Longitudinal Study of LDS Men Reconciling Conflicting Religious and Sexual Identities

By

Daman D. Reynolds

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Masters of Science in Human Development

Angela Huebner

Committee Chair

Eric McCullom

Committee Member

Mary Linda Sara

Committee Member

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(ABSTRACT)

This qualitative study is an exploration of the ways individuals experience and reconcile seemingly incompatible sexual and religious identities. The experience of espousing a religious identity which prohibits homosexuality while simultaneously being attracted to others of the same gender is not uncommon. This phenomenon and how individuals navigate it is poorly understood. Though it is often mentioned in existing literature, few if any studies highlight conflicting identities as the core conflict for this population. No existing studies apply identity theories to the phenomenon. For this study data were taken from two points in time, over nearly four years, from four participants. Results from survey 1 and survey 2 were compared for insights into the process of reconciliation. Results were also compared to two strains of identity theory (Stryker and Burke, 2000) to identify applicability of said theory to this phenomenon. Participants all report a conflict between sexual and religious identities. Relatively minor shifts in how they conceptualize and make meaning of their experiences are observed. All experienced a deepening of their understanding and relationship with self and God. Some report aspects of therapy that were helpful/unhelpful to them in this process. Also included are strengths and limitations of this study, implications for future research, and application of findings to a clinical setting.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Problem and its Setting

The present study is a qualitative, longitudinal exploration of individual experiences with seemingly incompatible sexual and religious identities. This section outlines the problem being investigated, the significance of studying said problem, and a rationale for the present approach to doing so. Identity theory is discussed, including exploration of the two aspects of identity (sexual and religious identities) most germane to this study. Finally, the author presents research questions and hypotheses for this study.

Conflicting Identities

As members of a complex and vastly diversified society most, if not all, of us espouse conflicting identities to some degree or another without adding too much stress to our lives (Stryker & Burke, 2000; White & Epston, 1990). When the conflicting identities are core, or highly salient, identities studies show that individuals can experience intense stress, anxiety, and confusion, as manifested in the lives of many who hold seemingly disparate sexual and religious identities (Haldeman, 2004).

As will be shown later, there is great variability in how individuals define different aspects of this conflict. In particular, the definitions for what it means to be ‘gay’ and/or same-sex attracted range widely based on the person. Researchers and this population have come to use the terms ‘same-sex attraction’ (SSA) and ‘same-gender attraction’ (SGA), usually to differentiate between adopting a gay identity and merely being attracted to others of the same sex while not defining oneself as gay. This study
uses the term ‘same-sex attraction’ as it seems to be more prominent throughout the literature.

Making meaning of same-sex attraction in today’s society is difficult for many, and is often accompanied by periods of confusion, anxiety, fear, rejection by family, friends and society, self-loathing, and depression (Gluth & Kiselica, 1994). Research suggests the difficulty of this process is compounded when the person experiencing same-sex attraction holds beliefs and values consistent with a traditional religious community which rejects same-sex sexual activity as an acceptable expression of sexuality (Barret & Barzan, 1996; Wagner et al., 1994). Literature discussing SSA individuals who are also religious often makes note of competing religious and sexual identities as the underlying cause of difficulty in these situations (Buchanan et al., 2001; Haldeman, 2004; Yarhouse, 2008; Yarhouse & Tan, 2005). Empirical evidence supports this position, as in a study of SSA Jewish men (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000) where over ninety five percent of participants (n=21) point to a perceived incompatibility between religious and sexual identities as their primary obstacle to reconciliation.

In such instances, individuals are faced not only with confronting the prevailing societal negativity toward SSA, but must also reconcile their personal and often deeply rooted belief that what they are feeling and/or doing is wrong. A common sentiment from outsiders is to encourage these individuals to simply abandon either their religious identity or their sexual identity (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Buchanan et al., 2001; Wagner et al., 1994). Being unable and/or unwilling to let go of either identity, individuals are often met with hostility, contempt, and rejection, resulting in the isolated...
and difficult position of feeling rejected by both the LGBT and religious communities (Buchanan et al., 2001).

Though there is considerable debate over the exact statistics on homosexuals in America, many estimate that 1-3%, or, between 30 – 90 million American men are gay (i.e. Billy et al., 1993; Laumann et al., 1994; U.S. Census, 2000). A recent survey from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life reported over 80% of Americans as claiming religious affiliation, and nearly 75% of U.S. religions denouncing homosexuality (U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2010). Of the millions of Americans developing sexual identities involving same-sex attraction, it is likely that a large portion of them are also wrestling with religion or spirituality and how it relates to their emerging sexuality. A 2001 sampling of 65 LGB-identified people reported nearly 70% feeling conflicted between their religious and sexual identities (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). As Wagner et. al (2004) suggests, the likelihood that an individual who is experiencing SSA would be influenced by a religious or spiritual upbringing is high. Indeed, Helminiak (1995) asserts that spiritual challenges are at the root of every gay or lesbian experience.

Significance

Traditionally, sexuality has been viewed as static – meaning that one was either gay or straight and not allowed to change. This phenomenon is evidenced in SSA sexual identity development models, which uniformly have the basic assumption that incorporating a LGB identity is the ultimate endpoint for people experiencing same-sex attraction (Diamond, 2003A; Diamond, 2003B; Yarhouse, 2001). While said models have great value in elucidating the process of identifying and coming to terms with same-sex attraction, current understanding suggests they could be expanded to incorporate new
knowledge of the fluidity of sexuality. In other words, incorporating a LGB identity (presently the endpoint) may be just one more stage on the ever evolving journey of a developing sexuality.

As is often the case, new knowledge takes time to disseminate and influence practice. Accordingly, it is not surprising that therapists generally adhere to the concept of static sexuality and therefore promote an “all or nothing” approach, wherein the endpoint for clients is either gay or straight, with little option for variability (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Yarhouse, 2008).

Hence, when individuals with conflicting sexual and religious identities seek therapy (as they often do), they enter a world characterized by polar opposites, advocating either religion and conversion (pursuing a heterosexual identity), or abandoning religion for sexuality (pursuing a gay identity) (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Yarhouse, 2008). The general response from secular therapists and the gay community at large has been a focus on embracing sexuality, often downplaying, completely dismissing, or becoming hostile toward the religious community (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004). On the other side of the spectrum is conversion therapy, which strong evidence suggests is both ineffective and often damaging, contributing to depression, internalized homonegativity, suicide, and shame (Haldeman, 2004). Among individuals espousing religious and sexual identities that are both highly salient and in conflict, neither approach is adequate (Haldeman, 2004).

While there is no reason to believe that either the secular or religious treatment models are malicious in intent, it seems clear that, in terms of treatment options for SSA clients in religious conflict, both models are deficient.
A growing body of research strongly asserts the need to depolarize the debate (Worthington, 2004), citing the vast diversity and complexity among nonheterosexuals and the need for a more neutral therapeutic stance allowing client self-determination of goals and direction (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Brady & Busse, 1994; Haldeman, 2004; Miville & Ferguson, 2004; Morrow & Beckstead, 2004; Morrow et al., 2004; Phillips, 2004; Worthington, 2004; Yarhouse, 2008).

Yarhouse, Tan, and Pawlowski (2005) note that there is a great need for more research exploring how and why SSA individuals come to identify or dis-identify with an LGB identity, and put a finer point on the issue by highlighting religious identity development as a key component influencing the ways individuals respond to same-sex attraction, and an important area for research.

While identity theory is routinely applied to the phenomenon of identity conflict between individuals and communities, this author found very little application of said theory to conflicts within the self, and no research applying the constructs of identity, as explained herein, to the internal struggle of conflicting religious and sexual identities within the self. Exploring this phenomenon through the lens of identity theory and how individuals make meaning of their experiences will provide unique understanding to a little understood phenomenon.

This study hopes to add to the small but growing body of literature aimed at understanding the experiences of SSA people in religious conflict, with a specific focus on the salience of sexual and religious identities over time. Insights gained will hopefully be utilized by those who answer the call for the development of emerging neutral therapeutic models. It is also hoped that this study will contribute to greater
understanding and empathy, within both the religious and non-religious communities, for the struggles of this population.

**Rationale**

Using a qualitative approach is ideal for seeking insight about a population and experience where relatively little is known (Morse & Richards, 2002). Inasmuch as opinions among therapists and researchers are fairly polarized on this subject (Haldeman, 2004), it seems that, in lieu of an appeal to academia, directly approaching the population of religiously conflicted SSA individuals is the best way to learn more about said population.

It has been mentioned that the meanings people attribute to different aspects of this phenomenon vary greatly. A qualitative approach allows the flexibility and in-depth exploration to tease out the different nuances in perceived meanings for participants.

Finally, this study highlights the fluidity in sexual identity as an important consideration in understanding this population. Considering this fluidity, a longitudinal approach is valuable in providing a wide lens (chronologically speaking) in which to more readily notice this fluidity over time. Similar to sexual identity, religious identity is noted to fluctuate over time (Allport & Ross, 1967), which phenomenon can similarly be noticed more easily in a longitudinal study.

In the present study, an on-line questionnaire consisting of a demographics section (ethnicity, gender, age, marriage/relationship status, religious affiliation, etc.) and open-ended questions regarding participants’ experiences relating to religious and sexual conflicts was administered three years previously. The researcher followed up with participants (through on-line questionnaire and emails) to explore shifts in sexual and
religious identity salience and how individuals make meaning of those shifts. The on-line questionnaire is a favorable design in that it is low-cost, convenient for recording purposes, non-intimidating, and far-reaching in terms of geography. Follow up emails are useful for the more in-depth, specific understanding of participant experiences sought through a phenomenological approach.

Theoretical Framework

Identity theory guides this study by providing a definition of identity and validating the experiences of participants – namely the experience of “housing” multiple, and sometimes conflicting, identities simultaneously. Identity theory also provides the lens for viewing experiences, specifically in terms of the concept of identity salience and a focus on the meanings individuals attribute to experiences/information.

Phenomenology provides the framework for exploring the experiences of participants with highly salient and conflicting identities. Data gathered will then be analyzed using a grounded theory framework.

Identity Theory

The term ‘identity’ has come to take on many different meanings over time. For the purposes of this work identity and related concepts are used in the context of Sheldon Stryker’s Identity Theory (Stryker & Burke, 2000), which is rooted in concepts developed by George Herbert Mead (1934), from which Herbert Blumer (1937) later coined the term symbolic interactionism. In essence, symbolic interactionism states that people react not to actions or situations per se, but to the interpretations and meanings they ascribe to the action or situation, which interpretations and meanings are based on
past interactions with society and others. Stryker defines identity as: “parts of a self composed of the meanings that persons attach to the multiple roles they typically play in highly differentiated contemporary societies.” Roles are defined as: “expectations attached to positions occupied in networks of relationships.” When a role expectation is internalized it becomes an identity. Hence, in our increasingly diverse society, the likelihood of an individual having two (or more) conflicting identities is high (Stryker & Burke, 2000; White & Epston, 1990).

Distinct identities are organized by a salience hierarchy, wherein the higher the salience, the more likely one is to make choices in line with the expectations attached to that identity. Identity salience is informed by commitment, which measures the degree to which a person’s relationships to others in the network are dependent upon his/her maintaining a particular identity (i.e. what would the cost be to an individual for forfeiting the identity?).


The mechanism for how identities are internalized is further elucidated by the complimentary work of Peter Burke (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Burke’s work, also rooted in symbolic interactionism, focuses on the internal mechanisms of identity development and how those mechanisms influence behavior. Burke proposes that the defining characteristic connecting identity and behavior is shared meaning. In other words, identity predicts behavior only when the meaning of the identity is consistent with the meaning of the behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000).
Burke’s model has four essential parts: *Identity standard* – the set of culturally dictated meanings an individual holds in reference to his/her role identity in any given situation; *Perceptions of Meanings* in said situation; *Comparator* – the internal mechanism one uses to compare perceived situational meanings with meanings held in the identity standard; and the *Behavior*, which, as noted previously, is a function of the similarity/difference between perceptions of meanings and identity standard (Burke, 1991).

Behavior, then, represents an attempt by the individual to change the situation in a way that puts self-relevant meanings in harmony with the identity standard. This process is termed *self-verification* (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and can include either changing the present situation or searching out or creating new situations wherein the identity standard matches perceived self-relevant meanings.

In summary, the two strands of identity theory represent two separate, but connected and applicable ways of understanding behavior in the context of identity. Stryker emphasizes social structures and how they influence our commitment to relationships (and hence the salience of a particular identity), which leads to role choice behavior. Burke arrives at behavior through an internal comparison of cultural standards and self-relevant meanings, where behavior represents an attempt to put the two in harmony either by changing the situation or seeking and creating new ones.

Initial interviews with participants, conducted by this author, suggest there are aspects of both identity models at work in participant experiences of having disparate core identities (Reynolds, 2006). It will be interesting to learn the degree to which
salience is a fluid characteristic of their identities and what/if any factors have influenced shifts and the meanings attributed to those shifts.

While two people in the same situation may take the same action based on the information available to them, the internal process of how the two individuals came to their conclusions may be very different. Stryker and Burke suggest that to understand the *how* and *why* of people’s actions, it is critical to understand the perceived self-relevant meanings individuals attach to experiences and information. With this in mind, the author has employed a data gathering strategy that is, in essence, phenomenological.

While phenomenology has multiple perspectives, all agree on the basic premise that the intent of a phenomenological study is to describe the “meaning for several individuals of their *lived experiences* of a concept or a phenomenon.” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57). In this case the phenomenon is the experience of living with seemingly contradicting sexual and religious identities. Hence, much of the information gathered in this study will be aimed at understanding the meanings attached to actions, relationships, information, and experiences, as opposed to purely content driven data. For example, questions gathering information about reactions from family, friends, church, and the LGBT community also explore participant interpretations of said actions. Inasmuch as sufficient information on these and other topics cannot be gleaned from questionnaire data, follow-up emails will be used to further elucidate.

Once data has been collected it will be analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965). Through the use of open, axial, and selective coding the researcher will be able to detect common themes, categories, stories, and meanings related to identity theory constructs such as *commitment*, *identity standard*, *perceived*
meanings, etc. In this way identity theory and phenomenology provide a framework for conceptualizing participant experiences and guide the information gathering process while identity theory and the constant comparative method inform the data analysis process.

Purpose of the Study

This study proposes to explore the experiences of SSA individuals in religious conflict through the lens of identity theory. It is hoped that this knowledge will aid the work of those developing neutral treatment models for the population in question and provide insight and understanding of a little-understood phenomenon.

The primary questions guiding this study are:

1. How do individuals make meaning of experiences with conflicting sexual and religious identities?
2. In what ways does identity theory apply to these experiences?
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section further develops the argument for why and how the present approach to studying this population is a valuable contribution to the existing knowledge base. Topics addressed include: Sexual identity development and the fluidity of sexuality; Religious identity development; and Identities in conflict.

Sexual Identity

The term sexual identity is a general concept referring to the way people think about themselves and express their sexual identity to others. Sexual identity is multifaceted and, as explained by Yarhouse (2005), can be influenced to varying degrees by: sexual attractions to the same, other, or both sexes, biological sex (male or female), gender identity (how masculine or feminine one feels in relation to established societal norms), moral evaluative framework (one’s values and beliefs about sexuality and sexual behavior – often linked to religion), and behavior (what one does or plans to do with sexual attractions).

Erik Erikson (1963) branded role identity vs. role confusion as the pivotal developmental task in psychosocial development for adolescents. Marcia (1966) later expanded on this theory suggesting there were four identity statuses: identity diffusion (no commitment to an identity, no crisis), identity foreclosure (non crisis-related commitment to identity – usually through suggestion of others), identity moratorium (identity exploration due to crisis), identity achievement (crisis overcome and identity determined). Multiple models have since been proposed, many of which have roots in the work of Erikson and Marcia, in attempts to explain the process of sexual identity development (i.e. Cass, 1979; Chan, 1989; Troiden, 1989; Yarhouse, 2001).
While adolescence seems to be a crucial period for sexual identity formation, research suggests there is more fluidity to identity through the life-cycle than previously thought (Diamond, 2003; Marcia, 2002). In the introduction to his seminal work on male sexuality, Alfred Kinsey (1948, p. 639) wrote:

Males do not represent two discrete populations, heterosexual and homosexual. The world is not to be divided into sheep and goats. It is a fundamental of taxonomy that nature rarely deals with discrete categories... The living world is a continuum in each and every one of its aspects.

Based on interviews with over 5000 participants, Kinsey developed a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “exclusively heterosexual” to “exclusively homosexual”, including a category for “asexual” for those who experience no sexual desire. In addition to the above finding that many people fall somewhere between the extremes, Kinsey (1948) posited that male sexuality was prone to change over time. A complimentary study (Kinsey, 1953) found similar results for women (i.e. sexuality is non discrete and fluid throughout the lifespan).

More recent studies support Kinsey’s findings about the fluid nature of sexuality. A 2003 study (Diamond, 2003b) following 80 women who claimed a lesbian or bisexual identity tracked participants for 5 years. Participants were interviewed at 3 points over the 5 years, at the end of which time Diamond reported over 25% had relinquished their lesbian or bisexual identities (half now claimed a heterosexual identity while the other half stopped labeling their sexuality completely).

Despite a growing body of research suggesting the fluidity of sexuality, the overwhelming majority of research on same-sex attracted individuals, including
theoretical models of SSA sexual identity development, has the basic assumption that incorporating a LGB identity is the ultimate endpoint for people experiencing same-sex attraction (Diamond, 2003A; Diamond, 2003B; Yarhouse, 2001). For example, the pioneering work of Cass (1979) laid an often emulated stage model for sexual identity development wherein individuals experience *identity confusion* as they begin to question their sexual identity in light of experienced same-sex attractions. From thence one progresses through the stages of *identity: comparison, tolerance, acceptance, pride,* and ultimately, *identity synthesis* wherein s/he self-identifies as “gay.” While individual rates of progress through the stages vary, there is ultimately only one endpoint for someone questioning sexual identity based on feelings of same-sex attraction. Various models have followed in the wake of Cass’ (i.e. Chan, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Troiden, 1989), each with a unique explanation of the complexities of sexual identity development. While they differ on the finer points of how one gets there, they all agree that for one experiencing same-sex attraction, the eventual endpoint is the synthesis of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual identity. As already noted, this author suggests that these models could be further developed to include new knowledge of the fluid nature of sexuality.

Diamond (2003) and others note the need to explore more fully the process of how individuals respond to SSA and why they respond the ways they do. A study of 28 same-sex attracted individuals, 14 of whom identified with an LGB identity and 14 who dis-identified with an LGB identity, comes to the ultimate conclusion that how and why SSA individuals come to identify or dis-identify with a LGB identity is a poorly understood process requiring more research (Yarhouse, Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005).
Religious Identity

Similar to sexual identity development, adolescence is seen as an influential time in the development of religious identity (Yarhouse, 2005). Early theorists argued that religious identity is strongly influenced by the culture, society, and relationships in one’s life (i.e. Allport, 1950).

Such theories led to the rise of stage models of development (i.e. Fowler, 1981). Other theorists developed models based on Bowlby’s (1969) work on attachment as applied to religion (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 2003), suggesting that attachment to one’s parents played a central role in the development of ideas about God.

Religious identity can be further clarified in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic orientation. An intrinsic orientation is often identified with the concept of spirituality, wherein persons are motivated to action more by an internal set of beliefs and values arrived at on a personal level than by any set of values maintained by outside authorities or institutions (Barret & Barzan, 1996). While intrinsic beliefs are developed on an individual level, it does not necessarily follow that said beliefs cannot align with one established religious view or another. Indeed, Allport and Ross (1967) described people with an intrinsic orientation as those who truly “live” their religion (p. 434).

People of an extrinsic orientation fall on the opposite end of the spectrum and are said to “use” their religion as opposed to living it (Allport & Ross, 1967, p. 434). These individuals find value in their religion in that it provides security, society, status, and self-justification and esteem lightly or selectively pick the religion’s beliefs and values that best serve them (Allport & Ross, 1967). As is the case in most areas in life, individuals rarely fall squarely on one end or another of the intrinsic/extrinsic spectrum, but maintain
a mix of both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation and religious identification (Allport & Ross, 1967).

As one might expect, religious individuals with a predominantly extrinsic orientation are more likely to shift in religious views while those of an intrinsic orientation are more likely to adhere to one set of values over time (Allport & Ross, 1967). How or if this phenomenon relates to sexual and religious identity salience is unclear.

As will be outlined later, evidence suggests that more often than not, for same-sex attracted individuals affiliated with conservative religions, the primary struggle is between perceived incompatibility between sexual and religious identities. Items 1-4 of the questionnaire administered in this study directly address conflicting religious and sexual identities.

**Identities in Conflict**

A 2004 (Beckstead & Morrow) study documented the experiences of 50 individuals, over a 5 year period, who had undergone counseling to change their sexual orientation. All 50 experienced same-sex attraction and were affiliated with a conservative Christian religion (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, or ‘Mormon’ or ‘LDS’). All 50 participants report that previous to their counseling experiences “they felt their sexual identities were peripheral to their religious identities” (p. 663). As the study progressed all 50 participants described a process of “cycling between opposing needs and identities” (p. 665). In essence, they explain themselves as having a homosexual identity which needed to be expressed and experienced (including same-sex physical intimacy/sex) and simultaneously having a religious identity (which
included the belief that homosexuality is wrong) which needed to be expressed and experienced. As they could not conceive a way to live both identities at once, they would “cycle” between them, allowing expression of each for as long as the opposing identity could be contained. For all participants this cycle was unsustainable and led to increasingly more distress (i.e. depression, anxiety, self-loathing, suicidal ideation, isolation from family/friends). Most reached a point of feeling completely out of control, at which point they sought counseling, which led ultimately to attempts at conversion therapy.

As already noted, similar experiences were reported in a study of SSA Jewish participants (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000), namely, that they felt their core struggle was between incompatible religious and sexual identities. In addition, the authors found that this struggle lead to increased stress, depression, and suicidality.

Conflicting identities between individuals and groups is a well documented and researched phenomenon commonly viewed through the lens of identity theory. It will be interesting to discover whether some of the phenomena common to conflicting identities between groups/individuals are consistent with those observed within the individual. For example: One interesting study applied the constructs of identity theory to 30 Israeli and Palestinian adolescents involved in a coexistence program (Hammack, 2006).

Participants voluntarily spent 3 weeks living together in an intensive, structured setting focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Similar to the above discussion of religious and sexual identities in conflict, Hammack describes the conflict between individuals in his study such that “the acceptance of one group’s identity...is often interpreted as necessarily invalidating the identity of the other.” (p. 328). Hammack
found that individuals came to the program with highly salient “in group” identities (i.e. the groups from which they originated – Palestinian or Israeli). By the end of the two weeks most reported a significant if not dramatic decrease in “in group” identity salience and an increase in a more universal, philanthropic identity salience (i.e. a member of the human race). Year later follow-up interviews discovered that most participants had returned to pre-program identity salience levels. In some cases “in group” identity salience was higher than before the program. Hammack concluded, among other things, that for most youth, the power of larger social structures vastly outweighs the influence of intervention programs in identity development processes.

Initial interviews with present study participants clearly demonstrate the power of larger social structures (i.e. Church and family). It will be interesting to note the long term influence of said structures on identity salience for individuals.

Other studies looked at identity salience and its influence on role performance. One particular study (Henley & Pasley, 2005) used existing data from 186 married and 93 divorced fathers to analyze the relationship between father involvement in their children’s lives and identity salience. Results replicated findings of previous researchers (Minton & Pasley, 1996; Rane & McBride, 2000), namely, that father identity salience was not associated with father involvement. Interestingly, fathers reporting highly salient father identities were no more likely to be involved in their children’s lives than were those reporting less salient father identities. On the other hand, identity satisfaction (i.e. the satisfaction experienced from behaviors consistent with the identity) was a strong indicator of whether or not a father was involved with his child’s life.
While these conclusions regarding identity salience seem counterintuitive, the high reliability demonstrated by measures used and the replicability of said findings lend strength to the assertion that identity salience does not always correlate with behavior’s relating to said identity. Stronger indicators were identity satisfaction and the existence of supportive relationships (i.e. relationships that supported involvement).

A closer look at the data reveals that the results are not as counterintuitive as supposed. For example, one can imagine how a married father may report the self-perception of a highly salient father identity (an expectation in the larger cultural context), yet not be very involved in his child’s life when he perceives his spouse as unsupportive in his efforts to be involved and holding other roles (i.e. worker, husband) in higher regard. Similarly, a divorced man may report the self-perception of a less-salient father identity (perhaps feeling like he failed his child in getting divorced, perhaps in response to cultural views of divorced fathers), and yet be more involved in response to a supportive spouse and/or ex-wife and/or the genuine satisfaction he receives from the involvement.

These are only two possibilities explaining the results. The data is compelling in that it begs the question of the influence of identity satisfaction and supportive relationships (in addition to salience) in influencing study participants acting on one or the other, sexual or religious, or both identities.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Design of the Study

This study is based on data taken from two points in time. An email questionnaire composed of 5 open-ended questions exploring experiences of being same-sex attracted and LDS was administered and returned by 19 participants in October, 2006. In July, 2010 the same 19 participants were invited to complete a follow-up web-based survey composed of a demographics section and an open-ended section exploring the same initial areas as well as others based on the above research. The second questionnaire was accompanied by follow-up emails when clarification of answers was needed. Four of the initial 19 completed the second survey. This study is based on the first and second survey responses of these same four individuals.

Study Participants

In order to be included in the study participants (in addition to being over 18 years old) answered ‘yes’ to the following pre-screening questions: Do you now, or have you in the past experienced same-sex attraction? Are you affiliated with a religion whose doctrine does not support homosexuality as a valid expression of sexuality?

The study was open to adults so that findings can be compared to present research, which deals primarily with adults. The research cited herein largely cites experiences of adult males experiencing religious and sexual identity conflict. The lack of insight into the female experience is noted often (Haldeman, 2004). One of the original 19 participants was a female. As she did not respond to the second survey she is not included in the study.
While noting the importance of recognizing and being open about minority status when working with gay/SSA clients (Mosher, 2001), the research does not suggest a need for dramatically different approaches based on ethnicity (Haldeman, 2004). This study was therefore open to participants of all ethnicities.

For the first survey, nineteen participants were recruited mainly from the Northern Virginia and Salt Lake City, UT regions. Participants were recruited through snowball/word-of-mouth methods. Most participants responded enthusiastically to the initial survey and expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences with a wider audience. Considering initial willingness to participate, this researcher expected a significant number of follow up responses and was surprised by the turn out (four of the initial 19 responded to the 2010 survey).

Procedures

The recruitment email sent to the initial 19 participants included an explanation of implied consent upon completion of the survey. Participants who responded to requests for a second questionnaire were emailed a link to the university-based survey. The survey included an explanatory paragraph informing participants of the intent and uses of the survey and potential risks involved. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked if they could be contacted for further follow-up to clarify responses. All four indicated willingness to respond to follow-up emails. Participants were emailed, after completion of the study, a letter expressing appreciation for their participation and a list of resources, including books and support groups/organizations they may find helpful.

It was expected that the questionnaire require an average of 30-40 minutes. Follow-up emails were expected to take 5-30 minutes. Participants were required to have
access to a computer and the internet. This process as explained was reviewed and approved by the university IRB.

**Instruments**

The initial questionnaire was sent out in response to a class assignment to learn about a culture unfamiliar to the writer. As the researcher was very unfamiliar with this population, the initial survey was an attempt to get general information on the experiences of members of the LDS Church experiencing same-sex attraction. Four open-ended questions were asked about: How they came to recognize and deal with same-sex attraction, how family and church members have responded, and how they conceptualize their SSA in terms of LDS doctrine. Room was also provided for any other comments they wanted to add.

The second survey included a brief demographics section to ascertain participant age, gender, ethnicity, marital/relation status, and religious affiliation. Additional questions were developed based on the above research and this researcher’s hypothesis that conflicting identities were at the core of this struggle.

Included in the survey were questions exploring present and retrospective perceptions of the same content covered in survey 1. The intent behind this was to compare past perceptions with present perceptions as well as present retrospections regarding the same time period as the initial survey.

Scaling questions were used to determine present and past levels of general anxiety regarding sexual and religious identities and conflict between the two identities. Scaling questions were also used to determine perceived levels of influence, past and present, from family, church, and the LGBT communities on participant’s decisions.
regarding sexuality. This author finds scaling questions particularly useful here in that they provide a simple way to report information which can be easily compared to past/present experiences.

Additional survey questions were developed with symbolic interactionism in mind. These questions sought to explore, in addition to participant experiences, the meanings they attributed to their experiences. Reliability and validity were established through cross-coding, follow-up with respondents to clarify statements/thoughts, and comparing findings to existing literature.

Analysis

Using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965), the researcher applied identity theory constructs to participant experiences in the following way:

Before reading or interpreting any data, the researcher took time to address personal biases on this topic. This was done through introspection, writing thoughts, and discussion with other researchers. The researcher then read through one transcript, making note of potential categories or themes. A second read-through served to identify and label “indicators” and “concepts” (i.e. open coding). Each additional indicator found was compared to existing indicators and concepts to determine if the indicator fit under an existing concept or if a new concept needed to be formulated.

The next step was coding, wherein for each concept the researcher determined subcategories which further develop the category (i.e. context, consequences, causes, covariance, contingencies, condition). Categories were then examined to determine a conceptual, underlying theme or story (Selective coding). In this case, the conceptual theme was pre-determined as the application of identity theory to the data.
This four-step process was repeated for each participant response. Responses were then compared to previous responses to see if/how their experiences and/or interpretation of experiences has (or has not) changed over time.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Demographics

Of the initial 19 respondents from November, 2006, 4 replied to the follow-up survey during July – August, 2010. Results are taken from initial and follow-up surveys from these four respondents, entailing 25 pages of single spaced data. All participants were white males between the ages of 30 – 52. All claim affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), either as members in good standing or aspiring to become so. Following is the data presented in the major themes identified. Quotations are identified as first or second survey responses by a superscript 1 (first survey) or 2 (second survey) preceding the quotation. Chart legends represent present and retrospective (denoted with ‘R’) ratings.

Relationship with Christ and God

One theme which emerged from each participant was the importance participants placed on their personal relationship with God and/or Jesus Christ. Though the specific question was never asked, each participant found at least one opportunity to share the importance of his personal relationship with God or Christ, both in the initial and follow-up surveys. For example: 2“‘My LDS beliefs help me to understand that God loves me no matter what.’, 1“‘The Lord knows I have this and loves me in spite of it, or no matter what, and no matter what I do with it.’”, 2“‘Delving into the scriptural messages about what the Saviour can really do for us and developing a deeper relationship with Him through regular prayer allowed Him to bless me.’”, 1“‘I've come to cherish my service in the Church, and have a testimony that it is the Lord's work... I could go on and on, but I'll
leave it at that”, “the Saviour Jesus Christ can bless, guide, save, and sanctify me if I will call on Him and be His disciple.”, “I used to care what members of the Church would think but I don’t anymore because I realize that God loves me no matter what and that is really all that matters.”

Identity Conflict

Participants were asked to rate the level of conflict they feel between their sexual and religious identities, now and three years ago, as well as their perceptions of the level of conflict between their feelings of same-sex attraction and their religious identity. All reported either static or decreasing conflict over time in both categories. The following charts show their responses:

**Sexual/Religious Identity Conflict**

![Chart 1: Sexual/Religious Identity Conflict](image)

*Figure 1: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), How Much Do You Feel Your Sexual Identity Conflicts with Your Religious Identity?*

**SSA/Religious Identity Conflict**

![Chart 2: SSA/Religious Identity Conflict](image)

*Figure 2: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), How Much Do You Feel Your Feelings of Same-sex Attraction Conflict with Your Religious Identity?*
Two participants differentiated between \textit{same-sex attraction} and \textit{sexual identity} through their rating. One participant wondered why the same question had been asked twice – suggesting he may view SSA as synonymous with sexual identity, while another participant gave the same rating for both sets of questions without commenting. Among the two who differentiated between SSA and sexual identity, they were reversed as to which was more in conflict with their religious identity. Participant 1, who experienced greater conflict between his sexual identity, defines sexual identity as “how I perceive myself and my attractions in a romantic and erotic sense” and SSA as “to be attracted to other men, yet to believe whether through society or upbringing that that attraction is unnatural or wrong in some regard.” Participant 2 experiences greater conflict between SSA and his religious identity. For him, SSA just means that he is attracted to people of his same gender, while sexual identity encompasses a “complex set of socio-sexual facets that comprise one’s socio-sexual matrix.”

Participant 4 reports dramatic decreases in identity conflict to the point that he presently feels “none.” In response to a follow-up email asking for more explanation he highlighted multiple areas contributing to his achievement. He describes a process of an honest cost/benefit analysis of choices, and once he determined his goals (remaining active in the Church and fully involved in his family) he earnestly set about pursuing them. Some of the things he found most helpful were: reading and pondering, introspection, writing thoughts, supportive friends, a counselor who would “support what I wanted”, and engaging in non-sexual intimate activities with other men (i.e. river rafting).
Role Satisfaction

Survey 2 asked participants how much satisfaction they gained from acting on impulses related to both their religious and sexual identities. Figure 1 displays responses to the question: “On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much satisfaction do you gain from acting on same-sex attractions/impulses now?” and “On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much satisfaction did you gain from acting on same-sex attractions/impulses three years ago?”

Satisfaction: Same-sex Attractions

![Figure 3: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), satisfaction gained from acting on same-sex attractions/impulses](image)

Figure 3 shows responses to the same questions in reference to satisfaction gained from acting on religious/spiritual beliefs.

Satisfaction: Religious/spiritual Beliefs

![Figure 4: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), Satisfaction Gained From Acting on Religious/spiritual beliefs](image)

All respondents rated their satisfaction from responding to same-sex impulses as either decreasing or static, while satisfaction related to religious/spiritual beliefs either remained static or increased. With the exception of participant 1, whose sexual
satisfaction has decreased to equal his spiritual satisfaction, all participants rated their spiritual satisfaction as greater than their sexual satisfaction, sometimes markedly so.

While participants 1, 3, and 4 report decreasing low levels of SSA satisfaction or none at all, participant 2 reports sustained high levels of satisfaction from acting on same-sex attractions/impulses (as well as increasing high levels of satisfaction from acting on spiritual/religious beliefs). His responses to survey 1 are helpful in explaining how/why this may be. He reported that he realized he was gay during college, and began attending support groups focused on changing the attractions. ¹“After a while, I realized I didn't buy the "change" idea, and that attending meetings wasn't getting me anywhere. I stopped attending.”

He continues, ¹“Absent from this period, though, was any long-term angst-ridden pleas to God to make me straight. Find the right woman, yes, but straight? No. I was gay, and couldn't imagine changing that.” It seems he embraces his same-sex attractions as an integral part of his sexual identity and is able to enjoy that part of him, to the extent that his religious convictions allow him to.

This seems similar to the way participant 4 described his views of same-sex attraction. In a follow-up email to survey 2 he explained that ²“SGA [same-gender attraction] is basically normal, healthy desires/feelings that have become sexualized.” He too has learned, in his own way, to embrace his feelings for closeness/intimacy with other men and found ways to fulfill them without compromising his faith.
Influence of Larger Social Structures on Sexuality

In survey 2 participants were asked to share the degree to which their relationships with their family, the Church, and the LGBT community influence their decisions regarding sexuality now as well as three years ago. The graphs show their responses to scaling questions.

Family Influence

![Graph showing family influence over time](image)

*Figure 5: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), To What Degree Do Family Relationships Influence Your Decisions Regarding Sexuality?*

Participant 1 reports diminishing influence from family. Three years ago he described his family as "My family has responded very positively. My parents worry about me but their behavior toward me has not changed at all." At that time he seemed to appreciate the fact that his family had not changed in how they treat him. Three years later he still feels verbally supported but suggests that there are ways in which he would like to be treated differently based on what he has shared with his family. My parents have been supportive in speech but have not yet had the occasion to physically demonstrate that (ie. I have not brought a "date" to family dinner) yet they have said they would support that decision. Occasionally my father asks about getting married to a woman, so I interpret that to mean he is hopeful I will change my feelings.
As will discussed more later, this likely has something to do with developments in the way he views himself and his sexual identity.

Participant 2 reports a fairly significant influence from his family (6 out of 10), yet his narrative suggests to this author that his family, while generally supportive and important to him, have less of an influence on his decisions regarding sexuality than the rating suggests. Three years ago he described his family as follows:

1In my family, I am out only to my two surviving siblings... others are kept in the dark only because I do not wish for anything to get back to mom and grandpa. I should be the one who first tells mom. [Sister] --- who is an active member of the Church --- responded with "it's about time you tell me, I've always known". And [Brother] --- never joined --- responded with nothing more than a "hm". But he and I don't talk much, so a "hm" is good.

More recently he explains his family as responding thus:

2My family is largely non-plussed. My Lutheran mother's response when I came out was "oh. I always assumed your brother was the gay one". My LDS sister's response was "I've known since you were 2". Generally speaking, everyone wants me to be happy. My LDS sister wants me to find happiness in a way that won't estrange me from the Church. My mom doesn't know what to think of it all, but she knows and loves me … so she's rather ambivalent about it. She's always thought homosexuals were kind of "icky" — but she doesn't think I'm "icky", so she's forced to simply see where this all goes. My mother is laconic, to say the least.
Other members of the family are in the know, but as we're not close, it's a non-issue.

His concern with sharing his story with certain family members illustrates his care and concern for them, particularly his mother. He does not, however, seem to have altered his sexual behaviors because of them. Rather, he continued on his course while remaining careful about how he shared the information with his family. As an interesting aside, his concerns regarding his mother seem to have been at least partially unfounded, based on her fairly benign response to his disclosure.

While participant 3 feels “love and compassion” from his family members, he does not feel like his relationship with them influences his decisions around sexuality at all. He feels they generally 1“don't know a lot about homosexuality, although my immediate family members have attended conferences with me. Just knowing that they love me and recognize that I'm working for worthy goals gives me a good feeling.” As he explains later, he is not bothered by the level of support he receives from family members: 2“In general, I get more helpful support from people in support groups and organizations dedicated to this kind of support than from my family members, which is to be expected, I think.”

Participant 4 continues to feel a very strong influence from family. Interestingly, three years ago only his wife knew and seemed to struggle to support him:

1Only my wife knows and she doesn't want to acknowledge that I have 'a problem'. Until recently, the only time she brought it up was in anger.

She has made a couple of comments recently not in anger but she doesn't want to talk about it.
More recently he described his wife as follows:

The one person who does know has seen it as 'my problem'. Because of the person's lack of real knowledge or understanding of SSA, their fears have kept them from talking about it or really being of any support.

It seems, from the responses, that perceived influence from family is not necessarily related to either the level/type of support received from family or whether family is aware of the situation. In other words, regardless of how supportive/unsupportive participants describe family, the perceived influence (or the degree to which family influence affects personal decisions) from family members is low and/or decreasing.

Church Influence

Participants were also asked to rate past and present levels of influence from the Church and church members. Three participants report a strong, supportive Church influence, while noting the sometimes lack of general knowledge on same-sex attraction:

"Church leaders and other members have generally been loving and caring when approached for support, but sometimes they have not known much about the subject before."

Participant 1 has had predominantly negative experiences with Church leadership,

I was excommunicated and told that in order to come back it would need to be determined that I was not a predator despite that not being an issue at hand…Since then I have met other Bishops who when I told them of my situation have made negative comments.
This same participant notes one exception from leadership in a congregation he attended previously, and how he yearns to return to that supportive environment, 

2It was not until I moved overseas…that I found an understanding Bishop…He was compassionate and thoughtful and did not react in a negative way. Currently I am back in my home country and rarely attend church (probably 4 times in the past year) but will soon be returning to that same foreign nation. One of the draws was that I…would have that same caring Bishop. I hope to be able to be active in the Ward there and to be rebaptised.

The following chart shows how participants rated church influence on their decisions regarding sexuality. All are similar in that they have remained constant over the three year period.

Church Influence

![Chart showing church influence over time](image_url)

Figure 6: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), To What Degree Does Your Relationship With the Church/its Members Influence Your Decisions Regarding Sexuality?
LGBT Influence

Participants were also asked to rate the level of influence the LGBT community had on their decisions regarding sexuality. There does not seem to be much of a pattern for how this influence is perceived.

Figure 7: On a Scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), To What Degree Does your Relationship with the LGBT community/its Members Influence your Decisions Regarding Sexuality?

Three participants report negative experiences with the LGBT community, as represented by the following response.

2When they have learned of my homosexual feelings and my desire to live the Gospel, they have responded in mostly negative ways, from shaking-heads condescension to telling me I will fail and the only way to be happy is to ‘accept myself’ all the way to really mean and vile derogatory remarks and childish name-calling.

Participants 1 and 4 report purely negative experiences. Participant 3 describes generally negative experiences with the LGBT community while highlighting some exceptions,

2My gay friends and a few gay people in [a support] group are the exception, as they have often shown understanding for what I am trying to
achieve in my life…even if they are perfectly happy in their gay lifestyles, they have been respectful of my choices and my boundaries.

Only participant 2 rated a significant positive influence from the LGBT community, which influence he perceives as increasing in a positive way, “By and large, I’m loved and respected by my LGBT peers.” He does make a note of exceptions, wherein he feels “dismissed by those who have a problem with my fealty, as being brainwashed or simple minded. Similarly, I’ve received push-back on my political thoughts vis a vis gay marriage and other gay-themed issues.” This participant also alludes to a perception of a broader gay influence outside of his personal community, “Quietly, though, I’ve been approached by others who – drowned out by what feels/seems/appears to be a formidable and monolithic gay politick – find my thoughts on various issues refreshing (whether they agree with them or not).”

Perceived Meanings

Participants were asked from their point of view, what the terms ‘gay’, ‘LDS’, and ‘SSA’ meant. For all participants, the terms ‘gay’ and ‘SSA’ varied in meaning and carried a personal, more complex, and deeper meaning beyond the typical dictionary definition. Participants shared a more uniform definition of the term ‘LDS’.

Definitions of the term “same-sex attracted” carried for all the concept of being attracted to someone of the same gender. Each also elaborated a more personal meaning as well. Participant 1 felt the term connoted a belief that the attraction is “unnatural or wrong.” For participant 2 the term signifies both the struggle of living in a predominantly heterosexual world and opportunities the struggle provided him for growth - “I hope it means I’m stronger, bolder, kinder, gentler.”
Participant 3 clarified that “This term doesn’t indicate anything about a person’s philosophical choices or beliefs” while participant 4 saw in the term an allusion to the development of the attractions, i.e. “that normal, healthy feelings have become sexualized by event(s), situation, and the person’s own perception.”

These interpretations of a term are symbolic of the experiences participants may be going through now and how they view their situations. The theme struck in individual interpretations stays largely consistent throughout each narrative. For example, the participant who sees within the term ‘same-sex attracted’ an opportunity for being “stronger, bolder, gentler, and kinder” also presents an overwhelmingly positive experience with his family, church, and LGBT communities.

Participants 3 and 4 saw in the term ‘gay’ the incorporation of same-sex attractions into an identity or lifestyle. Considering their goals of remaining active within the Church, it naturally follows that neither identified themselves as gay. Consistent with his definition of SSA as inherently “wrong” or “unnatural”, Participant 1 identified more with the term ‘gay’, which he defined as simply being attracted to other men. He then clarified that “It is only a portion of who I am and does not define me solely.” For this participant the term ‘gay’ is less stigmatizing and better suited to his religious identity.

Similar to 3 and 4, participant 1 interprets the term on a broader level, to include “not only to my orientation (man:man), but to a place in the cultural spectrum wherein I seek romantic, same-sex relationships.” Unlike 3 and 4, he embraces this aspect of his identity and does not see that it alienates him from his religious identity.

Participant definitions of the term ‘LDS’ were largely similar in their inclusion of belief in the teachings of the Church. Participants 3 and 4, respectively, included in their
definitions an active demonstration of their belief – “I call myself a Latter-day Saint because I believe in the truths taught by this church and have shown my commitment through baptism” and “To believe teachings/doctrines of the LDS Church as they are in the standard works and to see to live by them.”

Participant 2 included in his definition reference to community and culture as well as faith identity – “Being LDS is a specific religious identity. It is the nexus of LDS doctrine, culture, and experience. In the case of culture, it is both the culture of one’s own faith community and one’s larger, regional/national/social culture.”

One can see how the meanings attributed to different terms both influence and are influenced by participant experiences. Similarly, the way participants define one term necessarily influences how they were able to define the other terms related to their experiences in life.

Anxiety

Participants rated the level of anxiety/stress they experience in relation to their sexual and religious identity. As the following chart shows, all reported either consistent or decreasing anxiety over the past three years.

Anxiety/Stress: Sexual Identity

![Figure 8: On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = more than I can bear), how much stress/anxiety do you experience in relation to your sexual identity?](image-url)
Anxiety/Stress: Religious Identity

Figure 9: On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = more than I can bear), how much stress/anxiety do you experience in relation to your religious identity?

With one exception, all participants rated anxiety related to spiritual identity as equal to or less than that related to sexual identity. The exception (participant 1) also reports having had consistently (with one exception) negative interactions with Church leadership over the past three years, and is presently excommunicated and working toward re-joining the Church. For participant 1, both religious and sexual identity-related anxieties are decreasing, though sexual identity anxiety at a faster rate. This participant also reports progress in examining and coming to terms with his sexual identity and relationship with God: ¹“I am not sure if we are "born" with same-sex attraction or if it develops…but then I realized that it didn’t matter. The Lord…still loves me and delights in my triumphs.” This personal growth and simultaneous negative experiences with church leadership may help explain his ratings.

Making Meaning of the Struggle

Survey 2 asked participants how they made sense of their seemingly conflicting identities. All differed in their responses, but shared a common approach to making meaning of their individual struggle. Each chose to explain their struggle in a positive light (some more so than others), not focusing on the difficulties of day-to-day experiences as much as taking a more eternal perspective wherein this struggle had its
benefits and/or was just another trial on the path leading them to an ultimate goal. Four participants referenced their relationship with God as an important element of their journey. Following are their responses in full:

Participant 1:

I don’t know why this is something that I have in my life. But really I don’t dwell on that, because it doesn’t matter. The Lord wanted me to be attracted to other men and who knows why. What is important is that I learn I do not have to act on the feelings, and that is the hardest part.

Participant 2:

Each and every person finds distance between who they are and who they could be if they were strong enough/brave enough to make the hard choices to be better than the sum of their parts. For me, my sexual identity is a defining characteristic in the calculus of this struggle. It’s not the only characteristic, but it is certainly one of the most obvious. Like a blind man who doesn’t care to label his condition an impediment, I’m loathe to label my orientation a ‘struggle.’ But certainly has made life less convenient. I can’t imagine being straight, so I don’t care to be straight. But I’m not ignorant of the difficulties that being gay poses. If I can navigate the path between my several masters skillfully, I’ll be stronger, in the end.

Participant 3:

The challenges surrounding homosexuality are significant, but they are very much like other challenges in life. Just like any other challenge, the basic commitment to the Saviour and to living His Gospel will help us to
properly understand and deal with these challenges. There are particular things to learn, and it is a good thing that we can learn from our mortal experiences. There is the opportunity to reach out and receive and give support in love with others of God’s children. Sometimes the path feels lonely, difficult, or hopeless, but that is when we can experience the Lord’s love and guidance. In my experience with sexual addiction, where I came to understand I really had no hope on my own, I came to appreciate my challenges, for they cause me to learn to rely on the Lord (and thereby to confirm that He really is there, watching over us constantly, and that He really does have the power to transform our lives).

Participant 4: “I have learned many things from it that I would not have otherwise and have learned to be more compassionate to others.”

Shifts in Thinking

In survey 2 participants were asked how, if at all, their thinking about this issue has changed since the last survey. This author was very curious to discover what, if any, changes the participants had had in their thinking/actions related to this issue. In reviewing the data, there are some clear changes in how participants view themselves and their “struggle.” In very broad terms, however, participant experiences seem to be generally on the same trajectory as three years ago.

All are still attracted to others of the same gender, yet striving to adhere to gospel teachings and be active in the Church as best they can. None of them report having had any major changes in the way they conceptualize their experiences being gay/same-sex
attracted and LDS. All report having a richer understanding of themselves and their experiences. Following are their responses in full:

Participant 1:

I have come to a better understanding of myself. Really I think that my struggles are about me and not about other people. I used to care what members of the Church would think but I don’t anymore because I realize that God loves me no matter what and that is really all that matters.

Participant 2: “My thinking on the issue has largely remained static, though my ability to articulate my thinking on the issue has improved steadily.”

Participant 3:

Not at all. I have been clear about the right way to view the basic questions surrounding homosexuality for many years now. I have grown and developed in some ways and have learned more from paying attention to people and their viewpoints.

Participant 4: “I now understand myself better and how much I am like other men instead of different.”

Participants richer self understanding appears to have come from a process of “introspection” and observing themselves and others. There seems to be a progressive shift away from concern about what others think, and a deepening of their relationship with self and God.

Interestingly, responses to scaling questions tell a different story than the above sense which comes from their narratives. Three of the four rate the influence of the Church and its members as 6, 7, and 9 out of ten. This significant influence seems to be at
odds with their self descriptions of being more concerned with the personal answers they have come to between them and God. Participant 3 clarifies, however, that when he references the Church, “It's more my relationship with the Lord that influences me.” It may be that the other two are thinking similarly.

Three years ago participant 1 said about his struggle: “For a long time I tried to figure out the "cause" and the "reason" but then I realized that it didn’t matter.” Recently he re-affirmed this stance “I don't know why this is something that I have in my life. But really I don't dwell on that, because it doesn't matter.” At the same time he seems to have refined his view of God’s role in his struggle. He previously explained that “The Lord knows I have this and loves me in spite of it, or no matter what, and no matter what I do with it.” He now explains God’s role as “The Lord wanted me to be attracted to other men and who knows why.”

The first statement places no blame or responsibility for his struggle. He initially says God loves him “in spite of it” making one think the ‘it’ is something God disapproves of, but immediately adds “or no matter what” suggesting he is still grappling with what it means to be same-sex attracted. Three years later his statement is very clear that God, for an unknown reason, wanted him to be attracted to other men. At the same time he has now clarified that SSA is “wrong and unnatural.” This participant also reports decreasing anxiety/stress regarding his sexual and religious identities, decreasing influence from family and the LGBT community (no influence from church), and decreasing satisfaction from acting on same-sex impulses.

Defining SSA as something negative, then giving God the responsibility for him having it seems to fit with his self-rated improvements. While he seemed unclear how to
make meaning of the attractions and God’s role in it he understandably had heightened stress/anxiety over the issue. With the present perception: SSA is wrong, God gave it to him, and God loves him, he does not have to worry about where it came from or that he himself is “wrong” for having it and only needs concern himself with how to respond. This mechanism may partially explain his being able to feel less anxiety about his struggles and move toward a more self-directed state.

This same participant was noted earlier to have changed in his opinion of what “supportive” behavior looks like. When he first came out to his parents he appreciated the fact that they did not change in how they treated him. As he has developed in his views and relationship with self and God and had more experience he seems to slightly resent the fact that his parents still treat him the same and expect/hope he will change.

This description of his relationship with his parents seems to make sense in terms of the participant’s narrative. It seems that he is growing and developing in his understanding and experience of his struggle while his parents remain stagnant in their views. It follows that there would arise a difference of opinion as one changes and the other doesn’t.

All participants reported a deepening of their understanding of self and relationship with God. This change can be seen in the shifts in narrative from survey 1 to survey 2.

The contrast between how participant 4 made sense of the struggle three years ago and today is striking. Three years ago he said ᵃ“Acting on it is a sin. I hate it. It is hard not to hate myself.” More recently when asked how he made meaning of the struggle he responded ᵂ“I have learned many things from it that I would not have otherwise and have
learned to be more compassionate to others.” Over the three years he seems to have transformed what seemed a less hopeful, self-focused outlook into an optimistic, learning experience incorporating others in the journey.

Similarly, participant 3 initially explained the struggle in terms of himself and how he works through/makes sense of it:

1There is no doubt in my mind that the prophets speak the truth when they teach us that homosexual relationships defeat the purposes for which we have been sent to this life. Plus I have seen the fruits of the choices that some people have made to seek happiness in homosexuality, which is always lacking something essential and generally leads people away from a close relationship with God. I know that eternal marriage and family are a great part of the grand plan of God for us, and I can also have patience in faith, knowing that the Saviour can make all blessings possible at the right time and when I'm ready.

Three years later he still emphasizes the role of Christ in his journey. In addition to that he now includes the concept that the struggle gives him 2“the opportunity to reach out and receive and give support in love with others of God’s children.” For participants 3 and 4 this experience of expanding their awareness to relationships outside themselves seems to be one aspect of their growth and may be a contributor in their reduced feelings of identity conflict and anxiety.

Experiences in Therapy

Three of the four participants reported having sought therapy to work on this issue. Two reported positive and helpful experiences. One highlighted the value for him
of having a therapist with similar religious views, "I definitely benefitted from choosing LDS therapists who understand how spiritual solutions mesh with psychological solutions."

Two participants talked about the value of their relationship with their therapist, "The most helpful thoughts came from the therapists who really got to know me.", "He was very kind and understanding. Each time we met was ended with a hug."

One participant reported a negative experience with a therapist who was "supposedly an expert in the field." This participant felt the therapist took too simplistic a view of the issue being dealt with, and lead him in the opposite direction he was seeking help for, "It was during this time that I was in therapy that I had my first sexual experience ever and it was with another man. Perhaps it was the struggle I was having internally, but I think the therapy was what drove me to act out."
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Multiple themes have been identified within the data. In this chapter I will discuss these themes and how they may or may not apply to Identity Theory as outlined previously. I will also address the strengths and limitations of the study, future areas for research, and include my personal reflections to make conclusions and suggest clinical implications of this study.

Discussion of Themes

All participants reported conflict between sexual and religious identities as well as anxiety/stress related to both their religious and sexual identities. The initial thesis of conflicting identities being at the core of the struggles faced by same-sex attracted individuals who espouse traditional religious beliefs seems to have gained support in this study. How the highlighted themes apply to identity theory is not as straight forward.

Symbolic Interactionism

Identity theory is rooted in the theory of symbolic interactionism, which essentially states that the meaning an individual applies to situations/information is more telling than the situation/information itself in terms of what action that person will take in response. Participants in this study clearly demonstrated how responses to the same piece of information can vary greatly based on personal experience. An example of this is the meaning each ascribed to the terms ‘gay’ and ‘SSA’. For each, the terms hold markedly different meanings, which meanings likely influence their experiences and actions.

For example, participant 1 includes within the ‘SSA’ definition the concept that it is inherently 2“wrong” and 2“unnatural” to be attracted to other men. For participant 2 the
term holds no negative/damning qualities toward himself, rather, suggests to him that he needs to be "stronger, bolder, kinder, and gentler" to overcome the "social constructs that either dismiss my orientation or are openly hostile to it."

It seems in-line with their definitions of SSA, this attraction they both experience, that participant 1, who views his feelings as wrong and unnatural, consistently experiences the Church response as generally hostile, uncaring, and negative while participant 2 experiences himself as "welcomed universally" within the Church. While it is not possible to know which, if at all, came first, the attributed meaning or the experience, there is value (discussed more later) in recognizing the reciprocal relationship between experiences/actions and meaning attribution.

Identity Salience

Identity salience is a prominent feature in identity theory, as it is the ultimate construct guiding behavior (Stryker & Burke, 2000). According to the theory, the more salient an identity the more likely one is to act on it. Salience is informed by commitment, or the degree to which a person’s relationships to others are dependent on him/her maintaining a particular identity.

The one identity all four participants have most in common is their religious identity – in that they each define ‘religious identity’ and what it means to be LDS more uniformly than they do ‘sexual identity’, ‘SSA’, and ‘gay’. All four are actively working to maintain or develop their standing within the Church and profess a belief in the doctrines espoused by the Church. Though differences exist in their definitions of sexual identity and what it means to be attracted to the same gender, all have chosen to pursue their LDS identity and limit the degree to which they express their sexual identity.
According to identity theory, their religious identities would be considered to be more salient than their sexual identities. Hence, they should have a high level of commitment to others in their respective religious communities, meaning that they feel like their inclusion in this community is dependent on their performing a certain role.

Contrary to what identity theory would predict, all four participants (to differing degrees) report a consistent shift toward caring less about what other members think of them and focusing more on themselves and their relationship with God,

2I have come to a better understanding of myself. Really I think that my struggles are about me and not about other people. I used to care what members of the Church would think but I don’t anymore because I realize that God loves me no matter what and that is really all that matters.

Each talks more about their “personal faith” as the driving force in their religious identity than their relationships with others. As one participant put in his response to the question of how much his relationship to the church/its members influenced his decisions regarding sexuality: 2“it’s more my relationship with the Lord that influences me.”

This low level of commitment to others and high level of religious identity salience does not seem to fit the theory. It might be construed that there is a high level of commitment to their relationship with God (the ‘other’ in the community), which drives their high religious identity salience and decisions to act accordingly. This, however, might suggest that God accepts them only as they maintain the behaviors consistent with what God sees as their role in His church. Yet participants were clear that one aspect they value in their relationship with God is that they feel loved and accepted “no matter what.”
This idea of God as the ‘other’ in relationship to identity theory is an intriguing one and could be fleshed out more in further studies.

Extrinsic vs. Intrinsic Religious Orientation

While religious orientation is not an aspect of identity theory, it seems appropriate to discuss here. Allport and Ross (1967) define people of an extrinsic orientation as those who “use” their religion and relationships in the church for personal gain as opposed to being motivated by an internal set of beliefs and values. In contrast to an extrinsic orientation, some of these participants seem to maintain their religion despite the interactions they have with other members and leaders. It is clear that for all of them, the driving force in their religious identity is a personal belief in the principles of the Church and a personal relationship with God. As such, all four individuals seem to fall far on the intrinsic side of the spectrum, which may help explain their decisions and ability to maintain their religious identity in the face of strong urges that would have them do otherwise.

All four participants seem to have a strongly intrinsic religious orientation and a simultaneously highly salient religious identity. One might hypothesize that in some cases of religious identity, religious orientation might be a better predictor of identity salience than is commitment.

Role Expectations and Shifts in Thinking

According to Stryker (2000), identities are formed when we internalize role expectations. Role expectations are predominantly influenced by large social structures (Stryker & Burke, 2000) such as the local, national, and global communities in which we
participate. Traditionally, the LDS church has not allowed for the role of a gay or same-sex attracted member, and only provided role expectations for traditional heterosexual men and women. Inherent in the statement that one should be one way is the message that one should not be another way. Whether implicitly or explicitly stated, the other way of being is often construed as unacceptable and/or wrong, which seems like the clear message received by at least one of the participants who defines SSA as meaning something is “wrong” and “unnatural”.

While the members of the study report relatively low levels of stress/anxiety over their struggle with same-sex attraction, sexual identity, and religious identity, their narratives of earlier years tell a different story, including depression, abuse, and intense struggles with this issue. It is noteworthy that this study comes after each has struggled with this issue anywhere from 15 – 35 years. Each seems to have found a measure of peace they did not previously feel.

They also tell a general story of consistently moving away from concern with expectations from family, church, and LGBT community members and toward a deeper understanding of self and a personal relationship with God. In identity theory terms, one might say they are moving away from previously internalized role expectations from the Church, their families, and the LGBT community and internalizing different role expectations based on personal reflection and a personal relationship with God.

The anxiety/stress felt as participants grappled with internalized role expectations/identities that did not match their lived experience is consistent with what Stryker and Burke (2000) would project. Similarly, the reduction in anxiety/stress as participants move away from unhelpful role expectations and internalize expectations that
more closely fit their experiences is a phenomenon expected within the identity theory model.

Though research, including this study, supports the idea that identities are not static at any point in time (i.e. participant 4 reports rather dramatic shifts in identity related anxiety levels between the ages of 49-52 yrs.), applying identity theory to individuals in the early stages of coming to terms with disparate sexual and religious identities could prove more insightful. Specifically, the concept from Stryker’s (2000) work that deals with the influences of larger social structures on identity development might be more aptly applied during this period.

Burke’s (2000) model of identity development takes a related but different approach to explaining behavior. In essence, Burke proposes that behavior is an attempt to align self-relevant meanings with the identity standard, previously defined as “the set of culturally dictated meanings an individual holds in reference to his/her role identity in any given situation.” This can mean changing the present situation or searching out or creating new situations to put self-relevant meanings in harmony with the identity standard. In the case of these participants, changing the Church doctrine to fit their experiences doesn’t seem to be a possibility (or even desired). Similarly, leaving the Church to find a more gay-friendly religion (searching out new situations) is not a desirable option.

Study participants have maintained a high religious identity salience despite low commitment to other group members, and refused to change or seek new situations that might be more in harmony with their experiences. Interestingly, it seems that what they have done is find a way to re-frame or personalize perceptions of the meanings (some
more than others) in a way that puts their experience more in harmony with the identity standard. A notable example is participant 2, who rather defiantly states; “I’m an out, gay man…active in my ward and stake, and I date men. I’ve been welcomed universally.” (“ward” and “stake” refer to his local and regional congregations).

It seems he has adjusted his perception of the culturally dictated meanings of what it means to be ‘gay’ and what it means to be ‘LDS’ and internalized them into his identity such that they fit his experience and allow him to thrive in what could be considered an environment ill-fitted to his nature. In this sense Burke’s model may provide insight into the experiences of these men who remain in a seemingly incompatible environment and find ways to thrive by developing new perceptions of meanings.

Another way of looking at this and still remaining consistent with Burke’s theory is to say that these people have indeed changed the situation, though only symbolically. While there has been no outward change in the Church or its organization and doctrine – there has been a change in the internal perception of the church and its leaders/doctrines/members by the individuals. In this sense, their shift in perception in fact does create a real change in how they experience this situation, including their relationship with God, other church leaders, church and family members, and the doctrines of the Church.

Strengths of the Study

As stated in the introduction, many among the population of same-sex attracted individuals seeking to remain true to conservative religious convictions feel at times ostracized by both the religious and LGBT communities. As such, and as noted by all participants of this study, people in this population are often very careful in choosing
with whom to share information about their experiences. One great strength of this study is the candid nature in which these men shared such personal thoughts and feelings, giving insight into a little understood experience of many.

All participants were found through word-of-mouth/snowball recruiting. The initial recruitment email did not openly state, but strongly suggested that the author is LDS. Based on responses from many of the initial participants, it seems that the researcher was introduced to others as an LDS researcher, and potentially one who is also attracted to the same sex. This may partially explain participant’s willingness to share with an otherwise stranger. The promise of anonymity and a desire to educate others was certainly a strong motivator as well.

Another strength of the study is the longitudinal nature of the data. As noted previously, research suggests that with regards to sexual identity we all fall within a continuum and our position is subject to change throughout the lifespan. Hence, the ability to study this phenomenon over an extended period of time, as opposed to a snapshot of one point in time, provides greater advantages and insight into the experience. There is very little understanding as to how people move one way or the other as they make decisions regarding conflicting sexual and religious identities. Viewing participants over time provides a greater opportunity to understand just such changes in actions, meaning making, and conceptualizing situations.

The use of a largely qualitative methodology was key to providing participants the opportunity to share on a more in depth level than what a quantitative exploration could provide. Considering the lack of insight into this experience, the use of a purely quantitative model in this instance would have been limiting. As it is, a qualitative
approach allowed for more in-depth discovery and exploration of the how and why of participant experiences that is so lacking in the literature (Yarhouse et al. 2005).

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in the relative lack of diversity among participants on multiple levels. All participants were on the same general path, which didn’t allow for as much comparison. Similarly, participants were generally established in their thoughts on these issues which, again, limited the insights into how decisions are made regarding these issues.

This author was surprised with the number of respondents to the follow-up survey. Of the 19 initial respondents, all stated varying levels of success but an overall desire to remain true to their religious convictions. In the case of all four second survey respondents they were still largely on track with their goals of remaining faithful to their religious convictions and identity.

As noted earlier, it seemed to be common knowledge among the initial respondents that this researcher is LDS. The author suspects that there may have been those who have since abandoned their LDS identity or are not faring as well as they would like to on their path and were reluctant to share that with an LDS stranger. In this case, the aspect that contributed to a strength of the study may have simultaneously contributed to a limitation of the study.

There were also those whose email addresses had changed and likely many other reasons to explain why the response rate was what it was. Nevertheless, the lack of insight into the experiences of individuals who altered their goals/direction is noted. This added level of diversity among participants would have helped paint a more complete
picture of how/why participants make the decisions they do in reference to conflicting sexual and religious identities.

Participants were similarly homogenous in that they had all been grappling with these issues for anywhere from 20 – 40 years. As such, though there was some variation and movement in how they perceived issues, all were generally fairly established in their thinking about their religious and sexual identities.

A previously referenced study of Jewish and Palestinian adolescents (Hammack, 2006) noted pronounced shifts in thinking and identity over a period of weeks and then again after one year follow-up. Participants in this study report similar experiences during adolescence in relation to religious and sexual identity. This study targeted the last four years of experience and did not delve as much into the earlier formative years when participants were first making discoveries and decisions about their religious and sexual identities. Such an exploration could add significantly to the questions of how and why this population makes the decisions they do.

Future Research

One of the difficulties confronted by this researcher during this study was the myriad unique ways to study this population, all of which would provide new understanding to the studied population. Some specific future research areas based on this study include: the relationship between religious orientation and identity salience within this population, the application of identity theory to this population during the early formative years of religious and sexual identity (i.e. adolescence), conceptualizing God as the ‘other’ in terms of commitment, the role of supportive relationships (i.e. spouse) for
this population, and comparison studies of population members who choose a dominant religious identity vs. those who choose a dominant sexual identity.

This study revealed preliminary results suggesting that religious identity salience within this population may not be related to Stryker’s (2000) construct of commitment. Stryker (2000) asserts that within the hierarchy of identity salience, role expectations from other group members determine the level of identity salience. In other words, the likelihood of an LDS member staying true to an LDS identity in any given situation is directly related to the cost, in terms of relationships with other group members, for not acting on that identity.

In the case of this study, participants report simultaneous increases in religious identity salience and decreases in commitment to other group members. This finding seems inconsistent with the theory and could benefit from more in depth study. There are multiple potential explanations for this behavior, all of which are not necessarily inconsistent with identity theory. For example, this study data supports the thesis that God, as the head of the LDS religion, is the most important and influential group member and it is commitment to this relationship which drives participant’s level of religious identity salience. As noted, one common theme (generally) among participants was a deepening of their personal relationship with God and a simultaneous decrease in concern about how other group members perceived them. While this is an interesting theory, the study did not directly address it and future research would be needed to further flesh out the theory.

Another area of interest based on study results is the application of identity theory to the same population at an earlier stage. Hammack (2006) identified large shifts in
identity salience over relatively short periods of time based on two weeks of intensive experiential/educational intervention. A one-year follow up showed that virtually all participant’s original in-group salience levels equaled or exceeded pre-intervention levels. He concludes that the influence of larger social structures, at this stage in identity development, far outweigh other influences.

Participants of this study report a decreased influence from larger social structures and greater personal influence on identity salience. Participants also report that they were not always as clear in their understanding of themselves and their religious and sexual identities.

Further research exploring experiences during the early phases of religious and identity development could provide understanding that would assist this population at a time when they seem to be experiencing heightened confusion, depression, and anxiety. Identifying and exploring the transition from reliance on larger social structures to reliance on self could similarly provide important insights for those in the midst of the struggle and those assisting.

Another interesting question that arose through this study was the concept of God as the ‘other’ in terms of commitment to other community members. Participants report that God loves and accepts them regardless of their decisions. In one sense, this would suggest that actions are not made based on the potential loss of that relationship, because God’s love is unconditional. This view invalidates the application of commitment to this relationship.

At the same time, however, participants seem to have a clear understanding of what God expects of them and are striving to live up to those expectations. In this sense,
conceptualizing God as the ‘other’ in the community and the application of commitment to this relationship works well. This concept is one that could be further explored.

This study highlighted related research demonstrating that in some situations supportive relationships were a stronger predictor of behavior than was identity salience. This study did not address this aspect in much detail with participants. It would have been interesting to explore in more detail the dynamics of spouse and other committed relationships and how that relationship did may affect behavior in this area.

Finally, this study helped to illuminate the experiences of participants pursuing an existing religious identity at the expense of fully acting on same-sex attractions. The lack of data on participants who choose to pursue a sexual identity at the expense of existing religious beliefs is noted. How are the experiences of these individuals similar and different than those in this study? What are the implications for making this shift in identity pursuits at this stage in life as opposed to earlier in identity development? Is there a pattern for when individuals in this population decide one way or the other?

Most participants in this study were raised in LDS families. As such, the predominant social structures asserted an influence toward assuming an LDS identity and presumably downplaying a same-sex sexual identity. This author suspects that members of this population who decide to forfeit their LDS identity and pursue a same-sex sexual identity do so at a generally later age than SSA individuals not of a conservative faith. These are just a few of the many questions to be explored in relation to people with conflicting religious and sexual identities.
Clinical Implications

This study highlighted multiple issues for consideration when serving this population in a clinical setting. In addition to the specific therapy-related statements from participants, the data suggests certain considerations for therapists.

For all participants, whether they had participated in therapy or not, the thing of greatest value on their journey was a deepening of their personal relationship with self and God. Research notes the frequent avoidance and/or dismissal of spirituality/religion in the therapeutic setting (Haldeman, 2004). It seems that for this population, such an approach is a disservice. This assertion is validated by two participants of this study who report that sharing similar religious convictions with their therapist was a pivotal factor in the success of their therapy.

One participant went on to explain that he chose an LDS therapist because he wanted a therapist who would “support his goals.” This suggests an idea this researcher/therapist supports, namely the idea that a therapist need not necessarily share a client’s religious views to be helpful to this population. The critical element seems to be a willingness to support clients in their self-determined goals and allow spiritual/religious solutions into the therapeutic dialogue.

Personal Reflections

Conducting this study and analyzing and presenting the results has been an instructive and gratifying experience for me. The challenges of collecting, analyzing, and presenting stories from real life experiences are multiple.

I am a devoted member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS). I became interested in this topic when a close friend, also LDS, shared with me that he
had been struggling with same-sex attraction for years and had decided to leave the Church to embrace a gay lifestyle. This came as quite a shock to me and began an exploration process that opened my eyes to a vast and complex population that heretofore was relatively unknown to me.

As Kinsey (1948) states, sexuality is a continuum and very few of us are exclusively one way or the other. Nevertheless, my clear bias is toward the heterosexual lifestyle. I have remained ever mindful of this bias in my exploration of this population. As I have done so my appreciation for the complex nature of this phenomenon and my respect for those experiencing it continued to grow and mature during this research process.

The experiences and insights shared by these participants are deeply personal and often profound and moving. In the midst of analysis, theory, and deadlines this aspect of these stories can be forgotten and everything become mere “data.” I strove to ever be mindful of the people behind the data and accurately present and honor them and their experiences.
References


Appendix A: Recruitment Email 1

[Hi there],

I'm [friend’s name]’s friend in the MFT program. My name is Daman. As a future therapist I expect that I will do a lot of work in the LDS community, and therefore will most likely have the opportunity to offer my services to someone struggling with same sex attraction. I'm trying to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the thoughts/feelings/experiences of members working through this issue, for myself and for the sake of future clients. I would be most appreciative if you would take some time to answer a few questions as well as make any comments you feel would be beneficial. No names or personal information from these questions will be shared with anyone. Thank you so much for your willingness to share. If you know of anyone else you think would be willing to share their experiences would you please let me know or just forward this email to them.

Thanks again.

Daman
Appendix B: Recruitment Email 2

Hello,

In 2006 I emailed you a questionnaire exploring your thoughts and experiences of being both same-sex attracted and affiliated with a religion disavowing homosexuality. In the 2006 survey I asked questions about how your family, friends, and church members had responded to you in light of this experience. I also asked questions about your views of religious doctrine and how the two aspects of your identity (religious and sexual identity) do/do not fit together. The feedback you gave was very enlightening and helped me better understand this specific population. The information was also shared at a conference where participants expressed great interest, appreciation, and a desire for more research on the topic. Thank you for your earlier participation.

I am emailing you today because of your previous participation and interest. I am currently working to build on the previous research by exploring your experiences in this area today and how they have or have not changed over the past three years. If you agree to participate, you will be sent a link to a web-based questionnaire housed at Virginia Tech. The questionnaire is of minimal risk to you and is expected to take about 30-40 minutes of your time. You will be free to withdraw or to skip any questions you don’t wish to answer. Your responses will be confidential. All potentially identifying information will be removed.

This research will be used to complete my Master's Thesis in the Department of Human Development (Marriage and Family Therapy) at Virginia Tech.
Thank you again for your previous interest and participation. Your participation in the present study will contribute to greater appreciation and understanding of this little understood or appreciated topic. I look forward to hearing from you.

By responding to this email you imply your consent to use the collected data as described.

Sincerely,

Daman Reynolds
Appendix C: Survey 1

1. Can you give a brief history of how you came to recognize and deal with same-sex attraction as a personal issue?

2. How have the church and its members responded?

3. How has family responded?

4. How do you personally view same-sex attraction in light of LDS doctrine?

5. Any other comments you feel important.
Appendix D: Survey 2

First Name:

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Marital/relational status:

Religious affiliation:

1. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = more than I can bear), how much stress/anxiety do you experience in relation to your sexual identity?

2. Using the same scale from the previous question, how much stress/anxiety did you experience in relation to your sexual identity three years ago?

3. What does sexual identity mean to you?

4. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = more than I can bear), how much stress/anxiety do you experience in relation to your religious identity?

5. Using the same scale from the previous question, how much stress/anxiety did you experience in relation to your religious identity three years ago?

6. What does religious identity mean to you?

7. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much do you feel your sexual identity conflicts with your religious identity?

8. Using the same scale from the previous question, how much do you feel your sexual identity conflicted with your religious identity three years ago?

9. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much do you feel your feelings of same-sex attraction conflict with your religious identity?

10. Using the same scale from the previous question, how much do you feel your feelings of same-sex attraction conflicted with your religious identity three years ago?

11. From your point of view, what does it mean to be gay?

12. From your point of view, what does it mean to be LDS?
13. How does being LDS benefit you?

14. From your point of view, what does it mean to be same-sex attracted?

15. How have family members responded? How do you interpret their response?

16. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), to what degree do family relationships influence your decisions regarding sexuality now?

17. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), to what degree did family relationships influence your decisions regarding sexuality three years ago?

18. How have church members responded? How do you interpret their response?

19. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), to what degree does your relationship with the church/its members influence your decisions regarding sexuality now?

20. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), to what degree did your relationship with the church/its members influence your decisions regarding sexuality three years ago?

21. How has the gay community responded? How do you interpret this response?

22. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), to what degree does your relationship with the LGBT community/its members influence your decisions regarding sexuality now?

23. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), to what degree did your relationship with the LGBT community/its members influence your decisions regarding sexuality three years ago?

24. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much satisfaction do you gain from acting on same-sex attractions/impulses now?

25. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much satisfaction did you gain from acting on same-sex attractions/impulses three years ago?

26. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much satisfaction do you gain from acting on religious/spiritual beliefs now?

27. On a scale of 1-10 (1 = none at all, 10 = 100%), how much satisfaction did you gain from acting on religious/spiritual beliefs three years ago?

28. Have you been in therapy for this issue?
29. Please describe your experience in therapy.

30. Describe things the therapist did or said that were most helpful?

31. Describe things the therapist did or said that were least helpful?

32. How, if at all, has your thinking about this issue changed since the last survey?

33. What factors have contributed to your change in thinking?

34. How do you make meaning of this struggle (how does it make sense to you?)?

35. Any thoughts you would like to add/clarifications of survey answers.
MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 28, 2010

TO: Angela J. Huebner, Daman Reynolds

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires June 13, 2011)

PROTOCOL TITLE: Longitudinal Identity Development Study

IRB NUMBER: 10-483

Effective May 28, 2010, the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:
Approved as: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5, 7
Protocol Approval Date: 5/28/2010
Protocol Expiration Date: 5/27/2011
Continuing Review Due Date*: 5/13/2011

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:
Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.