of a government run by the Emperor and the Senate, a

more totalitarian atmosphere was emerging in Rome. The urban, egalitarian democracy finally crashed as invaders began to sack the remnants of the Empire. As the cities were sacked and technology lay in ruin (the Roman aqueducts and sewer system, for example) a more rural, less advanced civilization emerged. Boswell speculated that the rural viewpoint made a great difference in how people related to each other and government. A rural outlook, according to Boswell, is procreation oriented; there was, therefore, less forbearance toward any relationship which deviated from the purpose of propagation. Such an atmosphere may have been responsible for changes in attitudes about family and sexual propriety. A "general intolerance of sexual deviation" (Boswell, p. 120) replaced the open-mindedness of the earlier Empire.

Boswell (1980) offered that Christianity was the conduit for a more narrowed viewpoint of morality, but not the cause. Christianity did not originally abolish same-gender relationships, but eventually the Christian society adopted the attitudes of various theologians and neighboring rural governments reflecting a general derogation of those sexually attracted toward their same gender. Dualism is the belief that there is both good and evil in every thought or action. Stoicism is intellect-based purity or emotional hegemony. Dualism and stoicism influenced early Christians to seek higher levels of purity, regardless of sexual attractions. The dualistic influences lead to a general loathing of the human form and sexual pleasures. The human body and any sexual encounter became vulgar, and a movement was thus engendered against sex purely for pleasure (Boswell). Stoicism added to this atmosphere by insisting that procreation was the only

natural reason for sexual activity. However, Zeno, who was the founder of stoicism, counseled that gender should not be the basis from which a sexual partner is chosen (Boswell). The political intolerance of gay people which began in the late third and early fourth centuries, fueled by church dualism and stoicism, lead to a general prejudice against non-heterosexual people over the next two millennia (Boswell, 1980). Consequently, there are few references, save some expressions of love between clerics, to same-gender relationships from the downfall of the Roman Empire throughout the middle ages.

Religious Underpinnings of Heterosexism

As first the Egyptian and then the Roman civilizations waned and all of Europe was plunged into the feudal middle ages, the Christian church emerged as the authority for those who survived the deluge (Boswell, 1980). Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity, then were the four largest religious movements at the time. For this study, I concentrated on the Christian church and its influence upon LGBTQQ individuals. It is hoped that future endeavors will address the other prevalent religious influences so that the phenomena being studied can be examined within other religious environments. At this juncture such as investigation would be too vast to be considered as it would require a more in-depth analysis of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism than is practical for this undertaking.

Modern Christianity bases its intolerance of homosexuality upon a small group of biblical verses. To fully explore SCD, one should reflect upon biblical scriptures utilized

to condemn same-gender relationships and how they came to generate such intolerance. Although most the books which make up the New Testament of today's Bible were delineated by the eighth century, the final product was not solidified until the Catholic Council of Trent in 1546 (Boswell, 1980).

Many of the sacred writings found in the Bible, as well as the creed by which all Christians were widely united, were formally organized at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. (Henderson & Kirkpatrick, 2014). This gathering of church bishops was organized by the Roman Emperor Constantine to combat the conflicts within the Christian faith. During this meeting of bishops, the Christian creed was outlined, the theories of Jesus' deity and conception were shaped, and the sacred writings that would eventually form today's Bible were agreed upon by and large.

Contrary to many modern translations, the word "homosexual" does not appear in any of the original transcripts. None of the manuscripts, not Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, or Aramaic, included the word homosexual. The term homosexual did not even exist prior to the 19th century. The moral theology historically treated same-gender relationships similarly to heterosexual relationships. The Church throughout the middle ages was fairly quiet concerning homosexuality. Boswell (1980) contended that several upheavals during this period were evidence of an increasing intolerance of any deviance from majority ideals. The Crusades, the expulsion of Jewish families throughout Europe, the Spanish Inquisition, along with witchcraft and heresy trials were likely demonstrations of a reduction of minorities and the acceptance of a procreative requisite for any sexual

activity. Theological and legal writings during the middle ages reflect the growing prejudice toward many minority groups, including same-gender relationships (Boswell, 1980).

Most modern translations of scripture now include passages which seem to condemn same-gender relations and/or effeminacy. In the Old Testament, the book of Genesis, chapter 19 speaks about a person named Lot who lived in the city of Sodom. During its prime, Sodom was well known as a community of excess (Boswell, 1980). The biblical account of this city calls its townspeople "wicked." In other biblical accounts of Sodom and her sister city, Gomorrah, the cities were depicted as being populated by people who were grossly immoral and vehemently despised (Bible 2 Peter 2:7-10). Other references in Genesis state the inhabitants of these cities were deeply depraved. The story continues with God sending two angels to investigate Sodom and Gomorrah. The angels examined both towns and concluded there were no righteous people living in either, except for Lot and his family who lived in Sodom. God then told the angels to go to Lot's home and instruct him to leave the town before God destroyed the two wicked settlements. So, the angels went to Lot's house. When Lot's neighbors found out Lot had visitors, they demanded the strangers be given to the crowd so that they could "know" them. Lot refused, offering his daughters up to the crowd instead. The men of the town did not want Lot's daughters and demanded the strangers be turned over. Ultimately, God struck the townsmen with blindness, and the angels were able to leave unscathed.

This story in Genesis has been the center of debate for hundreds of years. The heart of the debate stems from one word within the passage, "know", that is, the men of Sodom wanted to know the strangers. The Hebrew word for "know" used in this passage is *yada*. This same word is used an additional 952 times throughout the entire Bible (Boswell, 1980; Kraus, 2011; Yarber, 2012). In ten of the passages using the word *yada* the scripture is clearly referring to sexual intercourse, including this story in Genesis when referring to the demand issued by the Sodomites. All the remaining 943 passages which use the word *yada* have the connotation of getting acquainted with a person, that is, meeting someone and finding out more about the new acquaintance. Early interpretations of the Sodom and Gomorrah story maintained that the men of Sodom wanted to have homosexual intercourse with the strangers. Lot, after all, offered up his daughters for the townsmen instead of handing over the angels.

Sodom and Gomorrah were said to be wicked in many ways. Many theologians interpreted the story to be condemning of homosexuality since the Sodomites called for Lot's visitors to come out of his house and be known. Modern-day scholars, however, believe the passages with which homosexuals were often condemned were not about the censure of homosexuality. Current pedagogy offers that these scriptures are better interpreted as a criticized of the town's treatment of strangers. The Sodomites demanded the strangers to be sent out of Lot's house, so the townsmen could "know", or rather, rape them.

To better understand why the Sodomites behaved as they did, one must consider the period in which this story was to have taken place. During this period, townspeople would have been extremely territorial. Foreigners would have been considered potential threats to the survival of the settlement. Even though Sodom and Gomorrah were larger cities, per se, they were not the size we would consider a city to be in today's terms. At best, they might have been small towns with a few hundred people in each settlement. Most settlements, no matter how large or small, would have been reluctant to let strangers stay in their town uninvited (Yarber, 2012). The Sodomites demand to "know" the visiting angels would have been a sexual act of subjugation rather than consensual sex. Subjugation of an enemy often included forced sex, that is, rape. The Sodomites, therefore, were more likely at Lot's home to rape the strangers and mark their territory than to have consensual sex with them (Yarber, 2012).

Since the men of Sodom wanted to know the strangers and the word *yada* was used in this passage, many early theologians interpreted the story as one involving homosexual, consensual sexual intercourse. Over the years, even the town's name, Sodom, became associated with homosexual intercourse. Sodomy is defined as "anal or oral copulation with a member of the same or opposite sex" (Merriam-Webster, 2015; Boswell, 1980) and it is specifically derived from "the homosexual proclivities of the men" of Sodom "in Genesis 19:1-11" (Merriam-Webster, 2015.) Krause (2011) suggests the term sodomy was first established in the 11th century by theologian Peter Damien (290) when admonishing heterosexual monks for their sexual impropriety.

The biblical story continues with Lot leaving Sodom and God destroying both Sodom and Gomorrah because of the wickedness of the inhabitants within. Later interpretations of the Genesis passage have amended the sin of Sodom as inhospitality rather than homosexuality (Boswell, 1980; Kraus, 2011; Yarber, 2012). Historians have recently determined that Sodom and Gomorrah were likely culturally suspicious of strangers. Lot, who was not born and raised in Sodom, had violated local customs by allowing strangers to enter the town and stay at his home without proper permission. The Sodomites were angry with Lot for breaking their custom and they were suspicious of the strangers in their midst. In Judges 19, a similar story is presented where an Ephraimite offers hospitality to a group of travelers and a gang of locals insists on raping the travelers. The Ephraimite offers a concubine to the gang instead, and she is raped instead of the Ephraimite's guests. Krause (2011) noted the similarities in this story and the Genesis story of Sodom and Gomorrah. He pointed out that since the gang raped the concubine, this type of transgression cannot be considered homosexual in nature. Both Biblical accounts reflect examples of the fear of strangers and the need to dominate whoever entered the regions. The concubine was female, and the angels were male. Both situations involved rape, regardless of the gender of the victim(s). The story of Sodom, therefore, was not about homosexuality; it was about the intolerance of strangers.

Reverend S. Yarber (2012) suggests that the intent of the Sodomites and the Ephraimites was to subjugate the strangers who had entered their territories. The Sodomites and Ephraimites were angry, and their intent was to conquer anyone who

might pose a threat to their communities. Rape is less about sex and more about overpowering the victim. Men often implicitly associate sex with aggression and power more than women (Chapleau & Oswald, 2010). If the scripture was condemning the Sodomites for wanting to know the strangers sexually, it was because they wanted to rape them and thus subdue any potential invaders (Yarber, 2012). Yarber posited the sin of Sodom was not only inhospitality, but also their depravity and malice. Consensual sex between same-gendered people is not what the Sodomites and Ephraimites were after.

Other biblical scriptures referring to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah refer to the cities' lack of hospitality as their sin. In the New Testament of the modern Bible, Jesus is quoted as saying, "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet. Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day-of-judgment, than for that city" (Matt. 10:14-15, KJV; cf. Luke 10:10-12). Sodom is referred to in several other biblical passages as a wicked city, however, the sins for which they were attributed never involved same-gender sexual relations (Boswell, 1980; Kraus, 2011). Pride, idleness, and merciless treatment of the poor and needy are the sins Sodom is accused of in other biblical passages.

The next biblical passage which more directly refers to same-gender sexual relations is in Chapter 18 of the book of Leviticus. Leviticus is the third book of the Jewish Pentateuch which lists all of the commandments given to Moses for the Israelites after they left Egypt. Most people are familiar with or have heard of the "ten

commandments", but there are 613 commandments and the majority are listed in Leviticus. These 613 commandments have been called the "Holiness Code" (Krause, 2011, p. 2). In chapter 18, verse 22, the King James Bible states, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind; it is an abomination." In Leviticus 20:13, it says, "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death, their blood shall be upon them." Boswell (1980) notes that the Hebrew word used for abomination, *toevah*, denotes a state of being unclean, rather than something that is fundamentally evil. Krause also notes that *toevah* refers to being ritualistically unclean. Likewise, the word *toevah* refers specifically to acts of idolatry in various passages throughout Leviticus (Krause, 2011; Yarber, 2012).

Some modern theologians have interpreted these two scriptures literally, concluding homosexuality is abhorrent to God. More recent studies point out that these scriptures had more to do with worshiping foreign deities (Yarber, 2012). Many pagan temples of worship during this time period offered temple prostitutes and contemporary interpretations of the two Leviticus passages submit that it was the act of utilizing a temple prostitute for blessing rather than praying to Jehovah that was being sanctioned (Boswell, 1980). Leviticus lists other abominations which are largely ignored by modern-day Christians, e.g. wearing clothing of mixed materials, eating shellfish or pork, women leaving their homes during menstruation, etc.

Boswell (1980) noted that during the early conversion efforts in Rome, many converts were opposed to including Jewish law as part of the new religion. The early

Christian church was so plagued by discord with whether or not to include the Mosaic

law that Paul actually wrote to the church in Galatia urging them to liberate themselves

from the old law (Galatians 5:1-2). In his letter to Titus, Paul offers that all things are

pure to a person who has a pure heart (Titus 1:14-15).

In the New Testament of the Bible, Paul is said to have condemned

homosexuality in First Corinthians 6:9 and in First Timothy 1:10. Paul uses the Greek

word for "soft" in referring to those who will not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

Many interpret the word for "soft" to mean homosexual (Boswell, 1980). Krause (2011)

notes that in a patriarchal society, being "soft" or effeminate would be considered a moral

flaw. Paul was a Roman citizen, and as such, would have disdained men who adopted the

passive role in a same-gender relationship. Krause also points out that in the original

Greek, the word *arsenokoites* was used to describe this type of relationship. Translated,

arsen refers to a male and *koites* refers to bed. Krause suggests the term *arsenokoites*

referred to male prostitution, rape, or some other exploitation of a male. As previously

noted, in a patriarchal society, this would be taboo. The word, however, is used in other

writings to connote a meaning closer to lacking self-control or being weak-willed.

Boswell (1980) contended that Paul was not speaking about what we currently refer to as

homosexuality in either of the scriptures mentioned above.

Paul definitely uses *arsenokoites* to signify same-gender sexual relations in

Romans 1:26-27. In this passage Paul is using same-gender sexual acts to draw a

metaphor for the Roman converts (Boswell, 1980). He says,

For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their

women did change the natural use into that which is against nature. And

likewise, also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in

their lust one toward another, men with men working that which is

unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error.

(Bible, King James Version).

Both Bozwell (1980), and Yarber (2012) suggested that more recent

interpretations, when taken into context it is more likely that Paul is drawing a picture of

infidelity in these verses. Romans had been offered the chance to worship a single God

but had rejected it. In the analogy Paul offers the description of a heterosexual man or

woman who goes against his or her own nature to commit same-gender sex acts just the

Romans, having been offered the monotheistic religion, had gone back to as worshiping

multiple gods. The point of Paul is likely drawing to the Romans in the first chapter is

that some of the new Roman converts had gotten off track and were not living according

to their calling. The condemnation, therefore, is for spiritual infidelity, not homosexuality

(Boswell, 1980; Yarber, 2012). Boswell further noted that once the point was made, Paul

does not beleaguer the point. He does not dwell on the same-gender sexual relationships

throughout the remainder of his letter to the Romans.

Boswell (1980) suggested that the early "church" was not condemning same-

gender sexual relations, nor was it the law; rather it was those who, much later in history,

had become intolerant of same-gender coupling. In other words, those religious leaders in

more recent centuries who had become intolerant of non-heterosexual behavior that purposefully misinterpreted the scriptures to fit their prejudice. Krause (2011) poses there are no condemnations of loving same-gender relationship, only admonitions of relationships that were inhospitable or those in which one person was being subjugated by another.

Herek (2007) notes that sexual prejudice, or stigma is not curtailed by society's rules as is racial, ethnic, and religious prejudice. Many societies condemn sexual deviance and are intolerant of the non-heterosexual and differently gendered. Herek defines sexual stigma ad "the negative, inferior status, and relative powerlessness that society collectively accords to any non-heterosexual behavior, identity, relationship, or community" (p. 907). Herek has labeled this type of stigma, heterosexism. Link and Phelan (2001) speak to heterosexism and how it affects the homosexual or transgendered person. Heterosexism is based on the concept of societal power structures. Heterosexuals have more power concerning access to resources, influencing other people, and over their personal life trajectory. At first, one might question how heterosexism could so negatively affect the LGBTQQ community. Herek explains by referring to how heterosexism influences society.

Heterosexism is the normalization of one sexual style of living within a large society, namely male/female or non-same-sex coupling. This occurs through two processes: a) promoting a heterosexual presumption, and b) development of predicament-oriented thought processes when one is faced with a non-heterosexual person (Herek,

2007). When a society promotes a heterosexual presumption, it is creating a world in which most of its inhabitants assume that others are heterosexual. Governmental laws and even group-oriented programs are geared toward heterosexual people. The non-heterosexual person then becomes virtually invisible in such a society. They are not given the same rights because the presumption is that most everyone is heterosexual, and there is no need to enact laws or programs which benefit non-heterosexual people. If there is a presumption that everyone is heterosexual, then the non-heterosexual person is abnormal and doesn't quite fit into such a society's expectations. The LGBTQQ person becomes a rock in the proverbial stream which causes the heterosexual milieu to scurry around and splash over the non-heterosexual as he or she is in a sense blocking the flow of normalcy. The LGBTQQ person becomes a problem to be dealt with, an obstacle to be overcome.

Heterosexism can lead the LGBTQQ person to accept, internally, that he or she is not normal and that his or her existence is problematic for the society (Herek, 2007). The internalized homo-negativity can generate self-loathing, low self-esteem, and even physical maladies. Herek (2007) and Glunt (1993) conducted a study which is encouraging, however. They found that non-LGBTQQ people who had contact with an LGBTQQ person were more likely to accept people from that sexual minority. Heterosexism can be checked in an individual when the person has a good, first-hand experience with an LGBTQQ person.

Religion and Heterosexism

Contrary to the belief that the Church at large is entirely against LGBTQQ people, it was church representatives who initially formed an organization which was one of the more ardent defenders of gays and lesbians (Olson & Cadge, 2002). The San Francisco Council on Religion and Homosexuality was formed by clergy in 1964 to address the idea of social justice for gay people. In 1969, the United Church of Christ was the first denomination to issue a statement of support for and compassion toward lesbians and gays. So, there are clergy from mainline Protestant churches who exhibit acceptance of the LGBTQQ brothers and sisters. While some denominations have taken a protective stance toward LGBTQQ congregants, others are reluctant to do so. Still, among the more reticent religious groups, there are likely LGBTQQ friendly groups. These LGBTQQ supportive religious individuals may also suffer from SCD as they struggle with their personal convictions and denominational statutes.

If, as Boswell (1980) suspects, the scriptures have been grossly misinterpreted over the centuries, it is likely that homosexuality has been vilified by those who found any deviation from the majority to be corrupt. This vilification of the homosexual and homosexuality as immoral and as deserving of God's wrath has been repeatedly passed down from generation to generation for the last two millennia. Such condemnation has likely kept many LGBTQQ people throughout history in a state of confusion. Many heterosexuals feel they were born to be heterosexual. Most are not likely to consider their sexual preference to be a choice; rather they likely believe their sexual preference to be

part of their genetic makeup. Their sexual preference was simply part of their genetic makeup. Why then do many heterosexuals assume that being gay or transgendered is merely a choice? If heterosexuals are born as such, it stands to reason that non-heterosexuals were born to be non-heterosexual. It is not an option. So, if one is spiritually minded, he/she might believe God made everything, even heterosexuals, homosexuals, and transgendered individuals. A common question among LGBTQQ people then is, "why did God make me this way if being gay is wrong?" They are caught between the doctrine of the conservative religion and their natural sexual inclinations toward the same gender. When there is a difference between what one has been taught and what one is experiencing, it will likely generate a spiritual dilemma or, SCD.

James (2012) identified SCD as knowing the right thing to do but doing the opposite. SCD, as defined by this writer, is that unpleasant feeling of conflict a person might experience when he or she behaves or thinks in a manner that is contradictory to long-held spiritual beliefs. The long-held beliefs may or not be "right", but they have been learned by the individual and, therefore, inform his or her behavior. Sherry, Alderman, Whilde, and Quick (2010) conducted an empirical study of CD in relation to both sexual and spiritual identities. They found that over 40% of the participants were having difficulty reconciling their spiritual and sexual identities and were uncomfortable with religion, in general. Other studies regarding CD have been conducted which correlate the dissonance with a particular religious or ethnic background. This chapter will report on said studies and how they inform this research. It is my contention that CD

theory alone cannot adequately describe the discord one may feel when he or she no longer subscribes to formerly embraced religious tenets. Further, I contend that if a person is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer, or questioning (LGBTQQ), he or she may experience intense SCD which may not be resolved for years, if ever. The remainder of this chapter will discuss the theories which support the concept of SCD, religion and its importance and potential harm to the LGBTQQ person, as well as potential approaches for reducing SCD.

Motivational Theories

Motivation theories describe what stimulates action or change. They explain the probable cause of physical motion and psychological modification. The theories generally describe biologically, physiologically, and psychologically based movement from basic reflexes to complex cognitive processing (Forbes, 2011). The word "motivation" itself delineates an incentive, drive, or provocation which initiates a change of physical or cognitive position. For example, thirst motivates or compels a person to reach for something satiating. This is a physiological motivation. Hull's (1943) drive reduction theory can be employed to explain why a person is likely to reach for a beverage when thirsty. The drive to satiate the thirst stimulates a response. If the thirst is regularly satisfied by drinking a beverage, it acts as a conditioning mechanism which will reinforce the behavior. Similarly, psychological motivations prompt either physical or cognitive movement. Desiring to drink water from the tap instead of water from a plastic bottle might be the result of psychological motivations to reduce non-biodegradable

waste output. When one is thirsty, there is a physiological motivation to retrieve something to drink. On the other hand, when a person desires to reduce her or his carbon footprint, the person is experiencing a psychological motivation. Thus, Hull's drive reduction theory can be applied to both physical and psychological motivations as the repeated satisfaction of the need drives the reductive response.

It is my contention various motivational theories may contribute to a condition of SCD. SCD, the uncomfortable, discordant feeling resulting from separating oneself from former long-held spiritual beliefs, is a complex psychological state brought on by various stimuli. Heider's balance theory (1946), Festinger's social comparison and cognitive dissonance theories (1954 and 1956, respectively), Rotter's social learning theory (1954), Tajfel's social identity theory (1982), Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), Forbes' unified model of motivation (2011), rational choice theory (Goldthorpe, 1998), and Brehm's reactance theory (1966) may all play a role in the generation of SCD.

Heider's balance theory (1946) speaks of social relationships. He proposed that social connections must be in either an equalized or unbalanced state. Further, the theory suggests that when a relationship is not balanced or is unequal the state of inequity generates a psychological disruption which, in turn, motivates those involved to resolve the conflict. Heider posited the resolution for such an imbalanced condition would stimulate either a behavioral or mindset change. Maslow outlined a hierarchy of need which proposed a structure of aspirations, from basic substantive safety and welfare needs to non-compulsory desires. He posited that all human needs are precipitated by

other needs. They are built then, need upon need, as a wall is built brick upon brick. If the foundation is properly laid, the building will be supported as it rises. Similar to a building or pyramid, Maslow believed that is fundamental needs for sustenance and shelter are not met, a person would have less ability or even inclination toward achieving other superfluous objectives. In relating Maslow's theory to SCD, one must consider the individual's primary concerns for safety and well-being. When individuals behave in ways which contradict long-held beliefs, they may feel uncomfortable, unsure of themselves, even fearful (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). If physiological needs are met, the need for safety becomes a key motivating factor (Maslow, 1943).

Expanding on Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Forbes (2011) developed the nine-point unified model of motivation which breaks up physiological and psychological aspirations into three categories: intra-psychic, instrumental, and interpersonal. Intra-psychic needs are those which are self-oriented such as the need for security, the need to establish identity or personal style, and the need for accomplishment or mastery of talents and abilities. Forbes believed the intra-psychic triad of needs is basic to an individual's psychological development. Forbes' instrumental triad of needs deals with aspirations toward the material. These aspirations affect comfort levels within his or her environment. They include empowerment, engagement, and achievement. While these aspirations are still inwardly rewarding, they reach beyond the basic physiological and psychological needs and address the comfort level of the individual. Finally, Forbes describes the interpersonal triad of aspirations which relate to an individual's social

world. These aspirations are: belonging, nurturing, and esteem. These aspirations set the stage for a person's social growth and well-being.

The grid proposed by Forbes (2011) correlates the three aspiration-focused triads to different levels of aspiration. Expectations of being compose the first level of aspiration and include: security, empowerment, and belonging. The second level, expectations of accomplishment, includes the aspirations of identity, engagement, and nurturing. Finally, the highest level of aspiration, development, includes aspirations toward mastery, achievement, and esteem. Forbes' unified model of motivation suggests individuals are primarily motivated by self-edifying aspirations. Security, empowerment, and belonging (expectations of being) are crucial to an individual's well-being. It was Forbes' contention that without attaining a sense of security, empowerment, and belonging, individuals would fail to thrive. Motivation to achieve these aspirations would, therefore, be more intense than those less-basic aspirations. Further, Forbes posits that if security, empowerment, and belonging are not achieved, higher aspirations such as mastery, achievement, and esteem will not be met. When a person experiences SCD, he or she may feel as if there is no longer acceptance where the person was once welcomed (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). When a person experiences this type of rejection, he or she may feel insecure, depressed, or even suicidal. These feelings are the antithesis of security, empowerment and belonging. There can be negative consequences when basic needs and aspirations are unmet. Some might conclude a person's very existence might be in jeopardy (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007; Macaulay, 2010; and Yip, 1997).

Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1956) and rational choice theory (Goldthorpe, 1998) further inform this research in that these theories elucidate possible motivations regarding religious decision making. Festinger (1956) posited that individuals' decisions are motivated by external validation of their opinions and capabilities. In other words, when people are making decisions, they tend to seek out the opinions and validation of others. They compare their opinions and abilities to those who are perceived to have knowledge and skill about the subject for which a decision is being made. Rotter's (1954) social learning theory offers that people learn within their social groups. They start off as outsiders, then as they learn the expected norms, they become increasingly group oriented, and eventually they will teach new out-group members how to behave within the group. Rotter offered that, when threatened, the in-group members will likely hold more tightly to each other and alienate out-group members. Considering both of these theories, it would seem that people are greatly affected by the social groups with which they associate.

Tajfel's (1982) social identity theory suggests people find their identity within their social groups. Tajfel maintained that people may have different identities for the various groups in which they participate. A person may rely heavily on the messages received from his or her religious leaders and co-congregants to make choices regarding how to live as a spiritual individual. If these outside sources are tolerant or accepting of the LGBTQQ community, the LGBTQQ individual will be more likely to accept his or her sexuality (Ford, Brignall, VanValey, & Macaluso, 2009). Conversely, if the spiritual

leaders and co-congregants do not tolerate or accept the LGBTQQ community the

LGBTQQ person seeking validation may be discouraged and/or rejected entirely (Lease,

Horn & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). This lack of validation can lead to the suppression of

the individual's LGBTQQ sexuality, a change in spiritual practices, or the rejection of

religion as a whole (Dahl & Galliher, 2009).

Goldthorpe's rational choice theory (1998) speculated that religious decisions are

often made with the same approach as other, non-religious decisions, that is, through

rationally observing the costs and benefits associated with the decisions being made. As

Wollschleger and Beach (2011) explain, individuals expect a sort of quid pro quo

relationship with their deity. They rationalize that specific actions have likely outcomes,

e.g. if one contributes to his or her place of worship, his or her deity will be more likely

to provide for the person's physical and monetary needs. The rational choice theory

would then predict that a person would weigh the outcomes from his or her religious

decisions. An LGBTQQ person who has grown up in a conservative, non-accepting/non-

affirming religious environment might perceive a decision to live openly as a lesbian,

gay, bisexual, or transgendered individual tantamount to moral bankruptcy (Yip, 1997).

His or her life, in turn, would be meaningless (Morrow, 2003), abominable and/or

unacceptable to the deity being worshipped. These outcomes often outweigh the

alternative outcomes of remaining hidden or closeted, no matter the discomfort or

dissonance. Indeed, a spiritual LGBTQQ person might perceive the cost of living openly

as LGBTQQ as potentially soul threatening.

Reactance theory (Brehm, 1966) proposes that human beings resist captivity and limitation. They are motivated to free themselves from such restrictions. Reactance theory informs this research by offering a motivation behind the spiritual LGBTQQ person's rejection of formerly-held religious beliefs and/or the abandonment of contradictory spiritual practices and institutions. When a spiritual LGBTQQ person perceives he or she is being restricted by religious teachings or practices, the person may reject said teachings or practices. The rejection of the restrictive teachings or practices is likely to reduce the resulting CD (Maher, 2006). This shifting of beliefs may be made to alleviate perceived restrictions.

Cognitive Dissonance

Definition

Cognitive dissonance was defined by Festinger (1956) as the contradiction between two attitudes or behaviors. The conflict produces a disparate psychological condition which Festinger called dissonance. The dissonance then induces some movement, either physical or cognitive, to reduce the conflict (Fointiat, 2011). These feelings of dissonance compromise a person's sense of self-reliance and self-harmony (Stapel & van der Linde, 2011). Matthey and Regner (2010) offered that it is this feeling of dissonance that explains the driving force or motivation for a person to either change their position physically or cognitively as the person attempts to avoid the adverse sensation of dissonance.

As stated previously, Festinger (1956) offered five distinct criteria which set up a cognitive dissonant situation. First, the person must hold a strong conviction about an issue, for example, the notion that the sky is blue. Second, the person must have spoken publicly about the strongly held conviction. Suppose, for example, a child asks his teacher about the color of the sky. The teacher confidently responds that the sky is blue. Third, there must be evidence to the contrary. To continue along with the same example, the child responds to the teacher that the sky doesn't look blue. "The sky is purple," announces the child. Knowing the sky should be blue, the teacher looks out the window and observes the color of the sky indeed has a purple tint. The following illustrates the fourth criteria – disconfirmation of the conviction. The teacher can see with his or her own eyes the sky looks purplish. Despite the evidence to the contrary, however, the teacher continues to declare the sky is blue. The teacher may even defend this position by explaining away the purple color. When the teacher can see the sky looks purplish but continues to defend his or her original answer, that the sky is blue, it meets Festinger's final criteria for CD, that is, defending a position with social support.

The dissonance experienced by the teacher in our example occurs because the sky is not the usual or normal blue color. The teacher then has to either change cognitions and admit the sky is purple or explain away the color to hold firm in the first conviction of the sky being blue. CD forces physical or, in this case, cognitive movement.

Empirical Studies

As discussed in the first chapter of this research effort, Festinger (1956) conducted a study of a religious group. The group's leaders felt God had given them a date for the end of days (as predicted in the Bible, Matthew 24:29-31). They announced the date they felt had been given them by God and prepared for the second coming of Christ. They held prayer vigils and meetings to encourage others to wait with them for God to return. In the end, though, the world did not end on the predicted date. Christ did not seem to have returned; they had not been catapulted into heaven. Despite this, the group and their leaders maintained that Christ was indeed supposed to have returned on the predicted date. Facing the seeming evidence to the contrary, they began to offer one new caveat. They concluded their prayers had forestalled Christ's second coming. They came to feel that since they were so vigilant and holy God had been merciful and had postponed the end of the world. In this situation, the group's cognitions were changed to decrease the dissonance felt because of the unmet prediction.

Schuck and Liddle (2001) conducted a mixed-methods study of 66 lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) participants regarding their experiences as LGB people with religion. Approximately two-thirds of the respondents experienced some conflict concerning religion and their sexual orientation. The participants relayed their feelings of shame, despair, rejection, and even suicidal thoughts. Schuck and Liddle felt it likely such feelings of hopelessness were derived from doctrinal beliefs, sermons, teachings, interpretations of various scriptures, and co-congregant bias. Participants often conveyed

their difficulty with living openly as LGB people. Schuck and Liddle concluded the experienced dissonance might negatively impact the formation of an LGB person's identity.

Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) had similar findings in their study of 395 lesbian, gay, and questioning youth (mean age 18.45 years). Their results indicated that young people whose faith community was not accepting of homosexuals were more likely to experience internalized homophobia. Of the 395 respondents, 25% of the young men and 39% of the young women left their faith communities because of the religious conflict. These young men and women had significantly lower internalized homophobia scores, but their mental health scores were worse than those who remained in their faith communities. Ream and Savin-Williams concluded that when people remove themselves from a faith community there are likely to be ramifications to their mental well-being.

Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, and Quick (2010) conducted a study of 422 lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants to determine whether or not CD was regularly experienced by LGB people concerning formerly held religious views. They used various standardized tests to determine the existence of CD, internalized homophobia, and tendencies toward feelings of guilt and shame. In addition to the aforementioned quantitative tests, Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, and Quick asked one qualitative question of the participants. They asked each participant to describe their experiences with religion in regard to their sexual orientation. Of the 422 participants, 170 people (40%) relayed that their sexuality had caused them to question their religious beliefs. Seventy-five people

(17%) responded that they had begun to think of themselves as more spiritual rather than religious. Forty-eight people (11%) had totally rejected religion because of their sexuality, and forty-three (10%) conveyed they were struggling to find a compatible religious identity. These responses suggest a great portion of the participants (over 78%) had experienced some form of SCD concerning their religious upbringing and their sexual identity.

Resolution

Musically, dissonant chords may be resolved by altering the chord structure. CD may be resolved by altering cognitions, behavior, or environment. Festinger (1956) suggested that changes in behavior, cognitions, and social environments may alter or dissipate the dissonance one experiences when two or more cognitions or behaviors are in conflict. While a change in behavior may offer some relief from CD, one may ask which behavior should be altered. Should the individual refrain from participating in religious practices? Should the person refrain from behaving in a manner which is contradictory to long-held religious beliefs, that is, alter his or her sexual activity to reflect the doctrine held by the person's non-accepting religious community? Either choice may have a negative impact on the individual.

Mahaffy (1996) suggests rationalization or restructuring of the cognitions may mitigate CD (no matter the subject of the dissonance). Pitt (2010) concluded many who remain in their religious communities rationalize in order to maintain both their sexual and spiritual identities. Pitt's qualitative study specifically targeted African-American

men. Most of the men he spoke with indicated their religious communities were essential

to their existence. They therefore found other ways of coping with the negative messages

they were regularly subjected to in regard to homosexuality. Pitt explains that some men

merely ignored the negative messages from the pulpit. Others attacked the character of

the messenger, e.g. they concluded the pastors had issues also (bad temper, gluttony,

misbehaving children, rumored affairs, etc.). The men then rationalized that the

messenger was flawed, and, therefore, some of the messages said messenger delivered

may also be flawed.

Another way of changing cognitions is to restructure the way a person perceives

the issues. In Mahaffy's 1996 study of 163 self-proclaimed lesbians, she discovered many

were able to cope with the dissonance experienced between religious beliefs and sexual

identity by altering the say they interpreted challenging scriptural texts. As we discussed

earlier, many religious organizations cite the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah

(Genesis 19:1-29) as an illustration of how God punishes homosexuals. Religious

teachers have often proclaimed that God destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah

because the men in the town of Sodom demanded Lot surrender his guests to the

townsmen, so they could have sexual relations with them. Similarly, the Leviticus

scriptures (Leviticus 18:21-23) have often been used to condemn homosexuality.

Restructuring how one perceives these condemning scriptures may be a key to

successfully diminish SCD. Those religious organizations which are open and affirming

to LGBTQQ people encourage congregants to consider the cultural and societal norms,

ethnic and religious backgrounds, and the educational levels of those for whom the

scriptures were originally written (Yarber, 2012). When the background staging of the

scriptures is presented, the congregant is more able to restructure those previously

condemning passages cognitively so that their meaning is less about homosexuality and

more about how a small, specific cultural group was required to behave in order to

increase its numbers and grow as a society (Yarber). Mahaffy noted that several

participants in her study had chosen to relate to God or their higher power as a loving

entity and unlikely to punish people for being non-heterosexual. Other participants

believed the Bible was written by men, not necessarily by divine inspiration, and was,

therefore, fallible.

Finally, Festinger (1956) suggests a person should change his or her environment

to mitigate CD. Indeed, Ream and Savin-Williams' 2005 study revealed that nearly one

third of their participants had left their former religious communities to mollify the

dissonance experienced. Leaving their religious communities also helped lower the sense

of anxiety resulting from the conflict between their sexual identities and religious beliefs.

McCann and Prentice (1981) claimed that one must face a counteractive experience and

subsequent cognitive reorganization to alleviate CD. In other words, leaving the non-

accepting faith community might be the only step available to some which will lessen the

dissonance they are experiencing.

Religion

The word "religion" is perceived differently from person to person. Zinbauer and Pargament (2005), however, offer an excellent description. They characterize religion as an organized collective search for the holy or sacred. Accordingly, this definition includes the individual's personal journey toward a relationship with a deity or higher power along with the beliefs of those within the same faith community. The faith community brings in the communal rituals associated with the overarching faith organization to which the community belongs (Barbosa, Torres, & Khan, 2010). Morrow (2003) takes the definition of religion a step further offering that it is a social institution which, by definition, represents standards and mechanisms that shape behavioral and societal norms. He suggests that religion, as a social institution, substantially contributes to extensive moral concepts including ideals concerning gender and sexual constructs.

The concepts of religion and spirituality differ in their influence and scope. Religion tends to engender an institutional level of worship, and spirituality brings to mind a more personal relationship with the diving (Halkitis et al., 2009). One might see religion as a corporate level of worship and spirituality as individual worship. Religion seems to have a great influence on individuals, as well as communities of people; it is the outward demonstration of the sacred. Spirituality, then, is a personal internal expression of a person's faith (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Religion and LGBTQQ people. Despite the likelihood of heterosexist, conservative teaching causing harm to LGBTQQ people, study after study indicates

spiritual and religious involvement can be helpful to LGBTQQ individuals. When the spiritual teachings do not condemn the LGBTQQ person, an overall improvement of the individual's outlook on life is likely.

Importance of religion. Dahl and Galliher (2009) estimated approximately ninety percent of the United States adult population and sixty percent of U.S. teenagers consider religion to be an integral part of their lives. Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) asserted that over two-thirds of all U.S. citizens are members of either a church or synagogue. About sixty percent of the population considers faith to be significant in their daily lives. It would appear that the places of worship and religion hold a great deal of sway over an individual's development both cognitively and even physiologically (Sherkat, 2002). Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier report a positive relationship between spirituality and psychological well-being; it can help with depression reduction and increase a person's overall optimism during periods of anxiety. Religion and/or spirituality have also been linked to disease prevention (Powell et al., 2003). Tan (2005) offers that LGBTQQ people would especially benefit from religious or spiritual affiliation as they regularly encounter oppression. Powell et al., posited having a faith community mitigates the malevolence one might encounter as an LGBTQQ person.

Tan (2005) studied 93 highly spiritual lesbian and gay individuals. He determined that spiritual well-being could be broken down into sub-construct: religious well-being or how a person relates to a perceived deity, and existential well-being, that is, a person's sense of purpose and/or life satisfaction. Further, and contrary to the majority of

conservative religious rhetoric, Tan's study revealed LGBTQQ people are not spiritually impoverished. Participants in Tan's study lived abundantly rich spiritual lives. Rodriguez (2010) concurred. In his study, Rodriguez observed LGBTQQ people are indeed spiritual and faithful people and not simply sexual beings. Tan concluded that having both spiritual well-being and existential well-being will positively contribute to an individual's overall welfare.

It is no surprise then that a lack of support from a religious community can have a negative physiological and/or psychological impact. When a religious organization demonstrates intolerance toward individuals or groups of people, it tends to influence congregants to behave in a biased or bigoted manner. History is rife with examples of physical harm done in the name of religion: the holy wars, the Spanish Inquisition, the conflict between Catholics and Protestants, etc. Even if a person is not physically harmed, a lack of support can affect the person's outlook on life and could damage his or her opportunities to grow and flourish (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). As previously noted, Dahl and Galliher (2009) report all but a few of the 2,500 religious organizations within the United States view homosexuality as immoral. This stance can cause non-heterosexual people to feel marginalized and disenchanted with organized religion.

LGBTQQ experiences with organized religion. In researching the literature related to this undertaking a preponderance of evidence revealing a negative relationship between LGBTQQ people and organized religion. With few exceptions most of the data

exposed prejudice, bigotry, and marginalization of LGBTQQ individuals by conservative religious leaders and congregations. Even when LGBTQQ people have been tolerated within a denomination, they are often denied opportunities to serve as leaders or to minister within the church (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). Whether or not a religious group publicly declares homosexuality to be immoral, homo-negativity may be projected. When there is a lack of participation opportunities, or if most activities offered are geared toward heterosexual couples, LGBTQQ members may feel isolated neglected (Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). In Halkitis et al.'s study of 498 lesbian and gay people most of the respondents viewed religion and faith communities as adverse environments full of conflict. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) found LGBTQQ spiritual development to be compromised by conflicting philosophies and doctrines. The religious communities that view homosexuality as immoral tend to communicate negative, condemning teachings to their congregants. When this occurs, LGBTQQ congregants likely feel isolated. Further, families and friends of LGBTQQ people may feel as if they should reduce or cut off communications with the LGBTQQ person because of his or her predilections. This is frequently termed "tough love," and is often encouraged by conservative religious leaders. This may place LGBTQQ people in a double jeopardy situation. If they live openly as LGBTQQ individuals, they risk losing their family and friends, their church, and their social base. If they hide their sexual identity, they are living a lie. There is no healthy choice available under such circumstances (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter).

Macaulay (2010) relayed his personal experience with organized religion. His denomination proclaimed homosexuality to be demonic. The religious leaders told him if he prayed passionately and believed he would be delivered from his sinful nature. Macaulay vilified himself and saw himself as wicked and immoral. He believed he was unacceptable to God and not worthy of living. Morrow (2003) suggests that evangelical denominations tend to view homosexuality as immoral more than other doctrinal sects. In fact, evangelical denominations tend to take a narrower view on most issues. Morrow expressed concern for those LGBTQQ people who have been brought up in evangelical religious environments as their sexual identity would be considered the antithesis of the conservative ethic. Yip (1997) cites a letter of Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons from 1986 in which the author describes the homosexual person as being predisposed toward an innate depravity and that this predilection should be viewed as an intentional condition. The missive goes on to claim that homosexuality is a self-indulgent behavior, incapable of generating life, and to be contrary to God's design for the human race.

Comstock and Henking (1997) oppose Tan's 2005 study by proposing that LGBTQQ people and religious people have nothing in common whatsoever. Wilcox' 2006 literature review noted very few positive references in regard to relationships between LGBTQQ people and organized religion. The majority of her research yielded only negative reflections upon most organized religious entities. Many of the articles she reviewed declared organized religion to be stifling, overbearing, and heterosexist. Mahaffy's 1996 study indicated that most respondents, whether or not they attended a

place of worship, often experienced a divergence between their sexual inclination and their spiritual convictions. Schuck and Liddle (2001) believed the origins of this type of conflict stems from homo-negative teachings and interpretations of biblical passages. Their sixty-six respondents reported feelings of guilt and shame, homo-negative environments, and fear of exposure. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) stated organized religion hampers the LGBTQQ individual's opportunities to identify as such and, therefore, impairs the LGBTQQ person's psychological health.

Prejudice. Newman conducted a study of attitudes toward non-heterosexual people among 2,846 college students in 2002. He wanted to see how gender and religious upbringing affected participants' views toward LGBTQQ people. Newman found that heterosexual males tended to express more negativity toward LGBTQQ people than heterosexual females. It was also discovered that those who considered themselves to be members of conservative Christian religions tended to be more disparaging toward LGBTQQ people than those members of other religious affiliations. Those who claimed no religious affiliation or who were Jewish were relatively positive toward members of the LGBTQQ communities while liberal Protestants tended to be more or less tolerant of non-heterosexuals.

Ford, Brignall, VanValey, and Macaluso (2009) conducted two correlational studies which explored participants' levels of prejudice in regard to LGBTQQ people in respect to their religious affiliations. Their hypothesis was that an internalized orthodox Christian faith would inhibit prejudicial attitudes toward LGBTQQ people in that biblical

teachings reflect a moral obligation to respect and hold sacred all life. They found that their hypothesis was correct, if one controlled for religious fundamentalism (RF) and right-wing authoritarianism (RWA). The study revealed that when an individual adheres strongly to religious tenets and holds these creeds as moral standards, he or she will become intolerant of prejudice. The commandment to love one another is so highly esteemed that the person will be repulsed by injurious behaviors and will likely be repulsed and feel shame or remorse when acting in such a manner. In other words, the individual's internalized convictions would compel the person to act in a less prejudicial fashion.

Despite the positive correlation between internalized moral convictions and prejudicial behavior, Ford, Brignall, VanValey, and Macaluso (2009) found RF to be predictive of a greater likelihood of deleterious actions. When participants indicated a strong conviction to observe key elements of their conservative doctrine, there was a positive relationship between discriminatory viewpoints toward LGBTQQ people and other, differing groups of people. This was the case not only with fundamental Christians, but with members of the Jewish, Islamic, and Hindu faiths as well. Brignall, VanValey, and Macaluso believed their findings reveal potentially significant data to facilitate the reduction of prejudice. Adherence to traditional values within most religions correlates positively with tolerance and non-prejudicial behavior toward LGBTQQ people and other marginalized communities. Further, when RWA is minimized, prejudicial behavior will likely diminish.

Rejection. Though prejudicial treatment of LGBTQQ people may be minimized by the internalization of orthodox faith tenets, it does not prevent the believer from perceiving homosexuality as being immoral (Ford Brignall, VanValey, & Macaluso, 2009). The issue of immorality may cause conservative religious people to ostracize or reject LGBTQQ people, even when they do not present outwardly as prejudiced. There is a belief among many Christian community members that one should not hate the sinner. One should love the sinner and hate the sin. Thus, the conservative religious person can effectively reject the LGBTQQ person due to what he or she perceives as a lifestyle transgression. They will welcome an LGBTQQ person, but not quite accept what is deemed to be the "sin" of the LGBTQQ person (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). Maher (2006) offered that LGBTQQ people who do not openly identify as such tend to be more accepted in even the most conservative of religious communities. Often, however if an LGBTQQ congregant begins to identify as non-heterosexual, he or she is rejected or ignored and eventually, may leave his or her place of worship for lack of communal support (Maher).

Interestingly, LGBTQQ people have a tendency to reject fellow LGBTQQ individuals who consider themselves to be religious. Maher's 2006 study of gay religious groups across the United States revealed a division within the LGBTQQ community concerning religion. He found that many LGBTQQ Christians believed it was more challenging to disclose their faith to fellow LGBTQQ community members than it was to divulge their sexual identities within their Christian community.

Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance

Cognitive Dissonance Theory greatly informs this research in that it explains a motivation for correcting the cognitive discord experienced when one behavior or cognition is in conflict with another learned behavior or cognition. However, this does not explain the complex thought processes and emotions experienced by LGBTQQ people with respect to experiences they have had within organized religions. Kuran (1998) stated the obligatory embrace of long-held standards which are in conflict with sexual preferences is moral dissonance. This term might serve better to describe the divergence of cognitions and mores, but it does not address the actual clash between deeply embraced religious values and a person's behavioral or cognitive reality. An argument can be made that no one term can completely describe such a condition just as there is no one theory of motivation that describes its associated reaction. For the purpose of this research, however, the term SCD will be utilized to describe the conflict ascribed hereto. SCD is inclusive of the concept of organized religion and its effect upon LGBTQQ individual's cognitions.

Definition

SCD will herein be defined as the internal cognitive conflict which presents in relation to long-held religious beliefs which differ from practiced behavior or cognitions. SCD directly refers to the discord experienced when one thinks or behaves in a manner that is contrary to the religious teachings and beliefs he or she has maintained throughout his or her lifetime. Mahaffy (1996) refers to this type of dissonance when he suggests that

a pre-existing evangelical identity may predict internal dissonance for an LGBTQQ individual. Mahaffy believed such an affiliation was more likely because of the evangelical belief that homosexuality is inherently wicked. The participants in Mahaffy's study seemed to have embraced the religion's conservative scriptural interpretations which exacerbated the tension between their spiritual self and their sexual orientation. Wollschleger and Beach (2011) offer that if one continues to behave in a manner which conflicts with his or her religious beliefs despite behaving in an oppositional manner it could be tantamount to hypocrisy. Hypocrisy, though, is not without cost and the tension that results therefrom may lead not only to discomfort, but possibly cause psychological torment and physiological damages as well.

Empirical Studies

As previously mentioned, Festinger's 1956 study of the Messianic religious congregants and their response to dissonant data were, to some degree, comparable to SCD. However, Festinger was researching the concept of holding onto a belief despite data which may be contradictory. While the subjects being interviewed were part of a religious organization, Festinger did not appear to be testing religious beliefs as they related to conflicting behavior. The research conducted by Festinger informs this project but does not identity SCD in and of itself.

Sherkat (2002) conducted a survey to determine who would be more likely to sever religious ties with organized religion as a whole: male heterosexuals, female heterosexuals, gay men, lesbian women, or bisexual individuals. His study was conducted

utilizing the General Social Surveys (GSS) from 1991 – 2000. The GSS questions asked about partners, that is, whether the person's life partner was of the same or opposite sex. It also requested information about the participants' religious affiliations. Sherkat concluded that lesbians and bisexual individuals were more likely to several religious ties. Gay men, on the other hand, participated in religious services more often than heterosexual women. This conclusion is somewhat surprising as women tend to be more regular church attendees than men in most religious affiliations. Sherkat's study is helpful regarding the potential involvement of LGBTQQ people with organized religion. It does not, however, specifically study the dissonance LGBTQQ people may experience due to religious affiliations.

Dahl and Galliher (2009) studied 105 lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning individuals between the ages of 18-24 to ascertain the likelihood that participants' sexual and religious identities would be integrated. One hundred of the participants disclosed their sexual orientation. Of those, 61% reported some degree of perceived conflict concerning their religious identity. Nearly one-third of those who reported some degree of conflict noted there was significant to extreme conflict being experienced between the two identities. Dahl and Galliher's study offers many insights into the dissonance experienced when trying to integrate religious and LGBTQQ identities. They reported that those participants who experienced more intense religious conflict assessed the process of self-identifying as LGBTQQ as more arduous than those participants who experienced less religious discord.

Similarly, Schuck and Liddle's 2001 study of 66 lesbian, gay, and bisexual people produced data reflecting a correlation between being openly homosexual and religious friction. Two-thirds of the women and men who participated in Schuck and Liddle's study indicated it was more difficult for them to live openly as LGB if they were formerly associated with conservative religion. This was not limited to religious affiliations; they found every function of life was affected by their former religious affiliation. Further, Schuck and Liddle found that the more conflict the participants had experienced with religious imperatives, the more likely the person waited until later in life to openly identify as LGB. The participants reported feelings of depression associated with the conflict between their sexual and religious identities. Most felt guilty or shameful, and some had suicidal thoughts. Participants reported they had either left their former places of worship or religion completely to ease the dissonance they were experiencing. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) noted that this type of cognitive suffering commonly compels the LGB person to make a choice between religion and their personal psychological well-being.

While none of these studies termed the discord experienced by participants as SCD, the conflict is noted as stemming directly from religious and sexual identities. The term, "spiritual," as defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2015), refers to something which relates to or affects the spirit or soul of an individual or concern for religious matters. While CD explains the discord, a person might feel when faced with two or more cognitions or actions, it does not adequately convey the spiritual aspect of

the condition described herein. These feelings of conflict are directly related to how a

person responds to religious tenets when their personal beliefs are divergent. SCD could

be applied to any dissonant cognitions or actions when they are directly connected with

long-held religious beliefs. If a person is behaving in a manner that is inconsistent with

his or her religious principles, the individual will likely experience SCD, whether or not

the issue revolves around sexual identity. For example, one might believe that killing is

not allowed by religious code. Indeed, the Bible emphatically states, "Thou shalt not kill"

(Exodus 20:13, KJV). Still, soldiers kill enemy soldiers, executions kill convicted

murderers, and police sometimes kill criminals. Depending on a person's faith, any of

these examples could go against the scriptural edict to refrain from killing and could

generate an SCD experience. Some eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism

have sects which mandate that no one should kill anything, including animals, insect,

trees, etc. Mahatma Gandhi was a promoter of *ahimsa* which, translated, means to be

without harm – for any living being, human or otherwise. If one belongs to such a

religious background and kills a cockroach, one might experience SCD to some degree or

another.

Symptoms

As it relates to this research, symptoms of SCD include anxiety (Rodriguez,

2010), guilt and humiliation, as well as severe emotional complaints such as depression,

self-disdain, and suicidal ideations (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Many believe they are no

longer accepted by the clergy and/or other congregants within their places of worship.

They may feel left out or of less value because the majority of the doctrine and teachings focus on heteronormative behavior. Garcia (2008) noted when LGBTQQ people face this type of crisis their moral identities suffer, often leading to a reduction in or a cessation of participation within their places of worship. Heermann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) asserted religious leaders often propagate feelings of shame and self-loathing. This can set up an internalized fear regarding sexual identity, that is, internalized homophobia.

Internalized homophobia. Internalized homophobia occurs when a person fears his or her homosexual identity. Homo-negativity occurs when a person experiences fundamentally negative feelings regarding her or his homosexuality (Heermann, Wiggins, & Rutter, 2007). Lease, Horn, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) suggest that internalized homo-negativity correlates to low self-regard, shame, and a perceived lack of community championship. Those suffering from internalized homophobia often believe they are on their own, without family, friends, and/or deity to help them.

Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) noted that some people may be able to diminish SCD by integrating their sexual and religious identities. Others react to the dissonance by denying their homosexuality or be separating their sexual and religious selves. These individuals may endeavor to be seen as heterosexual, which, in turn, could delay the integration of the two identities and thus impede the development of a genuine sexual preference (Halkitis et al., 2009). Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) found that those participants who reported discord between their spiritual and sexual identities had higher degrees of internalized homophobia than those who did not experience spiritual conflict.

Interestingly enough, Ream and Savin-Williams found that the participants who left their

places of worship to alleviate the conflict often experienced less internalized homophobia

but tended to suffer more psychologically for having given up their religious affiliations.

This indicates a necessity for developing coping mechanisms which integrate the spiritual

and sexual identities especially for those LGBTQQ people with lifelong religious ties.

Resolution. So then how can one manage these feelings of dissonance? From the

literature, we see that simply leaving their places of worship may not resolve the conflict

and might engender a negative psychological impact (Ream & Savin-Williams, 2005).

While some people coped with SCD by leaving religion (Garcia, 2008), Morrow (2003)

reports others keep their religious identities but change places of worship. Many

Christian denominations have small branches which accept and/or welcome LGBTQQ

people. Morrow states that many LGBTQQ people with strong religious ties tend to

frequent these of-shoots of their original denomination to keep a semblance of the

tradition intact. Others leave the denomination, migrating to different types of spiritual

experiences.

If an LGBTQQ person doesn't reject religion or leave his or her place of worship

for a different form of worship, he or she may choose to remain in the original place of

worship and combat SCD in other ways. Yip (1997) suggested the LGBTQQ congregant

who stays in his or her original place of worship will attempt to alleviate the cognitive

distress by addressing the stigma connected to being LGBTQQ or by battling those who

are stigmatizing LGBTQQ people. They may utilize their story to battle the stigma or use

an ontogenetic defense to support the natural development of LGBTQQ tendencies. These types of arguments are used to discredit the Church's stance on homosexuality (Yip).

Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) contend that there are four distinct ways for the self-proclaimed LGBTQQ person to relieve the dissonance experienced between their sexual and religious identities. They agree that one of the first ways someone might alleviate SCD would be to reject their LGBTQQ identity, however, they suggest that the LGBTQQ person might completely reject any remnants of heterosexual identification. They may also compartmentalize their lives so that they present as homosexual in one context and heterosexual in another context. Finally, they might seek to integrate the sexual and spiritual identities.

Altering beliefs. In her study of 163 self-proclaimed lesbians, Mahaffy (1996) discovered that over half of the respondents preferred to stay within their original places of worship, despite the discord they were experiencing between their religious and sexual identities. Pitt (2010) confirms this finding. Pitt suggests that a person who had been affiliated with a particular religion or denomination for a long time may be reticent to leave his or her church community. Wollschleger and Beach (2011) noted that places of worship are not only spiritually stimulating, but they are also socially motivating. Often people hold onto religious affiliations so that they are included in a social group. They may form intense personal relationships with members of the group and would, therefore, be hesitant to abandon these close-knit connections. Despite the negative rhetoric, the

church community or style of worship continues to hold meaning for these individuals. Rather than merely living with the dissonance, participants in Pitt's study altered their spiritual beliefs so that both identities could be merged. Most participants were able to alter their beliefs either through reading about other LGBTQQ religious experiences, through therapy or by discounting specific damning scriptures.

Pitt (2010) suggests that LGBTQQ Christians can remain in their original places of worship by associating with supportive LGBTQQ-affirming religious groups outside of their place of worship, thus shielding themselves from anxiety-provoking messages. By associating with LGBTQQ-affirming religious groups, the LGBTQQ individual can increase his or her knowledge and acquire the tools needed to fight against stigmatizing, derogatory messages. Yip (1997) determined that such battling of the stigma is an excellent approach to changing the way a person views their sexual identity. The LGBTQQ person imports positive beliefs about his or her sexual identity and exports the negative beliefs.

Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter's 1996 study revealed a similar strategy for alleviating CD. Participants relayed they had to go through a restructuring of spiritual beliefs and what it meant to be a gay person. Most participants adopted a theology that was gay-friendly instead of formerly held beliefs. Pitt (2010) found that many LGBTQQ people who attempt to alter their religious or theological beliefs implement more of a critical thinking approach to scriptural interpretation. They contend that those passage which have been used to degrade and persecute LGBTQQ people have been

misinterpreted. They take the stance that culture and time period issues must be considered when interpreting all scripture; one cannot merely accept scripture as infallible for this current period.

Justification/deflection. When, for whatever reason, the LGBTQQ person remains in a homo-negative environment he or she will likely find other ways of coping with the disapproving messages from the pulpit. Yip's 2002 study revealed many LGBTQQ people held the Church, at large, responsible for the destructive theology. They tended to point out how religious entities have erred in their interpretation of scriptures throughout the ages. Slavery, for example, was once condoned by the Church, but today's religious environment condemns the practice.

Frederick Douglass, when speaking against slavery in 1845 to the citizens of Belfast, Ireland showed SCD tendencies concerning church law and the laws of humanity:

> Ladies and gentlemen, one of the most painful duties I have been called on
> to perform in the advocacy of the Abolition of Slavery has been to expose
> the corruption and sinful position of the American churches with regard to
> that question. That was almost the only duty which, when I commenced
> the advocacy of this cause, I felt inclined to shrink from. Really, any
> attempt to expose the inconsistencies of the religious organization of our
> land is the most painful undertaking. I have always looked upon these
> churches as possessing, in a superlative degree, the love of virtue and

justice – the love of humanity – the love of God. I had not supposed that

they were capable of descending to the low and mean act of upholding and

sustaining a system by which … millions of people have been divested of

every right and privilege which they ought to enjoy. (p. 3)

Pitt (2010) found many of the participants in his study criticized a negative focus

on homosexuality which touts it as being a worse transgression than others. Participants

claimed that some pastors condemn homosexuality in order to please their more affluent

congregants. Some participants questioned the Church's authority to establish negative

perspectives considering its history of persecution and war.

Pitt (2010) also noticed that many of his study participants deflected the negative

teachings by focusing on the person delivering the messages. He notes that few people

have a strong theological education with which to debate the authenticity of a pastoral

scripture interpretation. Pitt points out that most people in the United States lack an

educational background which includes studies of the ancient Hebrew, Greek, Latin, and

Aramaic languages. In the absence of education from which one might argue scriptural

interpretation, participants had a tendency to condemn the minister. Participants in Pitt's

study pointed out that their pastors also had moral flaws. They argued that the speakers

are human and are consequently flawed; therefore, so may be the messages they deliver.

They thus diminish the authority of the messenger. Pitt posited that when the messenger

becomes more human, the congregant is free to see the message as more of a guide than

imperative edict and in so doing, they are able to remain within a homo-negative place of worship.

Objective hypocrisy. Wollschleger and Beach (2011) used the term objective hypocrisy to convey the scenario of belonging to a religious group while living in a manner that morally varies from the expectations of said group. Any activity which conflicts with a person's religious objectives would fall into this category, including homosexuality if that is the case. Often LGBTQQ people have negative feelings toward themselves because of living in this state of objective hypocrisy. Subjective hypocrisy would pertain to thoughts and emotions related to suitable behavior. Objective hypocrisy pertains to a person's objective commitment to behave appropriately. The person may believe in the tenets prescribed by the religious body to which he or she belongs, but his or her behavior contradicts the advocated moral and ethical objectives of that body of believers. In effect, the person is cheating on his or her congregation. Wollschleger and Beach suggest that objective hypocrisy is a cogent approach to minimize the costs associated with leaving the place of worship or living openly as an LGBTQQ person. The objective hypocrite lives two lives, behaving secretly as LGBTQQ while living a pious public life.

Wollschleger and Beach (2011) posit there are two categories of objective hypocrisy. There are those who refrain from behaving according to their religious code. Refraining from behaving as expected would be an act of omission. Some people act in a manner that is in direct conflict with their religious code. Purposefully behaving in a

manner that conflicts with a religious code would be an act of commission. When discovered, the LGBTQQ person will often be shunned or rejected by his or her fellow congregants. The group often perceives the hypocritical behavior as an indication of the member's disregard for their place of worship and ethical codes, and even as disrespectful of fellow congregants. Wallschleger and Beach suggest this may cause the other group members to lose confidence in the LGBTQQ person. In turn, the LGBTQQ person may find they are rejected and disrespected and eventually this state could result in a departure from the group, the place of worship, the denomination, and possibly even religion altogether.

Intervention

There are some religious groups which advocate intervention as a way to set the LGBTQQ person back on his or her right path of righteousness. The theory behind intervention strategies is that the LGBTQQ person can regain his or her heterosexuality or heteronormative behavior through various curative methods. Some groups advocate counseling or group therapy; others believe the LGBTQQ person is possessed and must be exorcized to recover. The premise behind all interventions is to change the LGBTQQ person so that he or she conforms to heteronormative society mores.

Sexual reorientation therapy. Several LGBTQQ people have participated in sexual reorientation therapy (SRT) programs in order to change (rather than accept) their homosexual proclivities. The jury is still out when it comes to SRT. Several groups report high success rates of reorienting same-gender attracted people toward opposite-gender

attraction. I found no empirical studies documenting the viability of such programs to date. The evidence presented by SRT program directors is debatable; evidence to corroborate their claims has yet to be properly documented. There are those who choose to live a heterosexual life, despite their attractions to members of the same gender for a variety of reasons. Often one chooses to live as a straight person to maintain a "normal" family. He or she may wish to frequent the same type of church in which he or she grew up. Living as openly LGBTQQ might engender stress, especially when dealing with friends and family members who don't approve of non-heterosexual behavior.

Maccio conducted a study in 2010 of 263 LGBTQQ people, 52 of whom had participated in an SRT. The other two hundred and eleven participants had not been through any SRT program at the time of Maccio's study. She notes that those who had participated in an SRT program were more likely to have received a negative reaction from family and friends when they initially revealed their same-gender attraction. Most of the 52 participants who had entered an SRT program had done so in order to preserve religious and social incentives. Others participated in the programs to please family or peers. Those who indicated a strong tie to fundamental or conservative religions often expressed their desire to alter their sexual identity to avoid losing spiritual, religious, familial, and social rewards. Maccio noted that many of the 52 participants who went through an SRT program had done so more than once. Those who completed SRT programs scored lower on the same-gender attraction scale, indicating they were attracted to the opposite gender.

Hadelman (2002) posited that conversion therapy or any other SRT program likely causes more harm than good for participants. Further, Hadelman suggests that such programs devalue LGBTQQ people. When the programs fail to reduce a participant's same-gender attraction, clients often experience a low self-concept and depression. These individuals may withdraw from social activities and often report sexual impotence. Some indicated suicidal ideations and spiritual damage (Maccio, 2010).

Suicide. There are countless stories of LGBTQQ people committing suicide because they could not bear the rejection and stigmatization from family and social groups. Little empirical evidence is found linking suicidal ideations to rejection from religious organizations. Rejection by non-heterosexual pastors, congregants, family members, and former friends, however, take a huge toll on LGBTQQ individuals. The depression experienced by the LGBTQQ person following such rejection is spirit and life threatening. It should be noted that depression is more prevalent within the homosexual population than the heterosexual population (Haas et al., 2011). As previously mentioned, other studies connect depression to religious rejection and stigmatization. It can easily be inferred that rejection from a faith community could contribute to suicidal ideations. Haas et al. noted that both individual and institutional rejection can lead to increased suicidal tendencies. Institutional rejection is a result of laws and policies which discriminate or fail to protect a marginalized group. Faith communities which fail to protect their LGBTQQ members foster homophobic environments thus contributing to the LGBTQQ members' rejection and subsequent depression. Like dominoes, one action begets

another, the results of which can be deadly.

Leaving the church. Many people cannot bring themselves to remain in the same place of worship after they choose to live openly as an LGBTQQ person (Garcia, 2008). An LGBTQQ person might choose to leave the church because he or she is feeling out of place or to avoid the homo-negativity being communicated by the staff or fellow congregants (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Outside factors may contribute to a person's decision to leave a place of worship or denomination. Sherkat (2002) posits social situations may impact such a decision. This might include association with non-religious people or less regular church attendees. Alternatively, if family members or friends are regular attendees at a place of worship, and conflict has arisen within these sets of people, the person may elude potential clashes by steering clear of that mutual place of worship.

Mahaffy (1996) found that lesbians tended to withdraw from church attendance more so than their male, gay contemporaries. Sherkat (2002) and Maher's (2006) studies both corroborated this data. Maher points out that many lesbians reported feeling as if male-dominated religions were less in tune with their feministic progress. This is contrary to most heterosexual church attendees; heterosexual males have a greater tendency to leave religious organizations than heterosexual women (Newman, 2002).

Wollschleger and Beach (2011) offer another reason LGBTQQ people may leave their places of worship. They posit that negative public stigmatization of members may offset any positive benefits of continuing with the group. LGBTQQ people may also step away from former congregational associations when the message from the pulpit consists

of a one-way theology. Congregations which stress a solitary path to communicating with the divine will often alienate some of their members (Wollschleger & Beach). If one is told they are unworthy of God's love and grace, he or she will likely abandon the place of worship to seek other, less punitive spiritual outlets.

Identity Integration

The most proven method used to diminish SCD seems to be a more holistic endeavor. Individuals who manage to integrate both their spiritual and sexual identities tend to fare better than those who do not. Garcia (2008) reported this journey to integrate identities may be a lifelong endeavor. The LGBTQQ person must first recognize the hetero-normative conditioning he or she has experienced for likely the better part of his or her life. Then the LGBTQQ person has to unlearn this conditioning. Next the LGBTQQ person must recognize and unlearn the stereotypes inherently linked with being homosexual, bisexual or transgendered. As Yip (1997) points out, people have the ability to overcome their social labels. Positive influences in a person's life can greatly improve the chances of surmounting the negative stereotypes with which the person has become associated. This might be one of the hardest steps in that many of the concepts associated with homosexuality are stereotypical. For instance, gay men are expected to behave in an effeminate manner; more masculine behavior is expected of lesbians, etc. These labels, themselves, may contribute to dissonance as the person may not fit the stereotype given to his or her sexual identity. Following the breaking down of stereotypes, a person must learn what it means to be LGBTQQ. Garcia suggests this is

the step that takes the longest because it requires restructuring relationships and identity

disclosure as a self-aware LGBTQQ person.

Dahl and Galliher (2009) suggest religious and theological tension will likely

deter an individual from integrating spiritual and sexual identities. They posit that more

affirming spiritual environments should be sought out to facilitate growth and transition.

Maher (2006) recommended affiliation with groups such the United Federation of

Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC) which was founded by Reverent Troy

Perry in response to the spiritual need he perceived within the LGBTQQ community. The

UFMCC is specifically geared to meet the spiritual needs of non-heterosexuals although

they welcome heterosexuals in their congregations as well. Maher believed that such

religious groups took spirituality from being a negative, threatening experience for

LGBTQQ people to a more positive and healing condition. Rodriguez (2010) pointed out

that membership in affirming religious organizations (UFMCC, Good News, Quest, etc.)

can assist the LGBTQQ person in processing his or her self-portrait. These groups tend to

acknowledge a person's sexual and spiritual identities as important characteristics of the

individual's self-concept. Of course, overcoming SCD depends on the individual.

Mahaffy (1996) argued that overcoming dissonance is directly associated with the

LGBTQQ individual's personal strength and religious strength. Dissonance may hinder

the successful integration of these two personality phases.

Self-affirmation is another method used to assist in reducing SCD. Steele and Liu

(1993) suggest self-affirmation benefits a person in various ways. Not only does it reduce

potential dissonance, but it also allows a person to overcome prejudicial threats, increase self-confidence, manage fear, and it increases the ability to fight against self-deprecation. Steel and Liu noted that self-affirmation alone will not repair an individual's self-concept. They posit that value and attribute affirmation are likely just as important to an individual's overall self-portrait. Value affirmation is the act of emphasizing what is important to an individual. Attribute affirmation accentuates a person's superior traits. Steele and Liu suggested that value affirmation may be highly successful in cushioning against dissonance pressure while attribute affirmation can deflect negative self-assessments. Steele and Liu tested their hypotheses and discovered that when participants' values were affirmed, they generally were less troubled by dissonance. They determined that when a person has a strong self-concept and a firm understanding of who he or she is and what he or she values, the need to react to dissonance threats decreases. Further, if an individual's feelings of self-worth are clear and sound the likelihood of dissonance heavily impacting the person is diminished. Mahaffy (1996), and also Steel and Liu (1993) concluded the key to riding the waves of dissonance is being self-aware and having a firm concept of core values, beliefs, and standards.

Tan's 2005 study offered similar findings. When analyzed, Tan's data revealed that a person's well-being significantly forecasted his or her self-concept, the likelihood of internalized homophobia, and the potential for feeling alienated. Tan believed the data indicated that well-adjusted individuals who possess a strong sense of purpose feel as if

their lives have meaning; those who view themselves as ethical beings tend to be psychologically healthy.

Empowerment

Empowerment refers to improving wellness and pinpointing strengths (Rodriguez, 2010). Instead of trying to fix a problem, the person focuses on strengthening his or her well-being. Rather than casting blame, empowerment seeks to recognize potential. Rodriguez noted that empowered agencies inspire growth of the group as well as health for the individual. They engender opportunities for involvement and foster a strong community outlook. Empowered leaders are accessible and dedicated to both individuals and the organization as a whole. Casting that same light on the LGBTQQ individual one could say that an LGBTQQ person who is inspired to grow, who is involved, who has a strong sense of community, and who is dedicated to inspiring others is empowered. These individuals will more likely have not only an inward focus but will also desire to contribute to wellness for the group as a whole. By focusing both inward and outward, the person is more likely to develop connections and relationships that will foster continued growth and well-being. According to Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier (2005) such personal and/or spiritual development is associated with greater psychological welfare.

Education

As Garcia (2008) suggested, LGBTQQ people must unlearn stereotypes and re-learn what it means to be gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. Education would seem

to be a primary objective in reducing SCD. LGBTQQ people must educate themselves about who they are and discover what they believe spiritually. Religious organizations that wish to affirm and welcome LGBTQQ members must also educate their congregations along these same lines.

Reverend S. Yarber, a clergy member of the UFMCC, designed a program entitled "Recovering from Homophobic Religions." The curriculum offers new definitions for ancient biblical terms, alternative interpretations of biblical scriptures, and explanations of cultural and period settings for various passages within the Bible. This educational effort refocuses the participant's view of biblical tenets and practices. The point of the program is to offer participants a different experience with biblical scripture. Reverend Yarber (2012) reports that many of the participants in the classes have been previously harmed by the traditional interpretation of some biblical passages. As discussed earlier, many scriptures have been used to condemn LGBTQQ people to hell if they do not repent and refrain from homosexual behavior.

Reverend Yarber (2011) contended that both the era in which the scriptures were originally written and the culture to which the scriptures spoke should be considered when reviewing biblical passages. A person must recognize how these factors come into play when reading the Bible. Reverend Yarber further suggested that the deeper meaning of words utilized in biblical passages must be considered. Ancient Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic words do not always translate easily into modern-day languages. It is therefore important to examine the original language used to compose the writings. Yarber

suggested that studying the meanings and concepts conveyed within the original language allows one to see scriptures in a new light. When a person understands the texts, they are likely to be less intimidated by them. Further, it is important to keep an open mind regarding potential references to hypothetical homosexual relationships within the Bible. The Bible may be more accepting of homosexuality than society thinks.

Barbosa, Torres, and Khan (2010) developed an intervention course for congregations wanting to become more affirming and accepting of LGBTQQ people. Their program begins with congregants viewing two documentaries about homosexuality and bisexuality. Discussions are held afterward. Congregants discuss the films themselves, along with religious ideology and scriptural interpretations. After the discussion, participants are asked to complete a survey to gage homophobia levels. Overall, participants reported that they found the documentaries to be helpful in their understanding of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

Inveterate SCD

Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) conducted a study to determine if participation in an LGBTQQ affirming religious environment would nurture the integration of spiritual and sexual identities, thus ridding the LGBTQQ person of CD. They found that twenty-five percent of participants were unable to integrate the two personality aspects completely. Schuck and Liddle (2001) concur positing that openly identifying as LGBTQQ is only one step in the process of integration. They suggest that guilt, disgrace, despair, and dismissal can engender psychological scars which remain well after the

conflict has dissolved. Further, they assert that when one loses a faith community, one loses a system of support upon which to call in desperate times. It is a lonely, isolated place which is not easily traversed.

Wilcox (2006) concluded that rejection from religious organizations is connected to internalized oppression. He noted that even if a person regularly attends an LGBTQQ affirming religious organization, he or she will often continue to experience this internalized oppression for very long periods of time. Yip (1997) discovered that sixteen percent of LGBTQQ respondents to his questionnaire still believed the traditional religious arguments which condemn homosexuality. Yip believed this was significant in that it showed the likelihood of the LGBTQQ person facing continuing struggles to reconcile their spiritual and sexual identities. Respondents indicated the journey toward integration can be arduous and Yip concluded some may never achieve reconciliation of these two facets of their personalities.

Summary

After reviewing nearly 250 resources of information, it became clear that the term cognitive dissonance was widely used to express a state of mind which occurs when a person's beliefs clash with the person's behavior. The concept of CD is also termed oppositional psychology disorder (Festinger, 1956.) fMRI scans have been conducted which show how the brain behaves when there is a mental conflict (De Vries, Byrne, & Kehoe, 2015.) The scans revealed the increased neuro activity within the brain when the

subject was prompted to think of dissonant ideas. People who experience CD often feel uncomfortable both psychologically and physiologically.

The literature tells us that spiritual cognitive dissonance is this incongruent thought process that occur when a person's spirituality is not in sync with behaviors. The concept of SCD is supported by various motivational theories, CD empirical data, and by the personal experiences of participants in multiple research studies. The research shows that LGBTQQ individuals are highly susceptible to SCD as many were raised in conservative religious homes. SCD sufferers are more likely to alter their religious beliefs, change their places of worship, or leave the church altogether once they begin to live openly as LGBTQQ people. SCD is exhausting, even when the person who has the condition is not LGBTQQ. When the scenario factors in the non-heterosexual behavior in a heteronormative world, the task of overcoming SCD is exponentially greater.

The literature points out how the LGBTQQ person must adapt his or her mind, basically from the inside outward. The first step in overcoming SCD is to learn to accept what the person's beliefs are, what is dissonant with those beliefs, and then to come to a sort of integration of beliefs and behaviors. It is a process.

The literature points out that the likely consequences of not resolving SCD can range from a general uncomfortable feeling to suicidal ideations. What is less likely is that the LGBTQQ person understands what he or she is experiencing and further, that even if understood, he or she would be able to take the necessary steps to reduce the SCD.

In Chapter 3, I outlined the methodology utilized in this study for exploring SCD. The processes by which I measured its occurrence within the research sample are described. The population is explored as well as the data collection systems. The research design is detailed, and research questions are honed. All instruments used in this project are reviewed and validated. Finally, issues of trustworthiness are discussed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This research was conducted to document how SCD manifests within the LGBTQQ group as it relates to long-held spiritual beliefs. Information on the sample population, data collecting methods, data analysis processes, and any corresponding correlations are outlined in this chapter. The data is expected to reveal how participants are coping with SCD.

Research Design

This research was phenomenological. I conducted extensive personal interviews to allow participants to speak freely about any SCD experiences they may have had. I explored participants' incidents of SCD in detail and sought to discover a description of how SCD has manifested itself and to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the events. Further, I asked how the person felt during SCD episodes, and what, if anything, helped the participant to cope with those feelings. The guiding central questions being posed would be: how have you experienced SCD? Also, what feelings corresponded with SCD incidents? Notes were taken throughout the interview on nonverbal communications and any paralinguistic manifestations. Following a brief explanation of the research project, the participant was given an informed consent document to complete. In addition to completing the informed consent document, participants were asked to fill out a demographic questionnaire (See Appendix A) to collect information such as gender, sexual identity, sexual preference, religious affiliations, current age, the age one began to

openly live as LGBTQQ (if such a condition exists), the age one knew he or she was

LGBTQQ (if applicable), ethnicity, and region of residence. Following the completion of

the demographic survey, participants were asked to complete four standardized

questionnaires:

- the Preference for Consistency Scale (Appendix B (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995))

- the Internalized Heterosexism Scale (Appendix C (Johnson, Carrico, Chesney, & Morin, 2008))

- the Cognitive Dissonance Inventory (Appendix D (Gino, 2008))

- the Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire (Appendix E (Hodge, 2013)).

The aforementioned surveys served to predict (a) the likelihood of participant

adversity to change; (b) heteronormative tendencies; (c) the participant's ability to

comprehend CD, and (d) collect data on the participant's religious background. These

instruments may provide additional insight into the participants' psychological and

spiritual context. The surveys were brief and did not require extensive analysis. I

reviewed the participants' answers prior to the interviews and used the data to augment

the information gained therefrom.

By definition, a phenomenological study is meant to capture the experiences of

individuals so, that said, experiences may be utilized to achieve a greater understanding

of the phenomena being researched (Lester, 1999). In a phenomenological study, I sought

to describe in detail a phenomenon (Groenewald, 2004). Personal interviews with LGBTQQ people were conducted to examine how SCD manifests in the participants' lives. The questions were open-ended to encourage participants to speak freely and relay their experiences more fully. The questions being asked began with whether or not the person is experiencing or has experienced SCD and continued toward garnering the participant description(s) any such experiences.

Upon gaining permission from the participants, digital recording of the interview began. In addition to the digital recording, hand-written notes were taken as well. Hand-written notes are insufficient to record the depth of the words used by the participant and/or emotions expressed, so if the digital recorder had failed, the interview would have been concluded and rescheduled to another time when the recorder was working properly. This did not occur during the interviews. If the participant had declined to be recorded, the interview would have concluded the interview. However, as stated previously, all participants were chosen based on their experiences and willingness to relay such experiences. No interview was concluded due to recording issues. As the importance of recording interviews was provided at the beginning of a person's participation, there were no instances where a person withheld permission to record.

After the interviews were completed, the interviewer transcribed the conversations and paired the transcriptions with the interview notes. All data were then coded so that references to similar experiences could be found, categorized, and properly reported. Colleagues then read the transcripts for comparison and contrast of codified

information and, upon consensus, a coding standard was adopted for use in categorization of the interview data.

At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed of the purpose of the research project. The participant was also briefed regarding how data would be collected and coded for privacy, and how the data were to be stored so as to maintain the participant's confidentiality. I then then explained the concept of SCD utilizing Festinger's definition of CD and examples of how others have experienced SCD. I endeavored to remain transparent and did not withhold information regarding the goal of the research project. No deception was required as the goal of the study to obtain informed data from the participants.

After a brief explanation of what SCD is with examples, I conducted the interviews utilizing open-ended questions which explored how SCD had manifested in the participants' lives (Appendix G). Finally, participants were provided information regarding local counselors and programs designed to assist people who may be suffering from SCD.

Since the study was phenomenological, the number of participants was limited to no more than ten individuals as recommended by Boyd (2001) and Creswell (1998). A theoretical sampling was utilized so that those chosen to participate will be able to relay experiences related to the concept of SCD. Some participants were selected based on their experience with SCD to create a purposive sampling (Welman & Kruger, 1999). In other words, I specifically sought out LGBTQQ participants who have had or were

currently experiencing cognitive dissonance in regard to religion. This study yielded data from lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and questioning people concerning their experiences with SCD and how it has manifested in their lives.

Role of the Researcher

I have experienced SCD personally. These experiences have spurred my interest in this topic. I grew up in a very conservative church in the Assembly of God denomination. The leaders and congregants exhibited heterosexism. I remember well how members of the church reacted when a good friend of mine revealed his homosexual proclivity. He was glared at, talked about, made fun of, excluded, and shunned. This young man had grown up in the church and in a matter of weeks was ostracized by the same people who had cheered at each milestone he'd achieved. I remembered this and left my home church when I knew I would begin to live openly as bisexual. I did not want to experience the same type of rejection and vilification that my friend had endured.

I was taught that LGBTQQ people were ungodly. We were taught to love the LGBTQQ people and hate their sin. We prayed for their souls. When my brother revealed he was gay, we all cried. When he and his wife divorced, and he began attending the Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis, members of my immediate family shook our heads and worried for his soul. He would come to family gatherings and sing portions of solos he was planning for upcoming church services and my mother would wince; we all winced. My brother was singing about God's love, but we were sure he was living in sin. It is important to understand that I was raised participating in a conservative

church. More recently, however, I have come to believe that God, in whichever shape or form a person chooses to honor such deity, is more universally accepting and loving.

I currently attend worship services at the Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis (MCCGSL), Missouri. I sought participants from this church community and from the Metropolitan Community Church of Knoxville (MCCK), Tennessee. I did not attend MCCK for very long and did not form close relationships with its congregants, so personal relationship biases were low. While I know more individuals within MCCGSL, I refrained from seeking out personal friends for interview candidates. Should there have been a deficit in finding enough participants from these two congregations, participants would have been sought through LGBTQQ oriented magazines and websites.

LGBTQQ interview participants were selected based on whether or not they believe to have experienced SCD. There may have been some personal bias as I am within this same marginalized group. All personal feelings were kept in check during the interviews so that I did not appear to be overtly sympathetic with the person. Every effort was made to listen without conveying personal information about my experiences and without offering solution. Participants were not led. Each individual had the opportunity to speak more about his or her experiences. The person's comfort level was highly valued. Following the analysis and reporting of data, colleagues reviewed the piece for any bias I may have expressed.

I approached the congregations with an invitation to participate in this research. I offered a definition of SCD to the participants and asked those who believed they had experienced SCD to consider contributing to this study. I explained in greater detail how the research was to be conducted. I provided interested individuals with all the preliminary surveys and questionnaires (the Preference for Consistency Scale, the Internalized Heterosexism Survey, the Cognitive Dissonance Inventory, the Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire, and the SCD Questionnaire). Once the data from these instruments were obtained, I sorted through the potential participants and selected those individuals who indicated they had experienced SCD. I contacted these individuals to set up one-on-one interviews. I conducted a total of eight interviews.

In expressing my encounters with the SCD phenomenon to friends and family members, many have indicated they have had similar feelings. If these discourses are indicators, the likelihood that religious LGBTQQ people are experiencing SCD was high. No argument was made to defend the existence of SCD. The participant either had experienced the phenomenon or had not. I asked for each person to delve into his or her impressions at the moment of dissonance and to describe these feelings. I recorded these interviews digitally and typed out the transcriptions later so that I could compare them for similarities.

Setting and Sample

Data for this study was obtained via personal interviews using a digital recording device and via pen and paper notes. The interviews yielded details of how SCD had manifested within the participants' lives. These interviews were conducted in person, or via Skype connection, depending on availability and location of participants. Skype interviews allowed the participants to remain in their homes or other comfortable environments during the discussion. When face-to-face interviews were held, a neutral location was determined which was convenient and comfortable for both the participant and this researcher. The duration of the interviews was expected to be approximately one to two hours. Participants were given the option to discontinue the interview at any point during the process without malice.

Instrumentation

All data collected were encoded so that a successful pairing of collected pieces could be accomplished. The data collection procedure allowed the participants to elaborate on their specific experiences. In essence, I asked the participants to describe any experiences they had in regard to worship, organized religion, spirituality, and their LGBTQQ status and then inquired as to what they believed may have led to those responses.

Upon completion of the demographic questionnaire, numbers were assigned to the participants' surveys. The participant's name has not been revealed herein. The assigned number was stated on the recording at the beginning of the interview to ensure the

demographic data remained linked to the recorded data. The recording of the interview was done using a digital recording device. The recorded data was then transcribed and coded to categorize the data. Colleagues were asked to review the data analysis to ensure the coding (or bracketing) and categorization was in order.

Interview Protocol

Each interview began with introductions. Following the protocol set down within the consent agreement, I made the participant aware of what was expected to occur during the interview, how long the interview might last, and how much the individual's participation was appreciated. I explained that the interview was being digitally recorded so that I could transcribe the data for evaluation. I asked the person's permission before I began recording.

Each person was given a definition of SCD and an example of a situation wherein SCD might manifest. The person was then asked four questions to guide him or her through the interview process (see Appendix G). When the interview was completed, the participant was thanked and given contact information for local therapists who work specifically with LGBTQQ individuals on their life issues. The person was also asked if he or she would be amenable to being contacted again for clarification purposes.

Data Collection

The data obtained through all questionnaires, surveys, and the final interview were given unique identifying numbers. These numbers were utilized to ensure all data was properly grouped together. No personal names were recorded by any collection

device. The data collected via Appendix A was purely for demographic purposes.

Appendixes B – F were for pre-interview screening information only. The data collected

thereon was used for the sole purpose of determining whether or not the individual had

experienced SCD and under what circumstances that SCD may have manifested.

Interviews were only scheduled with those who had experienced SCD. Data was

collected in regard to actual SCD experiences by way of face-to-face interviews or via

Skype. All data was collected by this researcher. Participants were given two weeks to

complete the pen and paper questionnaires and surveys. Interviews lasted 60-120

minutes.

Exiting the Interview

Upon completion of each interview, I recapped the information shared to confirm

my understanding of the individual's SCD experience(s). I thanked the participant for his

or her time and for taking part in this research project (see Appendix G). I then, again,

relayed that all information would be kept in the strictest confidence. Finally, I asked the

participant if I could call on him or her again to ensure all data was properly collected or

to request additional information, as needed.

Alternate Participant Resources

Had there been a lack of willing participants within the MCCK, MCCGSL, or

other MCC congregations, I planned to contact the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan

Community Churches (the parent organization of all MCC churches) and request

assistance in locating individuals who might partake in the research. I also planned to

publish a request for interviewees in LGBTQQ oriented magazines, such as One 4 All, Metropulse, and The Advocate. Should these avenues had failed to yield enough participants, I planned to ask friends to suggest potential participants for the research. If all these types of leads didn't produce a minimum number of participants, I would have searched for interviewees via the internet on LGBTQQ-focused, on-line publications.

Data Analysis

This study data was analyzed to describe how SCD affects LGBTQQ people. Hycner (1985) suggested a listing of all presuppositions regarding the potential phenomena prior to interviewing participants so that the interviewer is consciously aware of any personal opinions or preconceived notions regarding the research subject. Acknowledging such presuppositions may assist interviewers to refrain from attaching personal feelings and thoughts about the phenomena to the research results. SCD symptomatology was coded to determine pattern similarities. The data answered the following central research question: How does SCD manifest in LGBTQQ people? Participants were specifically chosen based on their belief they have experienced SCD. They were asked open-ended, unstructured questions in an effort to determine how said SCD had manifested in their lives. The questions sought specific manifestations, detailed experiences, circumstances, and the associated feelings that accompanied moments of SCD.

Hycner (1985) likened the coding or bracketing process to entering into the mind and world-view of the person being interviewed. This process was time consuming as

transcripts of all interviews were required. Additionally, my notes regarding the participants' non-verbal communication and other paralinguistic transmissions were included with transcribed data. These data were reviewed meticulously to determine the meaning behind the words and to develop a clear picture of the phenomenon being described by the participant.

Once all interviews were transcribed, coded, and bracketed for meaning, I requested help from colleagues familiar with qualitative research methods to verify the codification and subtexts of the interviews. They reviewed the material to determine if the coding of the data was adequate and to offer suggestions for further bracketing of the material as necessary. Hycner (1985) suggested recordings and transcripts be reviewed multiple times so that non-verbal and paralinguistic cues which offer more meaning than what is merely stated by the participant can be properly noted. With this in mind, I reviewed the transcripts and notes from the interviews repeatedly to determine the "unit(s) of general meaning" (p. 282). These units of general meaning are words, statements, non-verbal communications, gestures, or any part of the communication process when the participant conveys an individualized moment of significance.

After all the data was properly reviewed and coded into units of meaning, I looked for any redundancies and delineated those units of meaning which related directly to the research effort. Units of meaning which are very similar may be clustered together to avoid repetition of ideas and data. The remaining clusters of meaning units represent those ideas, thoughts, words, actions, nuances, and any other types of responses which

are pertinent to the research. Themes from the clusters of meaning were determined, and summaries of each interview were written so that the units of meaning which are relevant to the research were denoted and properly categorized.

Hycner (1985) suggested a second interview, whenever possible, with all participants so that a review of the interview data can be conducted. Participants were offered the opportunity to examine the written interviews to assess whether their stories were captured accurately. Once participants' stories were correct and expressed their thoughts and feelings properly, I was able to move forward to the next phase of the research process. All participants indicated their stories were accurately depicted. All data was then coded for analysis.

It is important to note that both corroboration and negative case discrepant data analysis were to have been conducted. The corroboration analysis was used to triangulate all coded material to link like ideas or themes. There were no discrepant or negative cases to be reviewed. Finally, a composite of all the interviews were written so that the world-view of the participants was represented. This allowed those reviewing the information to catch a glimpse of the phenomena relative to the participants' points of view (Hycner, 1985).

Issues of Trustworthiness

This research project is in vain if the data collected was dubious. Qualitative research, however, is problematic when it comes to proving its reliability. It is, therefore,

of great import that all points of the research be credible, transferable, dependable, and valid. These points contribute to the project's overall trustworthiness.

Credibility

To establish credibility, I used both written documentation and personal interviews to establish the participants' likelihood of truthfulness. The use of questionnaires and surveys built the foundation of the participant's case. When each respondent completed the written record of his or her life experiences as they relate to SCD, it served as a foundation upon which the interview data would rest. Should the two types of data collection have failed to support one another, the credibility of the participant will come into question. Additionally, I requested colleagues review the data, not only for coding and analysis consistencies, but also for establishing the credibility of the data.

Participants' disclosures were key to understanding their SCD experiences. I wanted all interviewees to feel as though they could be candid when relaying SCD events. Participants were told from the outset that this study is for my doctoral dissertation and that I am not affiliated with any company or survey group. They were assured of confidentiality. I also offered the participant the opportunity to discontinue the interview at any time during the discussion. The participants were told that there was no right or wrong answer to the questions being asked of them. Further, I encouraged the participants to be open and honest regarding the telling of their experiences with SCD.

Transferability

The boundaries of this study were set to include only LGBTQQ individuals. The initial questionnaires and surveys collected information directly related to the participants' religious backgrounds, sexual preferences, potential homo-negativity, preferences for remaining within set environments, and likelihood of having experienced some sort of CD. The interviews augmented the surveys and questionnaires by giving the participant an opportunity to voice his or her SCD experiences. This study was open to men, women, and those who do not hold to gender codes. There was no particular age group from which the data was collected.

One field worker was utilized in this study, that is, this researcher. Participants had two weeks to complete all written surveys and questionnaires. If the participant did not return the documentation within said timeframe, he or she would not have been considered for inclusion in the interview portion of data collection. The interviews were held in a mutually agreed upon, non-threatening locations. They were approximately 60-120 minutes in length. These boundaries are listed so that they may be duplicated in future studies.

While the data collected in this research project may transfer to other studies or fields of study, it must be noted that the information herein pertains to the participants' understanding of SCD, their ability to express how it had affected them, and their personal realities. Thus, the study may or may not be transferable but should not be considered any less valid.

Dependability

The steps taken to retrieve all data are meticulously reported in later chapters. All data collected have been documented and encoded for the maximum chance of repetition. It is important to remember, however, that phenomenological studies are merely snapshots of the condition being studied. The viewpoints and perspectives of participants may change, thus skewing results of any future duplication attempts.

The intricate details of how data were collected, coded, and analyzed is set down in later chapters. Reporting of all the minute details of retrieving the interview data are given in future chapter as well. A reflective evaluation of the study will follow the chronicling of all testing and corresponding results. The evaluation of the effectiveness of this study are documented in later chapters.

Validity

To reduce the likelihood of researcher bias, all data was triangulated. It is important to recognize that phenomenological research only studies the named phenomenon. There are many issues which will not be covered within this body of research. All efforts to generate a replicable and credible product have been made. It is hoped that the in-depth description of all methods utilized in extracting the data which inform this project will assist in any scrutinizing of said undertaking. The shortcomings of the method utilized should not be construed to invalidate the findings.

Ethical Procedures

I complied with all ethical guidelines specified by Walden University and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). An IRB approval of this study was issued on August 30, 2017, under approval number 10-14-16-0064345. Again, participants were advised of their confidentiality and informed consent rights prior to their participation in this study.

Information regarding the purpose of the research, the procedures utilized to collect data, and the expected outcomes were conveyed to all participants. An informed consent form and a cover letter were included in the data collection procedure. All signed consent forms are contained within a locked filing cabinet to ensure confidentiality. All data collection devices have been coded, and no personal names or information will be disclosed to any source in an effort to secure participant anonymity. Data collected were viewed by previously mentioned colleagues. All data collected will remain in the locked filing cabinet for approximately 3 years, after which the data will be destroyed by shredding.

Phenomenological research is a qualitative method which delves into deeply personal perspectives (Lester, 1999). As such, it allows the participants' voices to be heard. Collection of phenomenological data may, therefore, be difficult or uncomfortable for both the interviewer and the participant. For this reason, participants were given the opportunity to decline from contributing to the study before the testing began, after the demographic information was collected, and even after the SCD phenomena interview was completed. It is my hope that those who participated will feel as if they have been

properly informed, understand the character of the study, and that any concerns regarding privacy have been removed so that the participant will continue with the research through all three stages, as they apply.

Summary

This body of work is a qualitative, phenomenological study of SCD in LGBTQQ individuals. As such, I relied on those experiencing the phenomenon to relay what had occurred in order to gain a proper perspective of the symptoms associated with SCD within this sample group. To ascertain whether or not volunteering participants were good candidates for this study, each was given written demographic and perception questionnaires and surveys. The written surveys are as follows: a Demographic Data form (Appendix A), the Preference for Consistency Scale (Appendix B), the Internalized Heterosexism Scale (Appendix C), the Cognitive Dissonance Inventory (Appendix D), the Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire (Appendix E), and the SCD Questionnaire (Appendix F). These scales were solely used to determine if the volunteer had experienced SCD. It is hoped the participants provided the background data necessary to reveal the more comprehensive landscapes of their lives. Participants were given two weeks to complete all written materials. Once the written assessments were evaluated by the researcher, interviewees were selected.

Interviews were conducted with eight participants. An interview protocol (Appendix G) was used so that each interviewee was given the same information and guiding questions. The personal interviews lasted approximately 60 – 120 minutes. They

were conducted at mutually agreed upon locations wherein discussions were unhampered. The interviews were digitally recorded, and notes were taken to capture both the spoken and unspoken language nuances. Transcripts of the voice recording were then encoded for proper categorization.

Participants' identities will be held confidential. All participants were assigned a unique identifying number which has been used on all documentation related to that individual. The names and other personal identifying information will be withheld from the documentation to ensure anonymity. All coded information was triangulated to ensure validity. Interviewees were allowed to terminate the discussions at any time during the interview process. They were allowed to decline to answer any of the guiding questions. As part of the interview protocol, each interviewee was reassured of the confidentiality that will be maintained regarding anything said during the discussion. They were told there were no right or wrong answers.

In Chapters 4 and 5, all research data will be presented and conclusions regarding that information will be set down. Coding processes will also be outlined. It is important to remember that phenomenological studies examine a phenomenon and, as such, seek to capture the event as accurately as possible. The phenomenon may be considered a snapshot in both physical and experiential time. The interviewee is describing the snapshot of how he or she perceived the phenomenon. The dependability of these data may be skewed as a participant gains new perspectives during his or her lifetime, such that the data set and study may be replicated with a different outcome.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to form a profile of how LGBTQQ individuals experience SCD. Participants were asked if they had previously or were currently experiencing SCD as an initial touchstone for the interview. The participants were then asked to explain in as much detail as possible their lived experience with SCD, using guided questions. Finally, interviewees were asked how they have managed SCD in their lives. As the participants' stories were presented, recurring themes arose throughout their experiences. These themes were noted and are described herein.

This chapter was written to review and present an analysis of how LGBTQQ people experience SCD, particularly if they were raised in non-affirming religious environments. Data were collected from eight people via interviews. In this chapter, I (a) reiterate the original purpose of the research; (b) detail interview settings and demographic data for each participant; (c) present participant background information; (d) describe the data collection process used in this research; (e) review the codification process and present the essential themes; (f) provide a narrative of the collected phenomenological data; (g) offer evidence of trustworthiness; and (h) summarize all research findings and outline the contents of the next chapter.

Setting

Participants were given a list of surveys and questionnaires to complete prior to scheduling interviews. Most of these questionnaires were e-mailed; one participant

required the paperwork be sent via the U.S. Postal Service. All who were selected to participate completed the surveys and questionnaires in the privacy of their own homes; therefore, each setting was different.

Following the review of each participant's responses to surveys and questionnaires, interviews were scheduled. The setting for each interview obtained during the research differed from interview to interview. Some interviews were conducted at the homes of the participants in a face-to-face manner. One was conducted at a coffee house. The coffee house was noisy and there were several people who wandered in and out of the area where the interview was taking place. The participant was asked if she was comfortable within the given setting and she indicated she was comfortable telling her story in that environment. It was sometimes necessary, however, to have her repeat some of the answers because of background noise. Other interviews were conducted via Skype using computers and webcams. All were recorded using a hand-held digital recorder so that the information could be transcribed afterward. Notes were taken to record the participants' body language and paralinguistic cues. Each participant was asked to give his or her permission prior to being recorded.

Participants

The participant pool was limited to those who responded to a request for research participants via the MCCGSL website and word-of-mouth at MCCK. All participants met the inclusionary criteria. A few individuals voiced a desire to participate but did not meet the LGBTQQ status criteria for this study and were subsequently declined. The median

age of this study's participants was 50. Five of the participants were women between the ages of 45 and 65. Four of the women participants identified as lesbians and one participant identified as questioning. Two participants were gay men, between 33 and 55. One male participant, age 49, considered himself to be bisexual. All eight interviews were conducted using a digital recorder as outlined in Chapter 3. Every participant grew up in a conservative religious environment and their views of religion and belief systems had changed over the years. Seven participants experienced SCD in one form or another. One participant did not originally believe he had experienced SCD but through endeavoring to complete the surveys and questionnaires came to believe he had experienced SCD.

Demographics

The participants of this study ranged in age from 33 to 65. There were five female and three male participants. Six of the participants lived in the St. Louis, Missouri area. One participant was from Knoxville, Tennessee; and one participant was from Jefferson City, Missouri. All eight participants stated they were lesbian, gay, bisexual or questioning. There were no participants who labeled themselves queer or transgender. Every participant grew up in heteronormative families and went to conservative churches during their formative years. Five of the participants are currently in committed relationships.

Table 1
Participant demographics

Classification	Number of participants
Gender	
Male	3
Female	5
Age	
25 – 35	1
36 – 45	1
46 – 55	4
55 and older	2
LGBTQQ Status	
Lesbian	4
Gay	2
Bisexual	1
Transgender	0
Queer	0
Questioning	1

Data Collection

Creswell (1998) suggested that no more than ten participants should be sought out for a phenomenological study. Eight people were interviewed for this study. Following their indication of approval to be recorded, the data from the interview were collected using a digital recorder and later transposed for analysis. Notes were taken to augment the voice recordings with data regarding body language and paralinguistic cues. All paperwork has been saved and is stored per the research protocol of Walden University.

P1's interview took place at her home. There were no distractions during the interview. It lasted approximately 90 minutes and a total of 22 pages were transcribed therefrom.

P2 was interviewed in the lower level of her home. There were other people present in the home, but none were in the lower level, so noise was minimal. The interview took approximately 40 minutes and resulted in a total of 17 transcribed pages.

P3's interview was conducted via Skype as varying schedules did not permit time for a face-to-face meeting. There were no distractions during the interview, and it was approximately 45 minutes in duration; there were 15 transcribed pages.

P4 was interviewed in his home. During the interview, the participant's television was on, but muted. The status of the television was somewhat distracting, but the participant answered all the interview questions in depth. This interview lasted about 70 minutes and a total of 31 transcribed pages were generated.

P5 was interviewed via Skype as she has had some medical issues and could not participate in person. The interview took approximately 60 minutes to complete. There were 28 pages transcribed from this interview.

P6's interview location was at a coffee house. There was significant background noise, such that the interviewer had to ask the participant to repeat a few of the answers. Despite the distractions the participant was able to answer all of the posed questions. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. A total of 29 pages were transcribed from this interview.

P7 was interviewed in her home. There were virtually no distractions during the interview. It lasted approximately 75 minutes. There were 30 transcribed pages.

P8 was interviewed via Skype as he resides in a city several miles from the researcher. The only distractions during the interview were a few notices popping up on the participant's cell phone, but he did not answer any of the incoming messages and stayed on point while giving his answers to the interview questions. The interview was completed in approximately 120 minutes. A total of 42 transcribed pages resulted from this interview.

Table 2
Interview data

Participant	Approximate length of interview	Number of transcribed pages
P1	90 minutes	22
P2	40 minutes	17
P3	45 minutes	15
P4	70 minutes	31
P5	60 minutes	28
P6	45 minutes	29
P7	75 minutes	30
P8	120 minutes	42

Data Analysis

Three common themes became evident through the research (see Figure 1). Fear was, by far, the most common theme revealed. All participants expressed fear when they initially began to live openly as LGBTQQ. All those observed relayed they were afraid of the repercussions they might face for choosing to live openly as LGBTQQ. The second common theme was concern about their spirituality. In other words, having grown up in

conservative Christian homes and having been taught that non-heteronormative behaviors were sinful, the participants agonized with the choice to live their lives authentically. They were anxious about how such a choice might affect their relationship with the divine. Finally, many of the participants struggled with how best to cope with coming out as LGBTQQ. Information regarding the participants' spiritual backgrounds was pulled from the Demographic Data Questionnaire (Appendix A), the Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire (Appendix E), and the SCD Questionnaire (Appendix F).

Concepts and Themes

An inductive reasoning pattern was utilized in the review of participants' questionnaires and surveys, as well as data collected via interviews. There were several commonalities shared by all or most of the participants. The first commonality, and the basis for the first premise in this research, was that each participant had experienced SCD. Although one individual initially believed he had not experienced SCD, it was later determined he likely had. This was a participation requirement and formed the first premise of the of the inductive approach to this body of research. The existence of SCD was a requirement to participate in the study. Participants were given a description of SCD and then made informed decisions as to whether they had experienced the condition. Likelihood of the existing SCD was corroborated through the pre-interview process by way of The Preference for Consistency Scale (Appendix C), and the Internalized Heterosexism Scale (Appendix D). These two instruments predicted, 1) how likely

participants were to embrace change, and 2) how internal conflict between their spiritual self and their sexuality was processed.

The second premise used for data analysis was that all participants formerly attended conservative Christian places of worship. The data supporting this premise were gathered utilizing the Demographics survey (Appendix A), the SCD Questionnaire (Appendix G), and information obtained during the one-on-one interviews (see interview questions on the Interview Protocol Form, Appendix G). The Demographics Survey asked which type of church or place of worship the participant attended during his or her formative years. The SCD Questionnaire added to the body of data by asking participants for more in-depth descriptions of the original places of worship and for data regarding how non-heterosexuality was viewed by those who lead or attended those places of worship.

The third premise, that the observed LGBTQQ participants experienced similarities in their encounters with SCD, was directly informed by the one-to-one personal interviews. The overarching themes of: (a) fear; (b) concerns for their spirituality; and (c) coping mechanisms, were repeated over and over throughout answers given in the surveys and questionnaires submitted by participants, as well as during the personal interviews (See questions posed in Appendices E-H). The conclusion drawn from this information was that all LGBTQQ people from conservative Christian backgrounds, who have experienced SCD, will likely have similar SCD episodes (see

Figure 1). I am not concluding every LGBTQQ individual will have the exact same SCD

manifestation, rather, that the themes of such experiences will likely be similar.
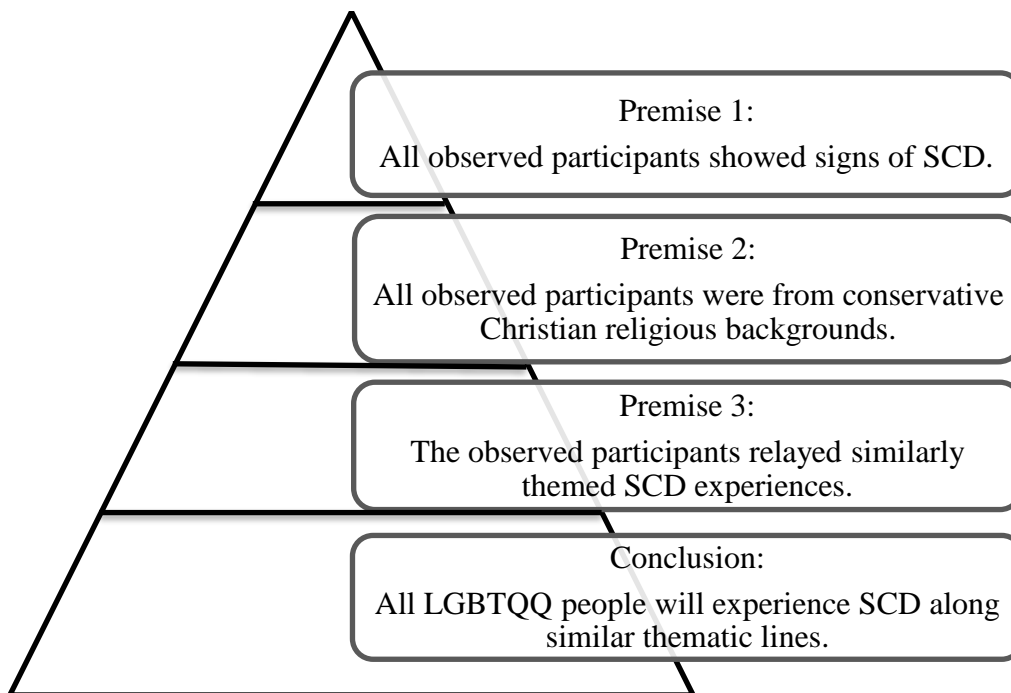
Figure 1. Inductive reasoning behind SCD codes and themes. This figure illustrates how
essential themes were derived from SCD research.

Codification

Codifying the data from this research was a lengthy process. Data from all

questionnaires, surveys, and transcribed interviews were reviewed to determine what

common words or phrases were used by the participants. Participants repeatedly used the

following words and phrases (see Appendix H): "my old church," "rejection," "coming

out," "accepting myself," "marriage," "family," "children," "I don't understand," "God's

love," "what the Bible says," "researched," "beliefs," "hope," "point of view," "wrong,"

"suicide," "this is who I am," "education," "scriptural meaning," "pray away the gay,"

"it's not easy being gay," "shunned," "justification," and "change."

These words or phrases were then assigned codes that would best illustrate similar

words or phrases. The codes are as follows: 1) Does God exist? 2) Why did God make

me this way? 3) Does God love me? 4) Rejection? 5) Left former church, 6) Changed

spiritual beliefs, 7) Justification, 8) What if I'm wrong? 9) Isolation, and 10) Suicidal

ideations. Narrowing the codes into categories yielded three main concepts: God, coping,

and fear. These concepts were then tied to the overarching research topic of SCD (see

Figure 2).
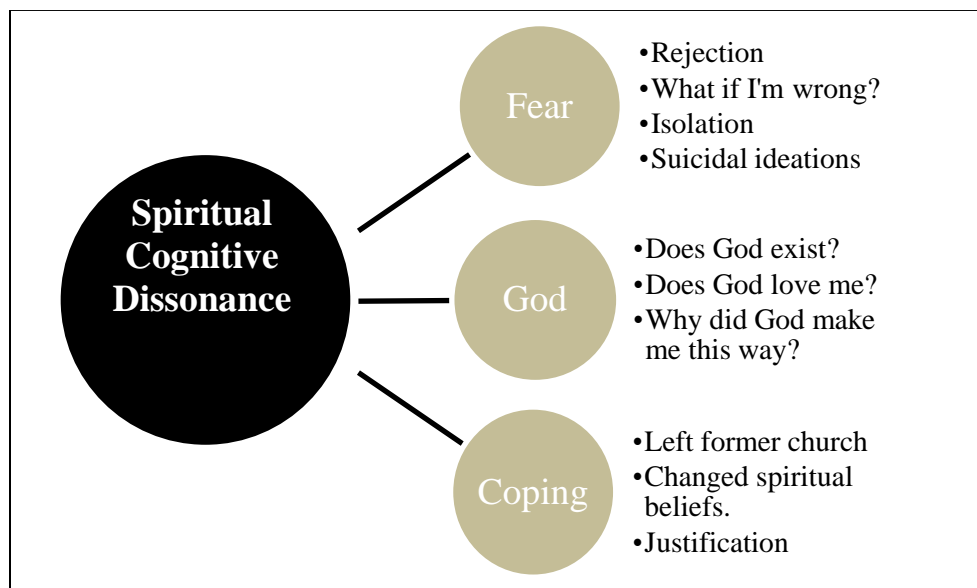
Figure 2. Essential themes tied to SCD. This figure illustrates how essential themes were derived from SCD research.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of this project, I utilized Yin's (2011) data analysis model. Because of the nature of this study, that is, clarifying participants' episodes of SCD, it was determined that individual interviews would best serve the project. Participants were selected based on whether they believed they had experienced SCD and that the tenets of their faith had changed from those learned earlier in life. I requested permission from the leadership of Metropolitan Community Church of Greater St. Louis (MCCGSL) and Metropolitan Community Church of Knoxville (MCCK) to solicit potential participants. Data was then collected via surveys, questionnaires, and interviews with eight participants. Interview data were collected either by face-to-face meetings or via Skype. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder.

The transcripts therefrom were extensively analyzed by this researcher and a panel of 27 peers and colleagues to ensure that proper codification and essential themes were generated. The review panel of 27 was not originally conceived of during the initial stages of this research project. Initially I intended to use the Coding Analysis Toolkit (CAT) to codify the participants' responses with only two colleagues being employed to review the codified data. It was later determined a larger review panel would sufficiently replace the use of the CAT. The review panel were given only codified data. They were not privy to participant personal information as each participant was assigned a numeric code. I was given permission to utilize this review panel by the Walden University Internal Review Board as of April 17, 2018.

Yin (2013) detailed how interviews provide essential information through which we may gain a keen understanding of the evidence. Further, he proposed that phenomenological studies should provide multiple sources of data which can be triangulated to establish credibility. This study utilized surveys, questionnaires, and interviews to gain the necessary data for understanding the phenomena of SCD within the LGBTQQ community. The surveys and questionnaires provided background information for each participant. The data collected via interviews allows for greater understanding of the participant's actual experience with SCD.

Credibility

To establish credibility, I triangulated the information gathered through written answers and interviews. Each participant completed the following surveys and questionnaires: (a) Demographic Data (Appendix A); (b) Preference for Consistency Scale (Appendix B); (c) Internalized Heterosexism Scale (Appendix C); (d) Cognitive Dissonance Inventory (Appendix D); (e) Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire (Appendix E); and (f) the Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance Questionnaire (Appendix F). These data collection tools provided not only background information, but they also revealed a state of mind within each participant toward their LGBTQQ status.

The demographic data showed that all participants had come from a conservative religious background (Catholic, Baptist, Assembly of God, Pentecostal, etc.) The participants who stated they were lesbian or gay, began living openly as such in their twenties to mid-thirties. All participants stated their former places of worship were

unaccepting of LGBTQQ people. Within the Preference for Consistency Scale

participants indicated desires to belong within their social groups and for these groups to

be stable. The Internalized Heterosexism Scale revealed most participants did not wish to

be LGBTQQ. One participant stated, "I wouldn't wish this on anyone. I did not choose

this; it's just who I am." Most were self-critical when they contemplated their LGBTQQ

status.

The Cognitive Dissonance Inventory showed that most of the participants

wondered if they had made the right choices regarding how they are conducting their

lives. The Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire and the Spiritual

Cognitive Dissonance Questionnaire revealed the religious experiences concerning

LGBTQQ status were similar and that there were considerable differences in the ideals of

former places of worship and current places of worship. I believe these surveys and

questionnaires could be administered to other research groups and achieve similar results,

that is, if the participants have been raised in conservative, heteronormative

environments, they are likely to question their decisions to live openly as LGBTQQ from

time to time. They will likely prefer to be perceived as a stable person and are likely to be

self-critical.

Dependability

Data were collected in a manner consistent with the strategies outlined in Chapter

3. All participants completed the written surveys and questionnaires and then participated

in one-on-one interviews. All interviews were recorded on a digital device and then

transcribed for review and coding. All data has been stored in a locked cabinet and will be destroyed after a five-year-time-period. All participants were offered opportunity to be excluded from the study. All participants were informed of their rights and Letters of Consent were collected. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the interview protocols and gained permission from the participant to be recorded. Interview cessation was described and offered to each interviewee.

Except for the differences in the interview methods, that is, Skype versus in person, the interviews were similar. Each interview lasted at least 45 minutes. No interview went beyond 120 minutes. One interview took place in a coffee house, which might have contributed to some lack of understanding because of the distraction of outside noises. All other interviews were conducted while the participant was in his or her home environment. These situations limited outside noise, although, there were some distractions to each environment, that is, children, cell phones, televisions, etc. I acknowledge these slight variations in the interview scenarios.

Confirmability

The data obtained via these research methods offers a snapshot of the participant's experiences with SCD. Should this research be replicated, exact duplication of the results would be impossible. The individuals interviewed had different views of spirituality and experiences with SCD conflicts. The study, however, could be replicated with similar overarching findings. As previously stated, there were similarly conservative religious backgrounds in each case. Those interviewed were self-critical and experienced rejection

from churches, friends, and family. Many questioned if their decision to live openly as LGBTQQ was wrong. These themes could likely be replicated in future research on this topic.

Transferability

The surveys and questionnaires utilized in this study were specifically geared to corroborate the background and mindsets behind the individual interviews (Yin, 2013). It is conceivable that these data collection methods could be utilized by researchers with any people group who feel SCD regarding a different aspect of their original religious upbringing. These questionnaires and surveys demonstrate whether a participant has experienced SCD, regardless of sexual orientation. The Cognitive Dissonance Inventory (Gino, 2008) measures the likelihood of participants being swayed by others when making decisions. The Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire (Hodge, D.R., 2013) was an inventory of past and present spirituality. The Preference for Consistency Scale (Cialdini, Trost, & Newsom, 1995) was used to determine the participants' likely behavior during seasons of change. None of the questionnaires utilized for this research, except the SCD Questionnaire (O'Flynne, 2016), were designed exclusively for LGBTQQ people, therefore, it can be construed that other uses of these instruments could be beneficial to future research.

Results

The participants relayed similar religious backgrounds in that they grew up in traditional, conservative, non-LGBTQQ affirming churches. Evidence of SCD

experiences was confirmed. Further, narratives of how SCD presented to the participants

expanded our understanding of this phenomenon. Each participant faced SCD episodes

differently and coped with the condition in their own way. The gay, lesbian, and bisexual

participants were all rejected by their churches of origin because of their sexual

preferences. All left their churches of origin. Fifty percent of those interviewed

contemplated suicide. Thirty-seven percent questioned their concept of God. Every

participant questioned if it was wrong to be LGBTQQ. Even the participant whose sexual

preference was questioning relayed the likelihood of rejection if she were to consider

identifying as anything other than heterosexual. She said, "Frankly, I just decided to stop

thinking about it and embrace the Bible and eventually those feelings went away."

Essential Themes

The themes which were essential to this research were those common to most or

all the study participants. Without essential themes, the phenomena do not present as

such (vanManen, 1990). The data were codified and grouped into themes by hand using

inductive reasoning, or a bottom up approach, to draw a general conclusion about how

SCD manifests within all spiritually minded, LGBTQQ individuals. I found repetitions of

ideas, thoughts, words, actions, and nuances and then codified the repetitions into units of

meaning. The units of meaning were then clustered. The clusters that formed revealed the

themes which were pertinent to this research. The overall arching or essential themes

boiled down to three issues most LGBTQQ people face when dealing with SCD. They

are fear, God, and coping.

Fear. Fear of shunning was the number one concern for the participants in this study. P1 worried that if she came out as lesbian, she would be shunned. She said, "If you lived the gay lifestyle you were to be shunned by the church…family." She went on to say, "I lost everything when I came out. My family no longer invited me over for dinners or, really, any get togethers. I was shunned mercilessly." Her fears then, became her reality. P2 was in fear of losing her family, friends and church when she realized she was gay. "I grew up in a very religious family. It took a long time before I could admit I was gay." P3's fears were similar. He said, "At first I wondered if my family would accept me. I had lots of friends though. They really helped me to push back the fear, so I could come out to my family." P3 went on to say, "My family was very supportive! They love me so much! That's how I got through the fear of coming out!"

P5 was confused and fearful of how her spirituality might be in conflict with her sexuality. She was also worried about being shunned. She put it this way:

I have been confused about all things related to God and church since I was old enough to question what I had been taught. Why should I fear someone that supposedly loved me? If I didn't believe the ways I was told? Why would I be punished for it? Since I was gay, why didn't God love me, and others love me, if they were supposed to be tolerant and Christ-like? I was scared to say how I believed because it alienated me from other people. And, they didn't believe the way I believed, so they would treat me differently.

P5 asked terrific questions in trying to resolve the issues surrounding her fear of rejection. She just didn't understand the insensitivity and anger that was directed toward her from those who called themselves Christian. Fear is not solely about how other people will react. Some people felt fear regarding how God might perceive them. For example, P2 expressed a great deal of fear about going back to church. She was not able to reconcile her spirituality and her sexuality for many years. She says, "I didn't go to church for a long while…there was a lot of destructive behavior and a lot of wasted time." The SCD she experienced caused her to isolate herself.

P4 said, "Well I grew up believing that homosexuality was wrong. It wasn't exactly preached from the pulpit, but everyone knew it." P4 has a strong tie to music. He was on the worship team of his former church, and he knew that coming out as a gay man would be difficult.

I was afraid of the ramifications for my wife and kids, and to my position on the worship team. Coming out as gay would result in an automatic dismissal from that team. I eventually left the church because my wife and children would have suffered from the scandalization of my circumstances. I knew there would be a lot of gossip and inuendo. It was an extremely scary time for me.

P7 questions her sexuality. She has been attracted to women and has had a couple of short-lived same-sex relationships. She has always felt very guilty and has feared revealing the non-heterosexual side of herself to others. During the

interview she said, "The guilt and shame were crushing me." Deeply religious, she is most concerned about how God and her church friends would perceive her if she were to admit to having homosexual thoughts. Self-deprecatingly, she says,

> I chose my path in my early 20's and I feel like I paid for that. I didn't ask God for help until I had already screwed things up. I didn't want anyone to know I had some feelings toward women. I felt as though I was guilty for just allowing the thought to enter my mind…My life would be a total wreck without God…When I wasn't living my life right, was when I wouldn't want Jesus to walk into the room!

P8 experienced shunning and rejection in his church of origin when he began to live openly as a gay man. He said,

> I took a boyfriend to church to see a Christmas play. No one knew him and, even though they may have assumed I was gay, I hadn't come out yet. This one couple stared me down. My boyfriend and I were really uncomfortable. I never set foot in that church again, even though it had been my church from as far back as I could remember.

God. P5 not only feared being shunned. She feared she might harm her relationship with God. She said she was afraid of going to hell. "Homosexuality was immoral and if you participated in it you were going against God and going to hell." P6 said it this way:

So being who I am today and being around others who live an alternative

lifestyle makes me worry. It makes me doubt my being a good person and

it makes me feel guilty that I might be justifying who I am by my own

beliefs and not God's word… I'm gay and that's not supposed to be OK,

so at times, my Baptist upbringing makes me worry about my salvation.

P6 said she was constantly questioning her new belief that homosexuality might

not be a sin. This was in stark opposition to what she was taught in her church of origin.

She has constantly experienced SCD, not only at her church, but throughout her entire

life as a spiritual lesbian. The SCD she feels causes her to have great anxiety every time

she thinks about the issue of God and her sexuality. She said, "There are times that my

head says the way I was raised was the only way to believe; that being gay is a sin and

God is mad at me."

The interview with P6 was highly informative about how a fear of being wrong

can consume a person's life. SCD can wreak havoc on a person's spiritual life. What was

once a "garden of Eden," if you will, can suddenly become a wasteland full of stress and

pain. This type of anguish, especially when it is related to a person's spiritual well-being,

can alter the person's ability to reach out to a divine entity for grace and mercy. When a

spiritually minded individual feels cut off from access to help from a greater power, it can

be devastating. Ryan and Ryan (n.d.). quoted a client regarding his feelings of being

separated from God. He said, "'I saw myself in a large crowd of people. God was holding

my hand. But suddenly God's hand was pulled away and I was lost in the crowd. I was

separated from God, abandoned, completely alone.'"

All the participants experienced fear regarding their sexuality. P8 is no exception.

When P8 was in a worship service at his church, he was terrified that someone would

realize he was gay.

> There were times, like, I couldn't worship; I was so afraid someone might
>
> find out about my being gay…The most dissonant times were when I was
>
> trying to pray about something or for someone and, because I was gay, I
>
> thought God didn't want my prayers…Because I was gay, and my beliefs
>
> were that homosexuality was a sin, I felt hollow when I tried to worship. I
>
> felt like God loved me, but that I was walking in sin, so I wasn't in a place
>
> to ask anything from Him – well except to forgive me for all my gay
>
> thoughts or actions. Since I wasn't living like I should, I didn't feel that
>
> God would listen to me…It's mostly when I'm praying that I feel
>
> dissonance. It's when I'm praying that I feel as if the line of
>
> communication with God has severed. I feel like I'm on the line, but
>
> God's blocked my call.

Coping. The participants of this study coped with their SCD in various ways. All left

their original places of worship and did not go to back to their churches of origin, or any

church for years. Some studied biblical passages and attended seminars which offered

different ways to interpret the scriptures that seem to condemn homosexuality. Some had

great difficulty overcoming SCD, resorting to alcohol and prescription drugs to drown out their dissonant feelings. Not all who experienced SCD early in their journey managed to quash the negative internal messages elicited by the SCD condition.

Such is the case for P2. She still experiences SCD, even though she has lived openly as lesbian for over thirty years. She has, at times, isolated herself both physically and emotionally. P2 has self-medicated by way of alcohol, prescription drugs, a string of bad relationships, and frequent buying excursions. None of these coping mechanisms have alleviated the SCD she experiences. She, "thought about suicide more than a few times." Granted, some of what P2 is experiencing may be related to depression. She told me that she has been is taking medication to remedy depression. The choice to live authentically, however, alienated her from her church and from her immediate family. She experienced SCD so vividly that she has not been able to go back to her church of origin or to any other church with any regularity. P2 continues to experience SCD some thirty years after she came out as lesbian.

P7 struggles with her SCD. She says, "You keep some sins quiet while other sins are known." She has been afraid of anyone seeing that she has any non-heteronormative ideas or past encounters. These fears, in turn, cause her to experience SCD all the more. She has found solace, though, in her belief that God has delivered her from having any new homosexual feelings.

P8 initially coped with his SCD by leaving his original place of worship. He did not attend any church on a regular basis for over ten years. He often had thoughts of

suicide as a final solution to alleviate the pain he was experiencing because of SCD. Eventually he decided he would live as a heterosexual again.

> I tried to live the straight life. I married a woman and we adopted several children. We went to church every Sunday and were very involved. That was, until I told my wife I was still gay…that those feelings I said were gone, were never really gone. I tried counseling and other types of therapy, but I knew the truth was that I am gay.

P5 also left her church of origin and refrained from attending worship at any other house of worship for several years. She now attends an LGBTQQ church and it has helped her to cope with the SCD she still experiences. She often recalls her experiences with SCD.

> I believe the most dissonant times for me were when I was in great despair. These times included the death of my grandfather and daughter. There were other times of despair too, when I realized I was gay and would not be welcome in my church anymore. I felt like God was not there for me during those times. The dissonance was in believing God is love and not feeling his love when I was in such pain. Still, I have a relationship with God. It gives me peace and love. I also love sharing that with others that are like-minded in their faith.

P3 says he was able to cope with SCD with the help of good friends and a strong, supportive family. He has found a place of worship where most of the congregants are

gay. He says, "It's really great to be able to be myself." P4 also joined a church where the majority of those in attendance are non-heterosexual. This, in addition to his extensive research into various biblical passages, has allowed P4 to accept who he is and to manage his SCD. In fact, P4 claims to have suffered very little from SCD. He says,

> I've come to grips with who I am and I'm OK with that. I did a lot of research and I don't think some of the Bible verses actually mean what most churches say they mean. Before I searched it out, there were many times when I just thought I'd kill myself and get it over with. However, now I believe God loves me just as I am.

> I never really stopped going to church. I was invited to sing at several churches that were more open regarding me being gay. One of those churches is the place I currently call home.

P6 has maintained her belief that God loves her but her spiritual path has altered slightly. She has opened her mind to other religions. She says she loves her place of worship but finds spending time with her friends to be most spiritual. Worship music is especially settling to her soul.

Research Questions

It came down to six questions which were asked of each participant. By analyzing the data from the participants' answers to these questions, repetition of thought or turns of phrases emerged. Once the phrases were analyzed further, I assigned codes to the repetitive phrases. These codes were then reviewed for succinctness, relevance, cohesion,

and continuity. Finally, all coded data were grouped into overarching, or essential themes.

To maintain credibility, the codified data was presented for review to a panel of 27 people. The panel was made up of colleagues and associates of this researcher. Each panel member had at least a graduate level degree. Panel members were given blind data, that is, no personal information was relayed. All data were assigned codes so that panel members were not seeing participant names, addresses, telephone numbers, or any other personal material. The transcribed interview data were presented to panel members, along with the codes and themes previously determined by this researcher. The panel then reviewed all data to verify the efficacy of the codes and themes originally determined by this researcher. The panel's sole purpose was to verify my coding and resulting essential themes.

Initially I suggested three questions which could answer the central theme of this phenomenological project, that is, how SCD manifests in LGBTQQ people. The questions were:

1) What do LGBTQQ people who encounter a heteronormative spirituality during their upbringing experience when they worship openly as LGBTQQ?

2) How do former teachings influence the participant's current spirituality?

3) Has the participant experienced any internal conflict concerning former spiritual upbringing and the person's current spirituality.

The three initial research questions were then augmented in hopes of gaining more in-depth responses from the participants. Six questions were posed to each participant. Each question contributed to the scope of this research by ascertaining how SCD manifested in the lives of each participant. Further, they queried the participants regarding spiritual upbringing, former church conflicts concerning the participants' LGBTQQ status, and what the participant had done to alleviate SCD symptoms. They questions were:

1) How does SCD manifest in your life?

2) Have you experienced any internal conflict concerning former spiritual upbringing and your current spirituality?

3) What did your heteronormative spiritual upbringing teach you about living as an LGBTQQ person?

4) How do those former teachings influence your current spirituality?

5) What have you experienced when worshiping openly as an LGBTQQ person, especially in consideration of your heteronormative spiritual upbringing?

6) What, if anything, have you done to decrease your SCD symptoms?

Each participant answered all six primary questions. Herein is a description of their answers to said questions.

How does SCD manifest in your life? Every SCD research participant in this study expressed how the SCD condition has affected his or her life. They relayed

experiences of inability to pray, worship, even to go to church. The participants conveyed their belief that former religious environments (original places of worship) were the reason for their SCD. Either their churches were inhospitable to LGBTQQ people; the clergy forbade all non-heterosexual relationships; or it was not spoken of but understood that homosexuality was a sin. Participants communicated their concern that negative situations might arise if they continued living openly as LGBTQQ within their original places of worship.

The participants in this study reported they all hailed from conservative-Christian, religious climates prior to their coming out as LGBTQQ. They were all in agreement that SCD was likely tied to their initial spiritual upbringing. I did not interview individuals who were brought up in non-conservative Christian places of worship. Future studies should seek out individuals from other religious backgrounds to get a fuller sense as to what might be prevalent within those religious atmospheres.

This question, "how does SCD manifest in your life," was key to this body of research. As outlined previously, the premises on which I drew the general conclusion were: 1) all observed participants showed signs of SCD; 2) all observed participants were from conservative Christian religious backgrounds; and 3) the observed participants relayed similarly themed SCD experiences. These premises allowed me to conclude: most LGBTQQ individuals who show signs of SCD, and grew up in a conservative religious home, would experience SCD in similarly themed patterns. They would be fearful, experience anxiety in reference to their relationship with the divine; and would

have difficulty coping with the transition into the greater non-heteronormative spiritual community.

Have you experienced any internal conflict concerning former spiritual upbringing and your current spirituality? I found that all of the participants believed there was internal conflict between their former spiritual upbringing and their current spirituality. P1 was heavily involved with her former place of worship. She and her husband played integral parts within that body of believers. After more than 20 years of marriage and service to the church, P1 finally accepted herself for who she was. She was attracted to women and had always been that way. She felt she had to be honest with herself, her husband, and with God. Once she told her husband, they began divorce procedures. Since he was one of the elders of the church, he felt he had to reveal his wife's predilections to the other elders of their church. P1 was immediately informed she could no longer head any groups, hold ministry positions, or remain in worship until she made a new commitment to God and to living a godly life, that is, not in sin as a homosexual. She says, "I didn't go to church for years. I was really hurt by the rejection I felt from my former church."

P2 and P7 have not been able to totally reconcile their former spiritual beliefs with who they are. P2 struggles to balance being lesbian and Christian. P2 refrained from attending any place of worship for over twenty years. She isolated herself and remains unreconciled with the doctrine of her youth. Attending regularly is very difficult; she struggles to combine her spirituality with her sexual preference. P7 was unable to

incorporate her feelings of being interested in people of the same sex with her spiritual

self.

> My life would be a total wreck without God in my life. There was a time
>
> in my life that I became involved in a threesome or another time when I
>
> was leaning towards a lesbian relationship. The devil was having a heyday
>
> with me. The guilt and shame were crushing me. That was a time when I
>
> wouldn't want Jesus to walk into the room!

Every participant in this study has experienced internal conflict between their

former spiritual beliefs and what they currently believe, with a few caveats. The basic

tenets of their spiritual selves have not changed. Their faith in God is no different; they

have just come to terms with who they are and have accepted themselves. P6 says,

> There are times that my head says the way I was raised was the only way
>
> to believe, that being gay is a sin and God is mad at me. However, when I
>
> get my mind right, I know in my heart that God made me who I am and
>
> how I am and loves me just as I am.

What did your heteronormative spiritual upbringing teach you about living

as an LGBTQQ person? The answers to this question varied from participant to

participant. Most of the participants revealed that their places of worship either preached

against the LGBTQQ community as being sinful, or they didn't cover the subject at all.

Many of the places of worship were extremely against non-heteronormative people and

would require such a person to leave that place of worship. "My church believed gay

people were living ungodly lifestyles. They were sex crazed and perverts," said P1. Her

former church was very rigid and conservative. She was able to serve on ministry teams

even after she and her husband divorced. However, as soon as the congregants were made

aware of her sexuality, she was ousted from all forms of ministry roles she had previously

been performing.

P2 had very little to do with her former church after coming out as gay. The

church was conservative Pentecostal and they did not tolerate LGBTQQ people. So,

when P2 made the choice to live her life authentically as a lesbian, she was ousted. Since

that time, P2 and her mother have had great difficulty communicating. "It's been 30 years

and my mom, and I are still not reconciled." She said that the dissonance she feels

directly relates to her worship of God.

> The church wasn't something I did for a lot of years. It was just too hard
>
> to try to go there…I couldn't pray, sing, or really listen to sermons when I
>
> started back to church with my partner. When I would start to open up, I
>
> would remember the rejection I felt from my family; I remembered that I
>
> was viewed as a sinner because I chose to love a woman. I just kept quiet
>
> and listened, but I couldn't speak… I still don't feel really comfortable in
>
> church. I mean, we go to a church with the kids sometimes, but I'm not
>
> really involved with the people there. I don't feel guilty, like I did before,
>
> but I still don't feel the same connection to God as I did when I was a
>
> kid…I still have difficulty attending church regularly.

P2 has experienced great loss because of her former place of worship. She was confident in her beliefs regarding being lesbian, but when it came to church, it was very difficult to reconcile how close she felt to her family, her church family, and her spiritual faith with the rejection she had experienced. She is not likely to attend church for some time as there are too many walls still up to fellowship with others in at this time.

P3 said the priest at his parish didn't specifically speak about different sexualities. He relayed that there was an understanding that being LGBTQQ was unacceptable.

I heard people talk about another person's kid and saying the kid was gay. I wasn't sure what they were talking about, but they seemed to be making fun of the kid and his family. So, it wasn't an atmosphere conducive to people who were different.

P6 indicated there was little to no mention of anything non-heteronormative within her church. "I don't remember ever hearing anything at all except the verse, 'man shall not lay with man,' and that was it as far as homosexuality being mentioned." P6 went on to say, "I have no idea what anyone thought about gay or trans people." P5, on the other hand, stated, "It was publicly spoken…(LGBTQQ) were immoral, and if you participated in such you were going against God and going to hell." P7 stated her church was "accepting, not condemning." However, P7 also said that being LGBTQQ was "against God's law." The church didn't "talk about it." Whether it was spoken or unspoken, many participants understood they would not be accepted within their original places of worship if they lived openly as LGBTQQ.

How do those former teachings influence your current spirituality? Every

participant left their initial place of worship. Some because of the prejudice and lack of

acceptance communicated by clergy and fellow congregants; others because they

themselves felt as if they were unacceptable because of their LGBTQQ status. P7 said

she left her church of origin, "because I felt guilty about my feelings. They weren't active

thoughts…they were in the depths of my soul." P7 eventually decided not to embrace

LGBTQQ inclinations and went back to a church that had branched from her church of

origin; she couldn't go back to the original church as it had closed. P7 says the beliefs,

however, are the same as the former church. P5 said, "I still go to church and believe the

Bible, but I think there are more ways to interpret the teachings than showing the wrath

and fear of God, instead of love." Further P5 states, "I still have a relationship with God.

It gives me peace and love. I also love sharing that with others that are like-minded in

their faith."

P1 does not miss her former place of worship. She says, "my past spirituality was

rigid, stoic, fear-based, and cult-like. Growing up, I remember how the pastor and

congregation spoke about homosexuality. It was a sin. They were very negative about

being gay. It was 'un-Godly'."

What have you experienced when worshiping openly as an LGBTQQ person,

especially in consideration of your heteronormative spiritual upbringing? This

question elicited a variety of responses. Some participants experienced difficulty

worshiping while others had no difficulty entering into a worship space. It should be

noted that those who had conducted research to justify their positions as accepted by the divine had far less difficulty worshiping than those who had not. Those who had not researched the topic of being a Christian LGBTQQ person seemed less likely to maintain a strong relationship with their higher power.

P1 said she experienced great guilt in worshiping when she had not yet begun to live openly as LGBTQQ. She says, "When no one knew I was gay at my former church and I was worshiping, I felt so guilty. I didn't even call myself gay at that point, but I still felt something was out of place in me." She had difficulty finding a worshipful place in her mind and soul. "I questioned if there was a God." P1 eventually began to research the idea of being a spiritual LGBTQQ person. She said, "I searched for a spiritual connection for a long time after I had to leave my former church. I studied various belief systems and even Native American religious practices, trying to find something that resonated with my soul."

Since that time, P1 has, "come to grips with (her) sexuality." She has found a new spirituality and is able to worship openly as a lesbian. "My partner and I attend a Unity church now. We love it. I am very involved in church again. There aren't that many gay couples in the church, but there is no condemnation whatsoever. I'm actually on the Board of Directors," she declared. Further, she stated, "most of my spirituality is experienced here at home. I practice meditation and it's when I am meditating that I feel closer to God."

P6 stated that since she's begun attending a Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) she can, "see others and understand what being a real Christian is." P6 finds, "music uplifting, especially older gospel. It feels good and makes me more confident that I am a good person and that my beliefs are right, and I am loved by God."

P4 conducted a great deal of research to justify his position with God as a gay man. He found new interpretations of biblical scriptures which allowed him to move past the guilt that most of the other participants experienced. P4 stated:

> What do I experience when I'm worshiping? Well, I experience God's presence. There were many years though, growing up in my old church, when worshiping was mostly a show. I thought I was wrong until I did my research. Before I changed my mind about being gay, I'd sing because I love singing, but there wasn't always a connection. I can worship freely now, as a gay man, with my husband beside me. I know I'm fine just as I am. God loves me, no matter what…I mean, I'm OK now with who I am. Do I ever want to go back to my old church? Absolutely not! Everyone there knows I'm gay and I would be on the wrong side of the stick with those people, if you know what I mean.

P2 still has difficulty attending church on a regular basis. She said she is not able to worship as she once did. She said, "I couldn't worship for a long while, 'cause I felt I wasn't living right. I shut myself off from my family because they disapproved." Further,

she still isn't able to attend church regularly, partially because she is not comfortable with her sexuality when it comes to her spirituality.

P3 experienced trepidation when it came to his spirituality but has found a way to move past some of his original concerns about being a spiritually minded gay man. He stated, "I've really worked through most of my issues regarding me being gay and how I believe in God. I know He loves me, but sometimes I still question if how I live my life is wrong. That's when it is hard to pray and worship."

P5 also found it difficult to worship when she first began living openly as a lesbian. She said, "I found it hard to worship when I realized I was gay. Since I was taught that homosexuality was wrong, it was difficult to connect. I just went through the motions. There was a huge disconnect."

What, if anything, have you done to alleviate the SCD you have experienced?
As stated previously, after choosing to live openly as LGBTQQ the first thing every study participant did was leave their original places of worship. Four of the eight participants researched biblical passages to find ways of re-interpreting the Bible, thus allowing themselves to accept their LGBTQQ status while maintaining a strong connection with the divine. Six of the eight participants joined LGBTQQ-friendly/accepting places of worship. One participant chose to walk away from her attraction to women. She still believes it is a sin to act on any LGBTQQ predilections. Fifty percent of those interviewed had thought about or attempted suicide. Three participants self-medicated with alcohol, prescription drugs, or jumping from one bad

relationship to another in search of something to quiet the spiritual dissonance they experienced. Only three of the participants seemed to have successfully navigated the waves of SCD leaving approximately sixty-three percent still living with the condition.

"It's not easy to bounce from anger to love," said P5. She continued, "The dissonance I feel was in what I had been taught all my life about homosexuality and believing I am loved by God anyway." P6 said, "There are brief moments when I think that God is punishing me for being gay by giving me cancer, among many other troubles I am dealing with...There are brief moments I have doubted that God exists because bad things keep happening." P7 stated,

> I did have feelings that were uncomfortable with my conscience as a child, but looking back, I feel those experiences were the natural curiosity of a little girl…I felt guilty about my feelings…I pushed aside any lesbian thoughts since I was in grade school.

P8 summed it up like this,

> I still wish sometimes that things were different. I wish I could have been straight; it would have been easier. I know in my heart that God loves me either way, but in my mind, I'm sure I'm not living the way He'd want me to live.

How the Sample Responded as a Whole

It is important to report the results of the entire group in order to show the commonalities between men and women, young and old, lesbian, gay, or questioning.

There were several situations which were common to all the participants. When interviewed all participants reported experiencing negative attitudes from friends, family, and original places of worship toward LGBTQQ individuals. All participants were raised in heteronormative environments. Of the seven who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual all relayed a lack of acceptance when they openly acknowledged their sexual preference was other than heterosexual. These same participants were initially shunned by their families and fellow congregants. All eventually sought out religious organizations which would allow them to express their faith openly as LGBTQQ people. The one person who identified as questioning did not tell anyone about her feelings for many years as she believed she would be rejected by her church's leaders and her peers. Later in life she shared her story with some close friends. She was not rejected or shunned by her close friends. She said, "I was glad to share the information," but noted, "If I were to have those feelings again, I'd not let them surface. I'd carry them to my grave."

Summary

At the beginning of this portion of the study, data about the participants and their demographics were presented. The use of a qualitative design and the collection of data via interviews was utilized so that I could document exact incidents of SCD. The literature review confirmed the existence of SCD within the LBGTQQ community but there was a gap in the literature regarding how an individual might experience an episode of SCD.

As outlined in the previous chapter, all data was collected via interview, either face-to-face, or by Skype. The data has been secured as protocol dictates. The data's validity is based upon the recording and transcription of participant interviews, hand-written field notes, and team review of all such information. This chapter represents the culmination of all data collected and the results therefrom. These results presented both supporting and contrasting elements to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the hypothesis stated within Chapter 1 of this project.

In the next chapter, I will summarize all data collected thus far, detail conclusions drawn from the research, discuss the project's limitations, and offer ideas on how this study can effect social change. Further, Chapter 5 will recommend ideas for future research regarding SCD. Finally, I will conclude this study at the end of the next chapter.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to shed light on the condition of SCD, especially regarding LGBTQQ individuals. The literature reviewed for this undertaking unequivocally gave credence to the condition of CD. The literature also described and affirmed SCD or spiritual conflict. The literature did not, however, describe what occurs while one is affected by SCD, or how SCD manifests in those experiencing the phenomena. In other words, how does a person feel or what do they do during an episode of SCD. SCD may manifest in fleeting thoughts or it could permeate a person's entire life. This study sought to describe the phenomena associated with SCD, specifically how it might be felt by the LGBTQQ members of society.

Over the course of this study I found that those interviewed experienced SCD as previously learned spiritual behaviors clashed with their current spirituality. SCD has been documented in existing literature, and this study confirmed its existence. The existing literature, however, did not include descriptions of how SCD presented, specifically within the LGBTQQ community. This study revealed that participants who grew up in conservative religions, that is, places of worship which shunned LGBTQQ people, keenly felt the sting of unacceptance. The hurt and anger felt by the participants in this study often carried over throughout the person's life. This lack of acceptance and intolerance led to a variety of manifestations of SCD. All the participants interviewed for this study experienced a loss of spiritual identity and changes to formerly held religious

beliefs. The participants' reactions to these changes included: abandonment of original places of worship, self-isolation, questioning and doubt regarding their ability to be loved by God, questioning the very existence of God, drug and/or alcohol abuse, and suicidal ideation.

Implication of the Findings

The literature reviewed for this study offered evidence of the existence of SCD as a viable phenomenon. This study confirmed the findings of those previous oeuvres. There was, however, a gap in the reviewed literature regarding how SCD presents within those individuals who are experiencing the malady. This study, as a project specifically seeking participants who had experienced some type of SCD, was conducted to document how SCD presents in the LGBTQQ spiritual community. As such, every participant in this study had experienced or was currently experiencing SCD. Herek (2007) outlined how an SCD event is formed. These mindsets include fear of the individual's sexual point of view; former negative encounters with LGBTQQ people; fear of potential consequences from friends and colleagues; and/or concern regarding how the individual's church and family might react to the participant's revelation of his or her LGBTQQ status. Herek posited that when these mindsets conflict with spiritual belief systems, dissonance will result. Herek's theories were corroborated by the current study. Every participant interviewed divulged she or he had experienced one or more of these mindsets.

Sherry, Alderman, Whilde, and Quick's, 2010 study of 422 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals introduced a variety of instruments to determine if the participant

was experiencing or had experienced SCD. They asked each participant to relay how SCD influenced their reactions to their religious environments. Of the 422 participants, seventy-eight percent claimed to have experienced SCD regarding their sexual identities. Schuck and Liddle's 2001 study of 66 lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals indicated two-thirds of those interviewed had difficulty reconciling the sexual and spiritual aspects of their personalities.

Ream and Savin-Williams' 2005 study of 395 lesbian and gay young people (mean average age 18.5 years old) revealed a likelihood there would be some internalized homophobia when SCD is experienced. Additionally, their study showed twenty-five percent of the young men and thirty-nine percent of the young women left their original places of worship because of the negative reactions from clergy and congregants regarding their homosexuality. The young people who remained in their original place of worship experienced a high degree of internalized homophobia. Interesting enough, those who left their original places of worship experienced less internalized homophobia but were more likely to suffer from some other form of mental illness. As indicated earlier, Macauley (2010) denigrated himself, believing he was wicked and not worthy of God's love.

As noted in the aforementioned-studies, participants relayed they had experienced feelings of shame, rejection, despair, internalized homophobia, and suicidal thoughts. The current study was no exception to this rule. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed for this study conveyed they, too, experienced shame, rejection, and despair. Twenty-five

percent struggled with internalized homophobia and fifty percent of those interviewed for this study had experienced suicidal thoughts.

Schuck and Liddle's 2001 study of 66 lesbian and gay individuals hypothesized the divergence between participants' sexual and spiritual identities is likely due to negative interpretations of various biblical passages and deep-seated homo-negativity. Sixty-six percent of their participants reported they felt shame, guilt, homo-negativity, fear of exposure, and generally hostile environments in their original places of worship. Herrmann, Wiggins, and Rutter (2007) claimed that places of worship which condemn non-heteronormative behavior are likely to create a hostile environment for congregants who find themselves outside of the sexual boundaries outlined by clergy and congregants of that church. This condemnation of those who have non-heteronormative sexualities can be stifling. Those who attend such institutions may feel isolated. Further, relatives and friends of an LBGTQQ individual may feel compelled to ostracize that person to conform to the tenets of the church. This finding is substantiated by the current study. Sixty-three percent of those interviewed had negative experiences with former clergy and congregants when they began to identify as non-heterosexual. Fifty percent of those interviewed felt isolated and condemned by clergy and congregants.

Mahaffy (1996) found that more than 50% of the 163 lesbian participants in her study preferred to remain in their original places of worship despite the SCD they were experiencing. In conflict with this finding, only two of those interviewed for this current study (25%) said they had no concerns about remaining a part of their original

congregations. These participants experienced a great deal of support from the congregants and clergy in their original places of worship. This, however, was not the norm. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed for this study were compelled to leave their original places of worship, specifically to remove themselves from the intolerance being projected upon them.

Ford, Brignall, VanValey and Macaluso (2009) theorized that the LGBTQQ individual is more likely to embrace his or her sexual orientation if the person's spiritual community (family, friends, religious leaders, co-congregants) is accepting. On the other hand, if the LGBTQQ individual is not accepted by his or her immediate spiritual community, the person will likely be discouraged and feel rejection, which could result in the person's suppression of his or her sexual orientation (Lease, Horn & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005). Dahl and Galliher (2009) suggested stifling a person's sexual orientation could result in a change of spiritual traditions or the entire elimination of spiritual practices. This likelihood is confirmed by the participants of the current study. Of the eight people interviewed, five (65%), shared they had difficulty with religious institutions and their own spirituality after owning their sexual preferences. These participants relayed they needed to leave their original places of worship. Four of the five individuals refrained from participating in any type of spiritual practice for several years following the rejection experienced within their original spiritual communities.

Halkitis et al.'s 2009 study of 498 gay and lesbian individuals disclosed an adverse relationship between participants' spiritual and sexual identities. The current

study affirms the likelihood of an oppositional relationship between the participant's original place of worship and his or her sexuality, especially if the participant grew up in a highly conservative spiritual atmosphere. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed had unfavorable experiences with their former places of worship regarding their sexuality. Lease, Horne, and Noffsinger-Frazier found that even when a place of worship accepted LGBT people as part of the congregation, they were often not permitted to serve in leadership roles. The current study confirms this. Seventy-five percent of those interviewed stated their congregations of origin might have allowed them to remain as a part of the congregation but would not tolerate the person contributing in any leadership role.

The current study affirmed the findings of all previously reviewed literary sources, that is, SCD can occur when an individual's behavior differs from the norms and beliefs of the person's place of worship; LGBTQQ people may feel isolated and ostracized by clergy and fellow congregants if they reveal their sexual preferences; LGBTQQ individuals who have been raised within conservative Christian homes may feel guilt, shame, internalized homophobia, and/or suicidal thoughts as they begin living as non-heterosexuals. Further, this study adds the dimension of how SCD was experienced by the individuals suffering therefrom.

Those interviewed for this study gave new, critical information about what one perceives during an episode of SCD. For example, P3 relayed his inability to pray the "Lord's Prayer" without guilt when reciting, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver

us from evil"; how, when verbalizing those two lines within the prayer, P3 pictured his partner as the "temptation," and the LGBTQQ-accepting place of worship as the "evil". P3 also explained how being in a bathroom with a transgender person made him uncomfortable, despite his current, supportive world views. P7 expressed the fear of letting anyone find out her secret interest in women. She felt as though she was guilty for just allowing a mere thought to enter her mind. P4 attempted to justify his sexuality by conducting intense research into condemning biblical passages. He could not fully embrace his spirituality until he could rationalize his attraction to men. P1, P2, and P8 all refrained from practicing any religion for several years due to the thoughts of self-recrimination. Each time they stepped into a place of worship their minds were bombarded by guilt, shame, and the deep feeling that God did not love them. These cognitions presented within seventy-five percent of those interviewed for this study.

Limitations of the Study

This study examined SCD within the Christian religion. Interviews were not conducted with participants from Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Islamic, et al. religious environments. While one may presume LGBTQQ individuals from any conservative religious background might experience SCD after beginning to live openly as non-heterosexual, it is not given that such is the case.

Because this study was a phenomenological endeavor, the number of interviews were limited ten or less. I interviewed a total of eight participants. Creswell (1998) recommended at least five, but no more than twenty-five interviews should be held when

conducting a phenomenological undertaking. The reason a small number of participants is suggested is that if there are too many interviews, the reporting could become convoluted and the phenomena being studied may be obfuscated. In other words, too many stories may muddy the phenomena and cause the central subject of the research to be obscured.

This study was limited to LGBTQQ individuals. The literature reviewed for this study did not offer any data regarding how LGBTQQ's experienced SCD. Further, I was seeking to contribute to the existing literature by telling the SCD stories of LGBTQQ people. It was interesting, however, how many non-LGBTQQ people were interested in participating in this type of endeavor. In soliciting potential participants, four heterosexual individuals expressed interest in telling their SCD stories. They said their spiritual beliefs had changed dramatically since they were young. Since this study was specifically limited to SCD in the LGBTQQ community, some volunteers were disqualified since they were heterosexual. The interest shown by non-LGBTQQ individuals leads me to proffer that SCD could present within any people group. Many people grow up ensconced in a religion of origin, but, for whatever reason, break from the tenets of their initial religious beliefs. Such a break could result in SCD experiences. This study was limited to LGBTQQ adults who experienced SCD. As such, several people groups were not included in this endeavor.

The data may not be applicable to all those experiencing SCD. The individual experiences relayed by the participants in this study are unique to each participant. The

data collected may or may not relate to other LGBTQQ SCD stories. It does not represent an exhaustive record of how all LGBTQQ individuals experience SCD. Everyone's story is different. Even within the eight participants interviewed each person's experiences were distinctive. While common themes were interwoven, each person's story was markedly different. This study, therefore, cannot be considered an exhaustive effort that might embrace every aspect of the SCD continuum.

Recommendations

This research involved only LGBTQQ people from conservative Christian backgrounds. Other religious backgrounds were not represented in this study. It would be interesting to explore LGBTQQ SCD as it relates to other religious backgrounds, that is, Hindu, Islam, Judaism, Buddhist, etc. Indeed, the stories of LGBTQQ individuals who hail from non-Christian backgrounds would augment this research. No literature was sought or even chanced upon which explored SCD as it relates to LGBTQQ people or heterosexual individuals from other religious backgrounds. Such a study could be remarkedly noteworthy. Some contextual data would need to be collected in order to properly demonstrate a strong grasp of the tenets of each religion. Including heterosexual SCD stories from people who hail from non-Christian, religious communities could enhance the literature within this field of research.

Research should be conducted with heterosexual people from conservative Christian backgrounds. As stated previously, many people who are brought up within conservative Christian churches may experience SCD regarding their adult religious

experiences. Some individuals who grow up in very conservative places of worship may experience SCD if they abandon their formerly-held, conservative religious tenets. I suggest a plethora of data could be collected from this people group. Exploration of existing data would be necessary to determine if there is a gap in the literature regarding this community.

Implications

This research has been completed to recognize and describe the effects of SCD. My goal is to call attention to a very real and potentially dangerous condition, and thereby positively effect social change. Recognizing and then assisting the person experiencing SCD may positively impact that person's life. As he or she is offered suggestions for managing and eventually overcoming the condition, one can expect the SCD sufferer will gain the confidence and courage needed to conquer SCD.

This body of research could lend to a better understanding of how SCD impacts LGBTQQ people. It could inform strategies for counseling and improving the lives of LGBTQQ individuals suffering from SCD. This research will likely enable clergy of LGBTQQ-accepting places of worship to develop educational resources for their congregants experiencing SCD. It may lead to better relationships with their LGBTQQ congregants. Having a thorough compendium of the existent literature regarding LGBTQQ persons who have experienced SCD deposited in one collective treatise can streamline future reviews and investigations.

The information contained herein could provide a platform for developing educational modules in both ecumenical and secular settings. Once SCD is brought to light and successful assistance is formulated, LGBTQQ accepting churches could offer programs which speak directly to the SCD phenomenon. Such educational platforms could be offered to both secondary education and collegiate students. The likelihood of reaching and/or treating a person who is experiencing suicidal thoughts in relation to SCD could increase exponentially.

This research can present opportunities for intervention on several fronts. For example, if a young person is offered counseling before SCD takes hold, he or she may be more adept in recognizing and coping with the condition. That young person can then develop a coping strategy to effectively navigate the issues which plague the SCD sufferer. One step further, if a more conservative congregation is interested in finding new ways to meet the needs of their LGBTQQ congregants and/or to retain these church members, a training program could be developed to help that congregation not only to better understand the LGBTQQ community, but to assist the congregation in overcoming their SCD about righteousness and being LGBTQQ. The hope is that by educating and offering tactical methods to deal with SCD, less people will leave all places of worship, less people will isolate themselves to avoid the feelings associated with SCD, and most importantly, less people might look toward suicide as a solution to the effects of SCD.

It should be noted that there were some methodological implications in the gathering of data for this study. The interviews for this study were conducted in differing

settings. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participant's home. Other interviews were collected via Skype and one interview was conducted at a coffee house. While the method for collection of data was consistent, that is, use of a digital recorder for processing the transcription of the interviews and pen and paper notes for each interview, the interviews were never held in the same place. Background noises were a part of each interview, from dogs barking, televisions, bistro noises, personal phone calls and text messages, to children needing attention. Existing background noise was a factor in each interview.

Recommendations for practice include recognition of SCD as an affective psychological condition. When LGBTQQ individuals are being plagued by a constant barrage of guilt, shame, loss of community, or suicidal ideations because their spiritual selves do not sync with their sexuality, care needs to be taken to assist them in overcoming the angst they are feeling.

Outreach programs which target SCD are recommended. Some churches offer educational programs which focus on being gay while also being a Christian. These can be helpful to a person experiencing SCD. I suggest more places of worship regularly include programs which help the LGBTQQ individual understand SCD. Further, it is recommended that LGBTQQ-accepting churches offer outlets for group and/or individual counseling with accredited therapists who include SCD as part of their therapy program.

I also recommend the development of religious educational offerings which specifically target SCD and focuses on the symptoms as well as suggestions for

overcoming the condition. I recommend cognitive dissonance analysis be offered within the education systems. Such programs should be offered to students in both secondary and collegiate settings. Because SCD and CD can evoke suicidal thoughts, the sooner the condition is addressed the more likely lives may be saved.

Conclusion

The body of research regarding SCD is by no means complete. Many authors have given credence to the condition, but there were no real descriptions of what an SCD sufferer experiences. This research offers a deeper look into the phenomena surrounding SCD. As such, this research describes what effect SCD has on LGBTQQ individuals. This work does not describe exactly how to treat someone with SCD, but it does shed light on the symptoms associated with the condition and offers suggestions for interventions which could help LGBTQQ people coping with the condition. Places of worship could spearhead educational opportunities specifically targeting SCD in the LGBTQQ community. Secular offerings could include education at both the secondary and collegiate levels which, in turn, might save the lives of those who do not know how to cope with the SCD feelings they are experiencing. Because there is a real and present danger of suicide associated with this disorder, it is imperative that intervention programs and educational opportunities be developed to properly recognize and treat this illness.

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Appendix A: Demographic Data

Instructions: The following page asks for information regarding who you are. You do not have to complete this information but doing so allows for a more complete analysis. Please note your answers on the line provided.

_____ 1. I am:
L = Lesbian, G = Gay, B = Bisexual, T = Transgender, Q = Queer, Qs = Questioning, O = Other

_____ 2. I am: M = Male, F = Female, A = Androgynous, O = Not Specified

_____ 3. I am primarily:
C = Caucasian, A = Asian, H = Hispanic, B = African American, M = Middle Eastern, N = Native American, I = East Indian, O = Other

_____ 4. I am:
A = 18 – 25
B = 26 – 35
C = 36 – 50
D = 51 – 65
F = Over 65

_____ 6. I started living openly as an LGBTQQ person at:
A = 18 – 25
B = 26 – 30
C = 31 – 40
D = 41 – 55
E = 56 – 65
F = Over 65
G = I have not yet come out.

_____ 7. I was raised as a:
A = Protestant
B = Catholic
C = Hindu
D = Islam
E = Buddhist
F = Other
G = I did not go to church when I was young.

_____ 8. I currently attend a place of worship. Y = Yes, N= No

_____ 9. If you currently attend at a place of worship, which category best defines it?
A = Protestant
B = Catholic
C = Hindu
D = Islam
E = Buddhist
F = Other

Explanation of SCD

Do you believe you have experienced SCD?

Appendix B: Preference for Consistency Scale

I prefer to be around people whose actions I can anticipate.
It is important to me that my actions are consistent with my beliefs.
Even if my attitudes and actions seemed consistent with one another to me, it would bother me if they did not seem consistent in the eyes of others.
It is important to me that those who know me can predict what I will do. [A]
I want to be described by others as a stable, predictable person. [a]
Admirable people are consistent and predictable.
The appearance of consistency is an important part of the image I present to the world. [a]
It bothers me when someone I depend upon is unpredictable.
I don't like to appear as if I am inconsistent.
I get uncomfortable when I find my behavior contradicts my beliefs.
An important requirement for any friend of mine is personal consistency. [a]
I typically prefer to do things the same way. [a]
I dislike people who are consistently changing their opinions.
I want my close friends to be predictable. [a]
It is important to me that others view me as a stable person. [a]
I make an effort to appear consistent to others. [a]
I'm uncomfortable holding two beliefs that are inconsistent.
It doesn't bother me much if my actions are inconsistent. [ab]

Source: Cialdini, R., Trost, M., & Newsom, J. (1995). Preference for consistency: the development of a valid measure and the discovery of surprising behavioral implications. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69(2), 318-328. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.69.2.318

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doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.69.2.318

Note: Items were scored along a scale with the category designations: Strongly Disagree (1), Disagree (2), Somewhat Disagree (3), Slightly Disagree (4), Neither Agree nor Disagree (5), Slightly Agree (6), Somewhat Agree (7), Agree (8), and Strongly Agree (9).
[a]Items that appear on the brief form (PFC-B).
[b]Reverse scored.

Appendix C: Internalized Heterosexism Scale

Test format:
Items are rated on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher internalized heterosexism.

I am glad to be gay. (reverse scored)

I wish I were heterosexual

Whenever I think a lot about being gay, I feel critical about myself.

Homosexuality is not as satisfying as heterosexuality.

_____

Note: Responses were selected on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree to 6 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating higher Internalized Heterosexism.

Appendix D: Cognitive Dissonance Inventory

Test format:
Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "not accurate at all" to 7 = "very accurate."

Cognitive-dissonance inventory used in Study 3. First dimension: items 1-3; second dimension: items 4-6; third dimension: items 7-8.

After I bought the advice, I resented it.
After I bought the advice, I felt disappointed with myself.
After I bought the advice, I felt I'd let myself down.
I wonder if I really needed the advice.
I wonder if I made the right choice.
I wonder if I have done the right thing in buying the advice.
After I bought the advice I wondered if I'd been fooled.
After I bought the advice I wondered if there was something wrong with the deal I got.

Appendix E: Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire

Test Format: Respondents provide verbal, open-ended responses to questions that are used to guide the therapeutic conversation.

Past Spirituality
Describe the spiritual/religious tradition you grew up in. How did your family express its spirituality?
When did you first personally discover or learn about the sacred?
How did you conceptualize spirituality when you were younger?
How did you express your spirituality?
What sort of spiritual experiences stood out for you when you were growing up?
What spiritual milestones have you experienced during your journey?

Present Spirituality: Conceptions of the sacred.
What do you hold sacred in your life?
How has your understanding or experience of the sacred changed since you were a child?
How have your spiritual beliefs and practices changed since you were a child?
Why are you involved in spirituality?
What do you feel God wants from you?
What do you imagine God feels when he sees you going through this difficult time?
Have there been times where you felt the sacred was absent in your life?
Do you ever experience a different side of the sacred than you are experiencing now? What is that like?
Do you ever have mixed thoughts and feelings about the sacred? What are they like?

Expression and experience of spirituality
How would you describe your current spiritual orientation?
How do you experience the sacred in your life?
What has helped nurture your spirituality?
What has damaged or hindered your spirituality?
When/where do you feel most connected to the sacred?
When/where do you feel the sacred is not present?
What spiritual beliefs do you find especially meaningful?
What spiritual rituals or practices are particularly important to you?
What aspects of your spirituality are particularly uplifting?
When/where do you feel closest to God?
How have your present challenges affected your relationship with God?

Comprehensive Spiritual and Religious History Questionnaire
(Continued)

Spiritual efficacy
How has your spirituality changed your life for the better?
How has your spirituality changed your life for the worse?
To what degree has your spirituality been a source of strength? Pleasure? Meaning?
Joy? Intimacy? Connectedness to others? Closeness with God? Hope for the future?
Confidence in yourself? Compassion for others?
To what degree has your spirituality been a source of pain? Frustration? Guilt? Anger?
Confusion and doubt? Anxiety? Fear? Feelings of personal insignificance? Feelings of
alienation from others?
In what ways has your spirituality helped you understand or cope with your problems?
In what ways has your spirituality hindered your ability to understand or cope with
problems?

Spiritual environment
Who supports you spiritually? How so?
How does not support you spiritually? How so?
In what ways has your religious community been a source of assistance and
encouragement?
In what ways has your religious community been a source of difficulties and problems?

Future spirituality
How do you see yourself changing spiritually in the future?
In what ways do you want to grow spiritually?
How does your spirituality relate to your goals in life?
How does your relationship with God affect your future life plans?

Source:
Hodge, D. (2013). Comprehensive spiritual and religious history questionnaire [Database
Record]. Retrieved from PsychTESTS.

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doi: 10.1037/t20178-000

Appendix F: SCD Questionnaire

Test Format: Respondents will provide verbal responses to open-ended questions that are used to guide the conversation.

Are you lesbian/gay/heterosexual/transgender/queer/questioning?

If you are not heterosexual, have you begun to live openly as such?

If so, at what age did you begin living opening as an LGBTQ person?

From the ages of 0 – 18 years did you attend a place of worship, that is, with your

parents?

How often did you attend a place of worship from the ages of 0 – 18 years?

How did those who peopled the place of worship you attended between 0 – 18 years of

age speak about homosexuality or transgender people?

What was the official stance of the aforementioned place of worship regarding

homosexuality and/or transgendered people?

Was their stance regarding homosexuality and/or transgendered people publicly spoken

or was it an implied viewpoint?

If your parents attended the same place of worship, did he/she/they agree with the place

of worship's stance on homosexuality and/or transgendered people?

Did you agree with the stance on homosexuality and/or transgendered people presented

by your place of worship when you attended said place of worship?

Do you currently attend a place of worship?

Is the place of worship you currently attend the same place of worship you attended when you were 0 – 18 years of age?

If so, has this place of worship changed its viewpoint regarding homosexuality and/or transgendered people?

If not, do you now attend a church which accepts/welcomes LGBTQQ people?

Source:

O'Flynne, T. (2014)

Appendix G: Interview Protocol Form

INSTITUTION: Walden University
INTERVIEWEE ID#   _____
INTERVIEWER: Teresa O'Flynne
SURVEY SECTIONS USED: _____   A) History of SCD Experiences
                                  _____   B) Current SCD Experiences
                                  _____   C) Reconciliation
                                  _____   D) Restoration

Introductory Protocol:
So that I may more correctly reflect what you will say during our interview, I would like to digitally and video record our interview today. For verification purposes, please indicate your permission to participate in this interview by signing the Interview Protocol Form and by verbally stating you agree to be digitally, and video recorded during this interview. In order to protect your identity and information we will be assigning the data an individual identification number and your name or other identifying information will be kept confidential. I want to assure you that your participation in this interview is strictly voluntary and, as such, if you feel uncomfortable you may request a break, or you may discontinue the interview as needed. We do not wish to cause you any harm.

This interview will last 60-90 minutes. We have some questions that will be used to guide the interview and get to the topics we specifically want to uncover. If we start running out of time, it may be necessary for me to interrupt an answer to get through all of these questions. I truly appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview and if you are ready, we'll get started.

Introduction
You were chosen to be interviewed because your answers to previous questionnaires indicate you have experienced spiritual cognitive dissonance (SCD). This research focuses on the phenomena surrounding SCD. Your actual experiences with SCD are of particular interest. It is believed that if we can gain a better understanding of the condition, we will be more effective in addressing same. This study is for the documentation of SCD phenomena only. There are no right or wrong answers. It is not the goal of this interview to evaluate your condition or to provide therapy for said condition. Rather, it is hoped your experiences can positively contribute to the existing body of research written about SCD and thereby improve our understanding thereof.

At this point the participants will hear a description of spiritual cognitive dissonance, specifically in regard to homosexuality and/or transgenderism. The interviewer will define spiritual cognitive dissonance concerning sexual or gender identity as: having been taught that homosexuality and transgenderism was societally inappropriate during their formative/adolescent years yet said participant has determined he/she is homosexual or

transgendered; any spiritual, cognitive conflict therefrom would be considered spiritual cognitive dissonance. After this brief explanation the participant will be allowed to ask questions to clarify the definition of SCD, then the following questions will be asked.

Have you ever experienced a moment or period of time wherein earlier held religious

beliefs regarding homosexuality and/or transgenderism conflicted with your currently

held religious beliefs in the same regard?

If so, please explain in as much detail as possible.

Do you still experience SCD?

What, if anything, have you done to alleviate the SCD?

Have your efforts to alleviate SCD been successful? Please explain.

After the interview is completed, I will reflect over my notes with the participant.

Closure
Thank the interviewee for participating.
Give interviewee the contact information of local therapists who specialize in LGBTQQ life issues.
Reassure the interviewee that information given in the interview will remain confidential.
Ask the interviewee if I can contact the person to follow up if needed. •YES •NO

Post Interview Comments:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix H: Code Book

The data collected by this researcher is qualitative in nature. Interviews using open ended questions were conducted to determine how Spiritual Cognitive Dissonance (SCD) presented in the lives of the participants. There were eight individuals interviewed. Excerpts from the interviews are coded herein showing similarities both in code and in essential themes.

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P1	1	My past spirituality was rigid, stoic, fear-based, and cult-like.	My…spirituality was rigid, stoic, fear-based, and cult-like.	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	2	My church believed gay people were living un-godly lifestyles. They were sex crazed and perverts.	…gay people were ungodly…sex-crazed…perverts	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God
	3	If you lived the gay lifestyle you were to be shunned by church…family.	…gay…shunned	Shunning	Rejection	Fear
	4	I didn't go to church for years. I was really hurt by the rejection I felt from my former church.	I didn't go to church for years.	Left former church	Rejection	Coping
	5	I was essentially outed by my niece. I was babysitting her child at that time. I don't exactly know what preceded her question, but well into the time frame I had been babysitting, my niece called me and asked me directly if I was gay. I didn't lie to her. I never got to babysit my great niece again.	…asked me directly if I was gay. I didn't lie to her.	Shunning	Rejection	Fear
	6	I lost everything when I came out. My family no longer invited me over for dinners or, really, any get togethers. I was shunned mercilessly.	I lost everything when I came out.	Loss and shunning	Rejection	Fear
	7	My ex-husband and I were long time members at my former church. When we divorced, he	…I was no longer welcome…	Loss	Rejection	Fear

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
		knew my reason was because I'd realized I was gay. He didn't talk about it, as far as I knew. The divorce didn't change anything in my service with the church. But, when my niece outed me, I was no longer welcome in the choir, Sunday school, as a deaconess, or in any service capacity. I was so hurt. I ended up leaving that church, the church I'd called home for nearly twenty years.				
	8	Yes, of course I felt dissonance. I was going against everything I'd ever been taught about homosexuality.	Yes, of course I felt dissonance. (SCD)	Change	Cognitive dissonance	Coping
	9	When no one knew I was gay at my former church, and I was worshiping, I felt so guilty. I didn't even call myself gay at that point, but I still felt something was out of place in me.	…I felt so guilty (SCD)	Guilty	Cognitive dissonance	God
	10	My partner and I attend a Unity church now. We love it. I am very involved in church again. There aren't that many gay couples in the church, but there is no condemnation whatsoever. I'm actually on the Board.	I am very involved in church again.	Change	Reconnection	God
	11	Growing up I remember how the pastor and congregation spoke about homosexuality. It was a sin. They were very negative about being gay. It was un-godly.	…homosexuality. It is a sin…un-godly.	Am I wrong?	Spiritual beliefs	God
	12	I used to struggle with living as gay because of how I grew up. I didn't go to church for a very long time.	I didn't go to church for a very long time.	Left church	Cognitive dissonance	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	13	American religious practices, trying to find something that resonated with my soul. I searched for a spiritual connection for a long time after I had to leave my former church. I studied various belief systems and even Native	I studied various belief systems…	Finding answers	Research	Coping
	14	I questioned if there was a God.	…questioned if there was a God.	Questioning	Spiritual beliefs	God
	15	Most of my spiritually is experienced here at home. I practice meditation and it's when I am meditating that I feel closer to a God	I practice meditation…	This is who I am	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	16	I no longer think of God as a He. I believe God is a source – not a HE/SHE. God is love. Any difficulty is mine to examine – and to redefine.	I believe God is a source…God is love.	Change	Spiritual beliefs	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P2	1	I came to grips with my sexuality at 21.	…my sexuality…	This is who I am.	Self-awareness	Coping
	2	It's been 30 years and my mom, and I are still not reconciled.	…my mom and I are still not reconciled.	Shunning	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	3	I don't remember homosexuality being mentioned from the pulpit.	…homosexuality (not) mentioned from pulpit.	My old church	Perception	Fear
	4	I didn't go to church for a long while.	I didn't go to church for long while.	Left church	Beliefs	Coping
	5	There was a lot of destructive behavior.	…destructive behavior.	Self-destruction	Suicidal ideations	Coping
	6	There was a lot of wasted time.	…wasted time.	Self-destruction	Direction	Coping
	7	I had several bad relationships.	…several bad relationships.	Self-destruction	Choices	Coping
	8	I isolated myself. I even went so far as to live in a gated community.	I isolated myself.	Closed off	Isolation	Coping
	9	I thought about suicide more than a few times.	I thought about suicide…	Self-destruction	Suicidal ideations	Coping
	10	No, church wasn't something I did for a lot of years. It was just too hard to go there.	…church wasn't something I did for a lot of years.	Disconnect	Spirituality	Coping
	11	I grew up in a very religious family. It took a long time before I could admit I was gay.	It took a long time…(to) admit I was gay.	Coming out	Rejection	Fear
	12	I couldn't worship for a long while 'cause I felt I wasn't living right. I shut myself off from my family because they disapproved.	…I felt I wasn't living right.	Disconnect	Isolation	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	13	I still don't feel really comfortable in church. I mean, we go to a church with the kids sometimes, but I'm not really involved with the people there. I don't feel guilty like I did before, but I still don't feel the same connection to God as I did when I was a kid.	I don't feel… comfortable in church.	Disconnect	Spirituality	Coping
	14	I couldn't pray, sing, or really listen to sermons when I started back to church with my partner. When I would start to open up, I would remember the rejection I felt from my family; I remembered that I was viewed as a sinner because I chose to love a woman. I just kept quiet and listened, but I couldn't speak.	I couldn't pray, sing, or really listen to sermons… (SCD)	Disconnect	Spirituality	God
	15	I still have a difficult time attending church regularly.	…difficult time attending church regularly.	Disconnect	Spirituality	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P3	1	I guess it was dissonance when I would pray the "Lord's Prayer." When I prayed, "and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," I pictured my partner as the "temptation," and the LGBTQQ accepting place of worship as the "evil."	…lead us not into temptation… deliver from evil… (SCD)	Temptation	Cognitive Dissonance	Coping
	2	I also kind of felt weird being in a bathroom with a transgendered person, even though I am supportive of the transgender community.	…in a bathroom with a trans… person.	New normal	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	3	There were times I would have preferred to just die already.	I just (wanted to) die already;	Self-destruction	Suicidal ideations	Coping
	4	At first, I wondered if my family would accept me. I had lots of friends, though. They helped me push back the fear, so I could come out to my family.	…I wondered if my family would accept me.	Family	Coming out	Fear
	5	My family was very supportive, and they love me so much. That's how I got through the fear of coming out.	My family was very supportive…	Family	Coming out	Coping
	6	Sometimes I feel like when I get home from a bar, I've been drinking, maybe hooking up with someone, that I shouldn't go to church the next Sunday. Sometimes I feel like God thinks I'm asking to be left by Him.	…I feel like God thinks I'm asking to be left by Him. (SCD)	Disconnect	Rejection	Fear
	7	I used to have difficulty praying for forgiveness. I thought since I kept seeing men, that God wouldn't forgive me of any other things I was asking about.	…God wouldn't' forgive me… (SCD)	Forgiveness	Rejection	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	8	I grew up Catholic. I don't go to a Catholic church anymore, but the strict rules still make me feel unworthy and, actually, kinda dirty sometimes. I now go to church where most of the people are gay. It's really great to be able to be myself.	…Catholic… (I felt) … unworthy…dirty	Left former church	Self-acceptance	God
	9	When I was pretty young, I remember hearing people talk about someone else' kid…they were saying the kid was gay. I wasn't sure what they were talking about at the time, but they seemed to be making fun of the kid and his family. So, it wasn't an atmosphere conducive to people who were different.	…they seemed to be making fun of the kid…	My old church	Bullying	Fear
	10	I've really worked through most of my issues regarding me being gay and how I believe in God. I know He loves me, but sometimes I still question if how I live my life is wrong. That's when it is hard to pray and worship.	…still question if …my life is wrong. (SCD)	Disconnect	Self-acceptance	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P4	1	I don't think I experienced any dissonance. I've come to grips with who I am and that I'm OK with that.	I've come to grips with who I am…	I am who I am	Self-acceptance	Coping
	2	I did a lot of research.	…a lot of research	Research	Justification	Coping
	3	I don't think some of the Bible verses actually mean what most churches say they mean.	…Bible verses actually mean what (they) say they mean.	Justification	Research	Coping
	4	I believe God loves me just as I am.	…just as I am.	God's love	Self-acceptance	God
	5	Before I researched it out, there were many times when I just thought I'd kill myself and get it over with.	…I thought I'd kill myself…	Self-destruction	Suicidal ideations	Coping
	6	Well I grew up believing that homosexuality was wrong. It wasn't exactly preached from the pulpit, but everyone knew it.	My old church	God's love	Spiritual beliefs	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	7	What do I experience when I'm worshiping? Well, I experience God's presence. There were many years though, growing up in my old church, when worshiping was mostly a show. I thought being gay was wrong until I did my research. Before I came to grips with being gay and was attending my old church, I'd sing just because I love singing, but there wasn't a connection.	I thought being gay was wrong… (SCD)	Justification	Self-acceptance	God
	8	My former church, the church I grew up in, didn't say much about homosexuality, but it was implied that it was wrong.	… implied that homosexuality was wrong	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	9	I never really stopped going to church. I was invited to sing at several churches that were more open regarding me being gay. One of those churches is the place I currently call home.	I (sang) at several churches that were more open…	Left my former church	Self-acceptance	Coping
	10	I was afraid of the ramifications for my wife and kids, and to my position on the worship team. Coming out as gay would result in an automatic dismissal from that team.	…ramification for my wife and kids.	Coming out	Rejection	Fear

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	11	I left the church because my wife and children would have suffered from the scandalization of my circumstances. I knew there would be a lot of gossip and inuendo. It was a very scary time for me.	I left the church…	Family	Rejection	Fear

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P5	1	I went to church three times a week.	I went to church…	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God
	2	Homosexuality or anything different from the church was immoral.	I don't understand.	My old church	Dissonance (SCD)	God
	3	My church's negative stance on homosexuality was publicly spoken	My church's negative stance on homosexuality…	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God
	4	Homosexuality was immoral and if you participated in it you were going against God and going to Hell.	…going to Hell.	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	5	My parents agreed with the church.	My parents agreed…	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	6	I do not attend the same church.	Left former church	Coming out	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	7	I grew up Pentecostal	…Pentecostal	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God
	8	You showed your spirituality by going to church and doing good.	…your spirituality…	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God
	9	In the darkest times of my life I did not see the love of God and I felt like I was being punished.	…I did not see the love of God…I was being punished.	Disconnect	Faith	Fear

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	10	It confuses me because I know that God is love, but I don't always feel that way.	…God is love, but I don't always feel (it). (SCD)	God's love	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	11	It's easy to bounce from anger to love.	…from anger to love.	Coming out	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	12	It also hurt that people tend to use religion to defend their positions of hate.	…use religion to defend positions of hate.	Hate speech	Anger	Coping
	13	I believe that God loves all people no matter what.	…God loves all people…	God's love	Spiritual beliefs	God
	14	Since I was gay, why didn't God love me, and others love me, if they were supposed to be tolerant and Christ-like?	…why didn't God love me… (SCD)	Tolerance	Rejection	God
	15	I still go to church and believe the Bible, but I think there are more ways to interpret the teachings than showing the wrath and fear of God, instead of love.	…I think there are more ways to interpret the (Bible)… (SCD)	Interpretation	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	16	I still have a relationship with God. It gives me peace and love. I also love sharing that with others that are like-minded in their faith.	I … have a relationship with God.	Peace	Spiritual beliefs	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	17	I didn't really realize I was gay until I was older. I didn't know that I was actually attracted to women until after I had married a man and we'd had a child.	I was older…	I am who I am.	Self-awareness	Coping
	18	My former church was a good experience for me. I didn't have any issues with the people who went there. When I started realizing my attraction to women, though, I stopped going to church because I knew the congregation and pastors believed homosexuality was wrong. I knew I would feel uncomfortable if I remained in the environment.	…I stopped going to… church.	Coming out	Self-awareness	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	19	I have been confused about all things related to God and church since I was old enough to question what I had been taught. Why should I fear someone that supposedly loved me? If I didn't believe the ways I was told, why would I be punished for it? Since I was gay, why didn't God love me, and others love me, if they were supposed to be tolerant and Christ-like? I was scared to say how I believed because it alienated me from other people, and they didn't believe the way I believed so they would treat me differently.	I have been confused… (SCD)	God's love	Rejection.	Fear
	20	I believe the most dissonant times for me were when I was in great despair. These times included the death of my grandfather and daughter. There were other times of despair too, when I realized I was gay and would not be welcome in my church anymore. I felt like God was not there for me during those times. The dissonance, I guess, was in believing God is love, and not feeling His love when I was in such pain.	…God was not there for me… dissonance	Despair	Cognitive dissonance	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	21	I stopped going to church (all together) for a while after I came out.	…stopped going to church…	Coming out	Self-acceptance	Coping
	22	I found it hard to worship when I realized I was gay. Since I was taught that homosexuality was wrong, it was difficult to connect. I just went through the motions. There was a huge disconnect.	…I found it hard to worship when I realized I was gay. (SCD)	Coming out	Cognitive dissonance (SCD)	Coping
	23	The dissonance I feel was in what I had been taught all my life about homosexuality and believing I am loved by God anyway.	…what I had been taught…about homosexuality and believing I am loved by God anyway. (SCD)	God's love	Self-acceptance	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P6	1	I have had a few milestones. The first was accepting Jesus and being baptized.	…accepting Jesus	Milestones	Spiritual beliefs	God
	2	When I was older and, after I accepted my sexuality… when I realized that I am still a child of God and loved was a huge milestone.	…I realized…I am still a child of God…	Milestones	Spiritual beliefs	God
	3	Oh yeah, there are brief moments when I think that God is punishing me for being gay by giving me cancer among many other troubles I am dealing with.	…God is punishing me for being gay…	Am I wrong?	Rejection	God
	4	There are brief moments I have doubted that God exists because bad things keep happening.	…doubted that God exists	Finding answers	Doubt	God
	5	There are times that my head says the way I was raised was the only way to believe, that being gay is a sin and God is mad at me.	…God is mad at me (SCD)	Questioning	Cognitive dissonance (SCD)	Fear
	6	When I get my mind right, I know in my heart that God made me who I am and how I am and loves me just as I am.	…(God) loves me just as I am	This is who I am	Faith	Coping
	7	I am very much like I have always been however; I am now much more accepting of others that are different than me.	…I am now much more accepting of others…	Change	Self-acceptance	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	8	I am spiritual in my own way I guess.	… my own way…	Questioning	Spirituality	Coping
	9	I like things from other religions as well as the one I was raised with.	…other religions…	Finding answers	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	10	I love church, but to me the time I spend with my friends is most spiritual to me.	…time I spend with friends is most spiritual…	This is who I am	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	11	Going to an LGBT friendly church helps me see others and understand what being a real Christian is.	Going to an LGBT friendly church helps…	Family and friends	Reconnection	Coping
	12	Also, people that I trust to help me feel my spirituality have confused me with their actions and that makes me question if how I think, and feel is really God's will.	…that makes me question…	Questioning	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	13	Music is uplifting to me, especially older gospel. It feels good and makes me more confident that I am a good person and that my beliefs are right, and I am loved by God.	…I am loved by God…	God's love	Self-acceptance	Coping
	14	I'm gay and that's not supposed to be OK, so at times my Baptist upbringing makes me worry about my salvation.	…upbringing makes me worry about my salvation. (SCD)	Am I wrong?	Cognitive dissonance	Fear

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	15	So, being who I am today and being around others who live an alternative lifestyle makes me worry. It makes me doubt my being a good person and it makes me feel guilty that I might be justifying who I am by my own beliefs and not God's word.	…it makes me feel guilty… (SCD)	Am I wrong?	Doubt	Fear
	16	I don't remember ever hearing anything at all except the verse, 'man shall not lay with man' and that was it as far as homosexuality being mentioned.	'man shall not lie with man'	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	17	I have no idea what anyone thought about gay or trans people.	…gay or trans people.	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God
	18	It was implied that homosexuality was wrong – I never heard anything but by looks and whispers, and that was if a gay person even had the nerve to come to church.	It was implied that homosexuality was wrong.	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	19	Honestly the only time a gay person was in our church, well not my Baptist church, but the catholic church my brother-in-law was getting married in – they were my future sister-in-law's best friend and my uncle-in-law. So, two gay men at the same time was super hard for 99% of the people to handle. One was the 'maid of honor' and one was an usher.	…the only time a gay person was in our church, well not my Baptist church…	My old church	Rejection	God

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P7	1	My relationship with God is sacred to me.	…God is sacred…	God's love	Spiritual beliefs	God
	2	I think God has been sad when he saw me struggle and not turn to Him.	…God has been sad…	Guilt	Perception	God
	3	I chose my path in my early twenties and I feel like I paid for that.	…I paid for that.	Guilt	Perception	Fear
	4	I didn't ask God for help until I had already screwed things up.	…I had already screwed up.	Guilt	Self-deprecation	Fear
	5	I did have feelings that were uncomfortable with my conscience as a child but looking back I feel those experiences were the natural curiosity of a little girl.	…feeling…were uncomfortable with my conscience… (SCD)	Guilt	Cognitive dissonance	Coping
	6	I think sin is always tempting – it doesn't have to be being sexual with only another female, but also with a male.	…sin is tempting	Temptation	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	7	There was a time in my life that I became involved in a threesome or another time when I was leaning towards a lesbian relationship. The devil was having a heyday with me.	The devil was having a heyday with me.	Temptation	Choices	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	8	The guilt and shame were crushing me.	…guilt and shame were crushing… (SCD)	Guilt	Cognitive dissonance	Fear
	9	That was a time when I wouldn't want Jesus to walk into the room.	…I wouldn't want Jesus (to see me) …	Guilt	Self-deprecation	Fear
	10	I don't' feel like I can judge others because I don't want to be judged by that same scale.	Blame	Guilt	Choices	Coping
	11	(A couple's) son, who was gay…possibly transgender…got saved and came to church. I made it a point to speak to him and welcome him.	I made it a point to speak to him…	My old church	Outreach	God
	12	My church didn't have a gay bashing sermon, if that's what you mean. They talked about all sex being equal.	…all sex being equal.	My old church	Perception	God
	13	You keep some sins quiet while other sins are known.	some sins quiet, others known.	Guilty	Self-awareness	Coping
	14	I didn't want anyone to know I had some feelings toward women. I felt as though I was guilty for just allowing the thought to enter my mind.	I felt…guilty	Guilty	Perception	Fear
	15	I didn't agree with my church about homosexuality, but I never felt like they would run someone off because of it.	I didn't agree with my church	My old church	Perception	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	16	I pushed aside any lesbian thoughts since I was in grade school.	…pushed aside lesbian thoughts…	Temptation	Choices	Coping
	17	I experimented with women.	…experimented…	Guilty	Confession	Coping
	18	I consider myself to be questioning.	…questioning.	Coming out	Self-acceptance	Coping
	19	There was a girl in my teen years the…we messed around…nobody knows.	…nobody knows.	Guilty	Confession	Coping
	20	I remember when (a couple) brought their gay son to church. He stuck out. May have made me suppress thoughts about sex with women.	He stuck out.	I am who I am	Confession	Fear
	21	I felt guilty about my feelings.	…guilty…	Guilty	Confession	Fear
	22	My thoughts about women weren't active thoughts…they were in the depths of my soul.	My thoughts about women…were in the depths of my soul.	Temptation	Confession	Coping
	23	Then when I was married, I thought about women again. I told myself not to open that can of worms.	…thought about women…can of worms.	Guilt	Choices	Coping
	24	A friend of mine came over who most of us thought was gay. I had some feelings, but I suppressed them.	…some feelings…I suppressed them.	Guilt	Cognitive Dissonance	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	25	My church believes homosexuality is against God's law, but they don't really talk about it.	…homosexuality is against God's law…	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Fear
	26	My church was accepting, not condemning.	…accepting…	My old church	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	27	I feel like God delivered me from the homosexual feelings.	…God delivered me…	Deliverance	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	28	If I had those feelings again, I'd not let them surface. I'd carry them to my grave.	I'd carry them to my grave.	Temptation	Spiritual beliefs	Coping
	29	Frankly, I just decided to stop thinking about it and embrace the Bible and eventually those feelings went away.	…eventually those feelings went away.	Temptation	Spirituality	Coping
	30	My life would be a total wreck without God in my life. When I wasn't living my life, right was when I wouldn't want Jesus to walk into the room.	My life would be a total wreck without God…	Guilt	Spiritual beliefs	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
P8	1	I wouldn't wish this on anyone.	I wouldn't wish…	I am who I am	Choices	Fear
	2	I did not choose this; it's just who I am.	it's just who I am.	This is who I am.	Self-acceptance	Fear
	3	I stopped going to church for a long time.	…stopped going to church…	Left church	Isolation	Coping
	4	Oh, yeah…I thought about suicide a lot.	I thought about suicide.	Guilty	Suicidal ideations	Coping
	5	There were times, I couldn't worship. I was afraid someone might find out about my being gay.	…couldn't worship… afraid	Guilty	Rejection	Fear
	6	The most dissonant times were when I would pray about something or for someone and, because I was gay, I thought God didn't want my prayers.	…I thought God didn't want my prayers.	Inner turmoil	Cognitive dissonance	Fear
	7	I was engaged to a woman once. I truly loved her, but I met this guy and we really hit it off. I remember how difficult it was to break off my engagement without being able to tell her why.	…without being able to really tell her why.	I am who I am	Choices	Fear

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	8	I took that same boyfriend to church. No one knew him and even though they may have assumed I was gay; I hadn't come out yet. (One couple) stared me down. I was really uncomfortable. I never set foot in that church again, even though it had been my church from as far back as I could remember.	I was really uncomfortable.	I am who I am	Bullying	Fear
	9	I tried to live the straight life. I married (a woman) and we adopted several children. We went to church every Sunday and were very involved. That was, until I told my wife I was still…that those feelings I said were gone, were never really gone.	…those feelings I said were gone, were never really gone.	Guilty	Choices	Coping
	10	I tried counseling and other types of therapy, but I knew the truth was I am gay. (Gay Conversion Therapy (GCT))	…the truth was I am gay."	I am who I am	Spirituality	Coping

Label	Item #	Excerpt	Common Phrases	Initial Code	Revised Codes	Essential Theme
	11	Because I was gay, and my beliefs were that homosexuality was a sin, I felt hollow when I tried to worship. I felt like God loved me, but that I was walking in sin, so I wasn't in a place to ask anything from Him – well except to forgive me for all my gay thoughts or actions. Since I wasn't living like I should, I didn't feel that God would listen to me.	I felt hollow when I tried to worship (SCD)	Disconnect	Cognitive dissonance	Fear
	12	I still wish sometimes that things were different. I wish I could have been straight…it would have been easier. I know in my heart that God loves me either way, but in my mind I'm sure I'm not living the way He'd want me to live.	I wish I could have been straight…	Disconnect	Cognitive dissonance	Coping
	13	It's mostly when I'm praying that I feel dissonance. It's when I'm praying that I feel as if the line of communication with God has been severed. I feel like I'm on the line, but God's blocked my call.	I feel like I'm on the line, but God's blocked my call. (SCD)	Disconnect	Rejection	God