



INTEGRATING RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY WITH LGBTQ+ CLIENTS

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STARS ACTIVITY

- Center – Your Name or an image that represents you
- Leg One – a very close friend's name
- Leg Two – family member with whom you are close
- Leg Three – community to which you belong
- Leg Four – a job you deeply enjoy
- Leg Five – one hope or dream you have for yourself

RELIGION AS RELATIONSHIPS

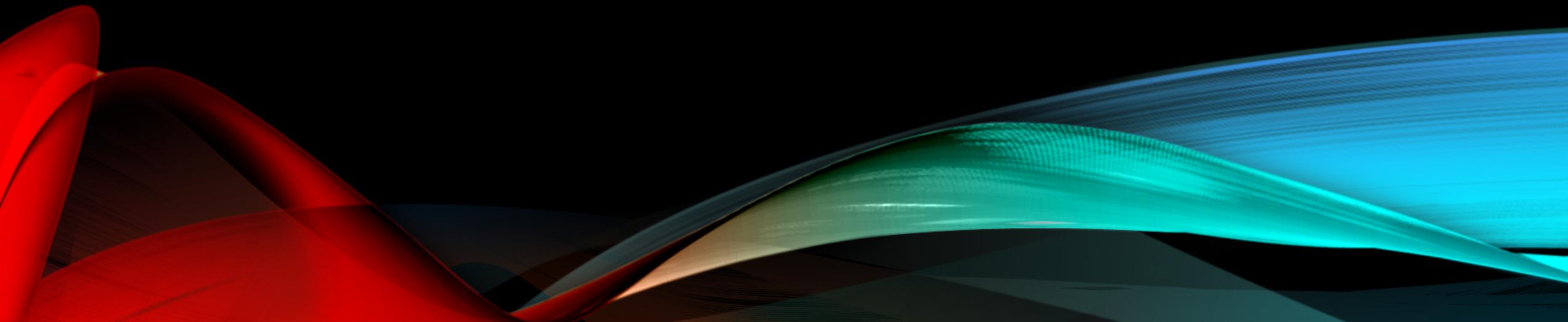
- Individual-Higher Power Relationship
- Individual-Hierarchy/Leadership Relationship
- Individual-Community Relationship
- Individual-Family Relationships
- Individual-Friends Relationships
- Religion-Society Relationship
- Religion-Higher Power Relationship
- Religion-Other Religion Relationships
- Religion-Non-believers Relationships

RELIGION FROM A SYSTEMS LENS

- Reciprocal Relationships exist which may impact the following:
 - Individual and group psychologies
 - Sources of resilience
 - Sense of belongingness in families, friend groups, communities, or even humanity
 - Stability including food, shelter, support, employment, etc.
 - View of the world outside of the context of the religious community
 - Patterns of comfort, self-care, and self-regulation
- While we may be tempted to read each of these in a negative light, religious affiliation and participation can be a positively impactful, neutral, or negatively impactful system for the individuals therein.

“ MY CHOICES, IT SEEMED, WERE TO BE BRANDED A SINNER AND LIVE MY LIFE ALONE; TO ABANDON MY FAITH, THE ONE THING I HELD MOST DEAR IN THE ENTIRE WORLD; OR TO LIE TO EVERYONE, PRETEND I WAS STRAIGHT, AND FORGET ABOUT IT ALL. ”

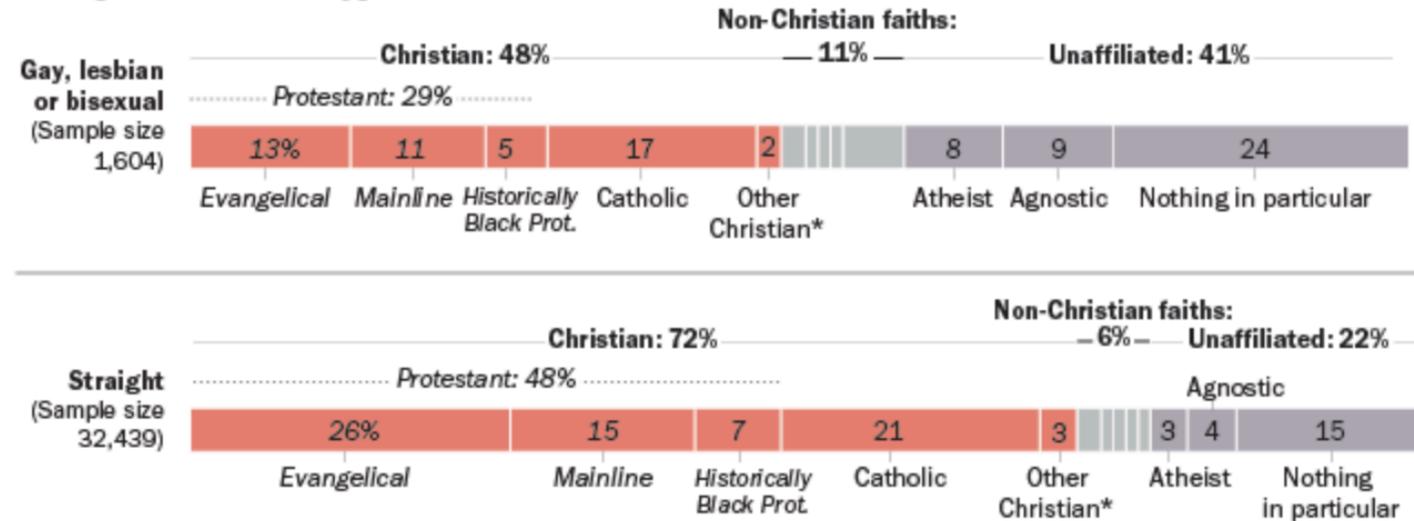
-Justin Lee, Author of *Torn: Rescuing the Gospel from the Gays-vs.-Christians Debate*



DATA ABOUT LGBTQ+ RELIGIOSITY

Religious Composition by Self-Reported Sexual Identity

Among those who identify as ...



Source: 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted June 4-Sept. 30, 2014.

*Non-Christian faiths" category includes Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and a number of other smaller, non-Christian faiths.

*Other Christian groups include Orthodox Christians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and a number of smaller Christian groups.

Don't know/refused answers are omitted.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

DATA CONT.

Religious Affiliation and Disaffiliation, by Demographic Groups

% of LGBT adults in each group who are ...

	<u>Unaffiliated</u>	<u>Affiliated</u>
All LGBT	48	51
Lesbian	46	53
Gay men	48	52
Bisexual	51	47
Bisexual Men	48	51
Bisexual Women	52	46
White	48	51
Hispanic, black, other or mixed race	47	52
Bachelor's degree or more	44	56
Less than bachelor's degree	49	50
Legally married	43	54
In a civil union, not legally married	53	47
Neither	47	52
Northeast	58	41
Midwest	48	50
South	41	57

DATA CONT.

- LGBTQ+ individuals are almost twice as likely to identify as religiously unaffiliated than non-LGBTQ+ individuals. (41% vs 22%).
- However, the majority of LGBTQ+ individuals reported religious affiliation.
- The majority of LGBTQ+ individuals also reported feeling that most major faith traditions were unwelcoming towards queer individuals and families.
- LGBTQ+ respondents were nearly twice as likely as non-LGBTQ+ individuals to identify as affiliated with a non-Christian religion (11% vs. 6%).
- Nearly one third of adult LGBTQ+ respondents reported that they have been personally made to feel unwelcome in a religious organization (29%).

WHAT DOES THIS DATA TELL US?

- The interplay of gender/sexual identity and religious identity is complex and changing.
- Despite growing social acceptance in many places and spaces many LGBTQ+ individuals still experience discrimination within some religious and spiritual contexts.
- While less likely to identify as religiously affiliated than non-LGBTQ+ individuals the queer community is still majority religiously affiliated.
- Working with LGBTQ+ populations requires the competent clinician to be aware of how spirituality and religion creates systems of resilience or oppression in the lives of many queer persons.

“ RELIGIOUS TRAUMA SYNDROME IS THE CONDITION EXPERIENCED BY PEOPLE WHO ARE STRUGGLING WITH LEAVING AN AUTHORITARIAN, DOGMATIC RELIGION AND COPING WITH THE DAMAGE OF INDOCTRINATION. ...

RTS IS A FUNCTION OF BOTH THE CHRONIC ABUSES OF HARMFUL RELIGION AND THE IMPACT OF SEVERING ONE'S CONNECTION WITH ONE'S FAITH, AND IT CAN BE EASILY COMPARED TO A COMBINATION OF PTSD AND COMPLEX PTSD (C-PTSD). ”

-Jamie Lee Finch. *You Are Your Own*

WHAT IS RELIGIOUS TRAUMA

- Originates from the work of Dr. Marlene Winell and is based in a trauma-informed lens of development and psychotherapy.
- Correlated with authoritarian and dogmatic religion, especially when such religion is the primary focus on the individual's family of origin.
- Typified by feelings of deep personal conflict, fear, anxiety, depression, and guilt on the part of the traumatized individual.
- Can impact the individual both while engaged in the religious system and can persist beyond direct involvement.
- Exists on a spectrum of severity and impacts individual cognitive, emotional, and somatic development

(Stone, 2014; Winell, 1993)

RELIGIOUS TRAUMA FROM A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

- Religion is one of many complex networks of relationships that a client or family might be engaged.
- For some individuals, religion is a deeply impactful system of relationships that touches many (if not all) aspects of wellbeing and wholeness.
- Such relationships can be explored to identify the client or family's cognitive and emotional experiences and the complex network of overlapping relationships.
- Can be conceptualized as multiple relationships within the self or outside of the self are at odds:
 - environmental dissonance
 - cognitive dissonance
 - behavioral dissonance

(Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011)

BEGINNING TO WORK WITH RELIGIOUS TRAUMA IN THERAPY

- Must be identified within the context of the individual's presentation and we cannot assume that exposure to an authoritarian or dogmatic religious system impacted each client or family.
- Often not the presenting problem when an individual or family seeks therapy and is identified more fully in the work of therapy itself (Griffith, 2010).
- The therapist can seek to assist the client or family in identifying and exploring their specific sources of cognitive dissonance while normalizing the experience of confusion or overwhelm.
 - Many treatment modalities can be used in this process and can be integrated into your clinical practice (e.g., CBT, expressive arts therapies, projective techniques such as sand tray, existential, feminist, etc.).

(Doyle, 2018)

AFFIRMATIVE APPROACH IN WORKING WITH RELIGIOUS TRAUMA

- Includes therapist affirmation of the individual as a worthy, whole individual as expressed through unconditional positive regard.
- Also includes the affirmation of the individual's formative experiences as backgrounds through the honoring of client identification with religion regardless of the therapist's personal feelings towards religion in general, specific religions, specific denominations, or specific teachings. (Not the same as supporting religious doctrine).
- Can often include discussion between the therapist and client about the beliefs held by the religion of affiliation (or former affiliation).
- Normalizing the complexity of the client's experience through education about the systems lens and highlighting the multiple interconnecting relationships that exist within his/her/their experience of the religion.

(Ginicola & Smith, 2011)

WORKING WITH LGBTQ+ CLIENTS WITH RELIGIOUS TRAUMA

- Affirmation of the individual inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identities (See ACA Code of Ethics, ALGBTIC Competencies)
- Affirmation of the power and importance of the religion of affiliation in the individual or family's development, self-understanding, and ongoing relationships.
- Exploration of the COGNITIVE dissonance caused by client identities as a queer person and a person of faith (or former faith).
- Exploration of the EMOTIONAL dissonance caused by selective affirmation or disaffirming/discriminatory words and actions.
- Support the client in experiencing past or present grief and loss experienced in their journey towards integration.

WORKING WITH LGBTQ+ CLIENTS WITH RELIGIOUS TRAUMA CONT.

- Assist and encourage the client to explore her/his/their own sense of self as an individual or family:
 - Current beliefs
 - Sources of authenticity
 - Needs for support – logistical, social, developmental, faith-based
- Encourage exploration of new boundaries within current systems (when appropriate).
- Encourage exploration of new relationships and systems for clients and families to find more integrated affirmation.
- Accept and affirm client decisions about continued religious belief, involvement, affiliation and openness as a queer person or family.

THINGS TO CONSIDER...

- Seek continuing education units about LGBTQ+ topics in counseling to competently navigate issues of coming out, identity development, etc.
- Spend time with your own story of religious or spiritual (non-) identification to be aware of your own biases or perspectives.
- Authentic and supportive curiosity is a helpful perspective from which to explore religious beliefs – this approach allows for the validation of the client or family experience without alienating them/him/her based on criticism or invalidation of religious convictions.
- Be aware of local queer resources as well as local religious organizations that identify as open and affirming while being honest about your knowledge of these resources.



QUESTIONS?