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Marissa M. Puntigam  
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Marissa Marianna Puntigam  
The Effect of Religion on  
Coming Out and the Sexual  
Identity Formation of 18-30  
Year Olds who Self-Identify  
as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or  
Queer

## ABSTRACT

Religion, particularly within Judeo-Christian traditions, is an often cited rationale for rejection of homosexuality and persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. Given the socio-cultural influence of religion, catalyzed through the media, legislation, churches, and families, such frequent defamation could be believed to elicit a moral dilemma for an individual contemplating his/her own sexual identity. This effect might be detectable through the process and age of coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. This study sought to investigate the direct impact of a religious upbringing on sexual identity formation and was executed through quantitative analysis with a cross-sectional design utilizing a snowball sample, recruited through social networking websites. The sample was comprised of 60 participants, with 49 completed anonymous, online surveys that included 12 demographic questions, the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS) and the Brief Multi-Measure of Religion and Spirituality (BMMRS). The LGBIS measure was modified to include queer identity. While religion was found to have an effect on the coming out process, significant findings either opposed the hypothesis or were found to be, in general, inconclusive. Future research should focus on recruiting a larger and more diverse sample and perhaps utilize different research measures.

THE EFFECT OF RELIGION ON COMING OUT AND THE SEXUAL IDENTITY  
FORMATION OF 18-30 YEAR OLDS WHO SELF-IDENTIFY AS LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL, OR QUEER

A project upon an independent investigation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Masters of Social Work

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2010

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The degree and kind of a man's sexuality reach up into the ultimate pinnacle of his spirit. ~Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, 1886

A sizable amount of literature currently exists on lesbian and gay identity with slowly increasing publications on bisexual and queer identity, as well as coming out as any of these orientations. While academic legitimacy continues to be gained in the relatively new field of queer studies, research in general has risen considerably since 1973, when homosexuality was officially removed from DSM as a pathology. This was due to the combination of a changing socio-political climate, a growing gay rights movement, and increasing empirical data.

Nevertheless, *ego-dystonic homosexuality*, was created for the DSM's third edition in 1980. Ego dystonic homosexuality was indicated by: (1) a persistent lack of heterosexual arousal, which the patient experienced as interfering with initiation or maintenance of wanted heterosexual relationships, and (2) persistent distress from a sustained pattern of unwanted homosexual arousal (American Psychiatric Association [DSM-III], 1980). In 1986, this was removed entirely from the DSM and the only semblance in the revised DSM-III was listed under *Sexual Disorders Not Otherwise Specified* and included persistent and marked distress about one's sexual orientation. The growing clinical acceptance of homosexuality continued when the American Psychological Association released a report of their Task Force on Appropriate

Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation as recently as 2009, in which they conclude that efforts to change sexual orientation (such as reparative therapies) are unlikely to be successful and “may cause or exacerbate distress and poor mental health in some individuals, including depression and suicidal thoughts” (APA. 2009, 42-43). While an increasing amount of qualitative and quantitative research studies have been conducted to glean information about this population as well as assess for co-morbidities and risks, including depression, anxiety, suicidality, and other psychological stressors, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer) individuals continue to be pathologized, thereby remaining largely anonymous and unknown.

Although the harsh political climate and social stigma associated with members of the LGBTQ population has diminished over the past decade, the formation of an individual’s personal identity and the subsequent coming out process continues to be challenging. Heteronormative responses vary from initial and complete support to reactionary defamation and rejection. Of interest is the reaction of particular Judeo-Christian tradition, as they have fueled some of the loudest and largest antagonist responses that have continued as gay or queer culture has slowly been incorporated into other parts of society, such as legislation. The more extreme example is of the Westboro Baptist Church whose members regularly protest funerals of fallen military members with signs stating “God hates fags” and call the legalization of sodomy in *Lawrence v. Texas*, 2003, the reason for the impending Armageddon. Yet, even more moderate responses such as the Presbyterian Church (USA), which remains heavily split of the ordination of openly gay and lesbian clergy, inform the LGBTQ population that they are different and perhaps not as deserving of the same treatment as heterosexual members of



the population. At the very least, the very presence of Christianity in the United States remains a strong socio-cultural influence. As religious communities can have a profound effect on a child's beliefs and moral development, it could naturally be concluded that they would thereby influence the child's perception of LGBQ acceptability. This initial perception becomes crucial when the individual himself or herself comes to self-identify with one of these categories.

This issue is of importance to not only the LGBQ community but also their family and friends, as well as social workers and other clinicians, particularly those committed to working with oppressed populations. This research study is meant to help inform friends and family of the ways in which religion and religious upbringing affect LGBQ individuals, prior to and in the process of coming out. Understanding has the potential to improve the lives of those who self-identify as LGBQ by means of increasing support which in turn may decrease anxiety, depression, and suicidality. This could help foster more supportive religious communities or at least initiate a more enlightened conversation.

Therefore, the focus of this study is on how a religious upbringing influences at what age an LGBQ individual comes out as well as the development of a sexual identity. For purposes of locating the current influence of religion on coming out, participants will be limited to 18-30 year olds who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. The intent is to gain information about the affect of religion on the LGBQ population by assessing for relationships between sexual identity formation and frequency of religious/spiritual activities.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### *Coming Out*

Coming out can oftentimes be one of the single more impactful experiences in the life of someone who self-identifies as a member of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ) population. In fact the coming out process for many continues to remain replete with painful memories that include “homophobia, heterosexism, rejection, invisibility, and stigma” (Cohen, Aviv & Kelman, 2009, 156). The initial responses and overall reactions received, particularly by close friends and family, can be particularly formative in either encouraging or discouraging levels of self-identification with the population and the plausibility of coming out to the larger community in the future, due to anxiety over anticipated rejection (Mosher, 2001). Coming out is an acknowledged choice that leaves one open to ridicule and forced to fight labels that “gay people are deviant, sick, or abnormal” or even “bad or immoral” (Clark, Brown & Hochstein, 1990). Further integration of LGBQ identity into other facets of life, such as identification with the culture or levels of sexual involvement can readily be determined by the level of acceptance and support the individual receives upon coming out (Bridgewater, 1997).

In a qualitative study of racially diverse gay, lesbian, transgender, and questioning students, it was found that an overwhelming majority feared emotional and physical rejection by their parents, which was reinforced by the fact that only a minority of parents were accepting of their child’s sexuality (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett & Saltzburg, 2009;

Savin-Williams, 2003). In a study of 32 gay and lesbian young adults and 27 unrelated parents, gay and lesbian participants expressed their greatest fear of coming out was being rejected by their parents and after disclosure, these same participants were less likely to identify improvement in the parent-child relationship (Ben-Ari, 1995). Parents of this study were questioned on their understanding of the coming out process, including how it affected the parent-child relationship and self reports of their acceptance. The threat or even thought of parental rejection by LGBQ individuals is a real and frequent phenomenon. Once sexual orientation is disclosed, the individual might then have to undergo periods of verbal victimization, rejection, isolation, and even displacement (Bond, Hefner & Drogos, 2008; Savin-Williams, 1995). While familial responses have been found to be increasingly accepting over time, the initial negative reaction may cause significant impairment, disruption of normal activity, and breaks in relationship. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals who are also racially or ethnically diverse may face unique challenges as group categorization or community membership might need to be prioritized, depending upon outward appearance and community acceptance (Dworkin, 2002; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; McQueeney, 2009). However, generalizations that either include or exclude ethnic minority LGBQ individuals should be avoided as great variety exists between groups and cultures as well as within them. Relatively few significant studies include enough of a sizable sample of racial or ethnic diversity to provide much insight (Savin-Williams, 1995).

Peer relationships and the school social setting, both significant in the development of a youth, also may become strained due to disclosure or even perceived homosexuality. In a large study of heterosexual attitudes towards lesbian and gay peers,

relational indicators of prejudice along with physical aggression against sexual minorities were found in middle and high school samples in the Midwest (Poteat, Espelage & Koenig, 2009). Based upon such anticipated and oftentimes actual rejection, a LGBTQ adolescent can suffer from depression, decreased self esteem, and other considerable psychological effects (Bond, Hefner & Drogos, 2009; Harris, Cook & Kashubeck-West, 2008; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000; Remafedi, 1987). These effects are not exclusively experienced by adolescents as a study of mental health issues among women of different sexual orientations found heightened incidents of emotional stress, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and counseling seeking for depression, among lesbian and/or bisexual women as compared to heterosexual women (Koh & Ross, 2006).

### *Coming Out Models*

Although different models and stages of the coming out process have been produced, they typically begin with initial self identification with homosexuality. Within the context of a heteronormative world, the possibility is considered that something in the self could be construed as homosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer. The following is not intended to be an exhaustive overview of coming out models, but rather a brief introduction to a few that are utilized in research.

In the study of sexual orientation identity formation, Cass has developed the most widely used and empirically validated model, listing the process as six unique stages (Cass, 1996; Degges-White, Rice & Myers, 2000; Eliason, 1996; Hunter, 2007; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Mosher, 2001). Based upon interpersonal congruence theory, the stages are as follows: Stage 1—Identity Confusion, Stage 2—Identity Comparison, Stage

3—Identity Tolerance, Stage 4—Identity Acceptance, Stage 5—Identity Pride, and Stage 6—Identity Synthesis (Cass, 1996). An individual may progress through each stage, rapidly or over a lifelong journey, remain at a particular stage, or undergo identity foreclosure, in which the individual desists the process altogether, choosing to remain identified in their initial sexual identity. This process does not end with reaching the final stage as individuals must continue to move through the stages in different facets and times of life and may not even experience certain stages (Esterberg, 1996; Degges-White, Rice & Myers, 2000).

Another, more recently developed model was formulated by Carrion and Lock and consists of eight stages that move from internal processes through self-disclosure and to maintaining continual outside relationships with a society in flux (Mosher, 2001). Focusing on a schema that includes biological and psychological components, they have outlined the progression as follows: Stage 1—Internal discovery of the sexual orientation, Stage 2—Inner exploration of attraction to sexual object, Stage 3—Early acceptance of an integrated sexual self, Stage 4—Congruence probing, Stage 5—Further acceptance of an integrated sexual self, Stage 6—Self-esteem consolidation, Stage 7—Mature formation of an integrated self-identity, and Stage 8—Integrated self-identity within a social context (Carrion & Locke, 1997). The Carrion and Lock model particularly focuses on how social intolerance negatively affects healthy sexual identity formation (particularly with sexual minority youth) and while it has not yet been empirically validated, support exists through other research that suggests the existence and importance of these proposed stages.

Fassinger and Miller constructed a new model on the theory that there is both an internal process of identity development and a means of navigating that identity in the world. This identity model has been tested and validated with samples of both lesbians and gay men (Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The researchers suggest that development occurs in two distinct but catalytic processes: individual sexual identity and group membership identity with both proceeded by initial unawareness. One key point of this model is that its use of phases are considered continuous and circular as “every new relationship raises new issues about individual sexuality, and every new context requires renewed awareness of group oppression” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). Another crucial point of difference is that this model does not include disclosure as a means of measuring identity development, acknowledging the salient existence of hostile environments. This is one of a few models that have identified the adaptive nature of withholding disclosure in particular settings. The four phases of each development are as follows: Awareness, Exploration, Deepening/Commitment, and Internalization/synthesis. While the phase are reciprocal, they are not necessarily simultaneous (Fassinger & Miller, 1996; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). These essentially are reduced to acknowledging feelings of difference, increasing understanding and self acceptance, then incorporating this into overall identity and occur for both the individual and their attitude towards and sense of belonging to the oppressed group.

Differences among these models are more within the nuances of the particular stages or phases as well as the number of stages included. These models have been developed over the course of two decades within a changing societal context while understanding of the emotional and societal implications of the development of a LGBTQ

identity have been in flux. Some more tangible differences are that the McCarn and Fassinger model give distinctions between the individual and societal process while the Carrion and Lock model include the role of “interpersonal conflicts and societal intolerance” within the proposed stages (Carrion & Lock, 1997). The Carrion and Lock model in particular outlines different sub-reactions (due to outside influences) within the first two stages that will hypothetically affect the ability of the individual to move through the remaining stages. Additionally, Cass’s model explicitly includes disclosure but is much more focused on self acceptance and the internal process, rather than behaviors or outside influences. The McCarn and Fassinger model focuses on a “commitment to self-fulfillment,” including both as a sexual being and as a member of a particular lesbian or gay group (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). It is important to note that these models focus on development of a gay or lesbian identity and very few models even mention bisexuality, let alone queer identity. The problem that is endemic in testing nearly all models of sexual identity or coming out is the lack of diversity in the sample as well as the failure to consider the way in which other identities or components of the self (e.g. race, class, gender, age) affect the development and progression through the stages (Eliason, 1996). These are, however, but a few of the many proposed models, each with limitations and strengths of their own.

The process of coming out as transgendered would, of course, be completely separate and unique from the prior identified stages as it involves identifying with a differently gendered being and often begins early in life (Hunter, 2007). For this reason, I have decided to not include transgendered identity in this study. Coming out, in any context is the beginning of a lifelong process to develop a LGBQ identity and is greatly

influenced by the norms and values of the current family, culture, and society, including religious upbringing (Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). This staged process can occur multiple times as context and relationships change.

### *Religious Influences*

Growing up in the Judeo-Christian tradition and attending religious services as a child may have a large impact on a child's initial perception of the world. An individual's moral framework is slowly established first through initial adoption of authoritarian, usually parental, beliefs (Davies, 2004; Dudley & Dudley, 1986). These beliefs are then accepted or changed as the individual is exposed to new experiences that demand re-evaluation of the moral imperatives to which one was previously prescribed.

Incorporation of parental beliefs is especially relevant in developing attitudes and feelings towards sexuality and orientation, as these are typically an area of focus in religious teachings. Such doctrines are intended to define the principles around which morality is constructed in the lives of individuals (Morrow, 2003). Although current denominations, groups, and movements greatly fluctuate in their tolerance, a vast majority of monotheistic religions in the United States historically and presently deny full inclusion and celebration of openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals (Clark, Brown & Hochstein, 1990; Davidson, 2000).

Even before the coming out process has begun, children and adolescents link a projected negative response based upon the increased degree of familial religious orientation (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett & Saltzburg, 2009). In a study of young men who sleep with men, churches were noted as the primary source of anti-gay messages and



homophobic messages were more likely to be from family members described as religious (Kubicek et al., 2009). In a study of 27 gay male youth, those from highly traditional families, which included an emphasis on religion, reported strong family disapproval (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). In a study of 155 college students at a religiously affiliated university, researchers attempted to determine attitudes towards self-identified gay and lesbian individuals, both celibate and sexually active, while accounting for various degrees of religiousness (Rosik, Griffith & Cruz, 2007). The author found negative attitudes towards pre-marital sexual activity in general, regardless of practices, with higher levels of religiousness correlating with more negative attitudes towards gay and lesbians. The researchers stated that homophobia scales do not adequately take into account “normative assumptions of religious communities,” which serves to question the possible need for a new scale that would take such views into account (Rosik, Griffith & Cruz, 2007).

In a study where the intent was to better understand some of these assumptions by examining how religious beliefs and attitudes relate to internalized homophobia of 99 lesbian, gay, and bisexual participants, researchers found that higher levels of post-conventional religious reasoning, or the ability to make religious decisions independently without authoritative figures, correlate with lower levels of internalized homophobia and further stages of sexual identity development (Harris, Cook & Kashubeck-West, 2008). Similarly, in a study examining the relationship between orthodox Christian beliefs and responding to homosexuals without prejudice (specifically differentiated from homosexual acts) a correlation was found between right-wing authoritarianism and implicit homosexual prejudice (Ford, Brignall, Vanvaley & Macaluso, 2009). Another

study, utilizing data from the World Values Survey to assess cross-national attitudes, found that while a shift from survival mentality to self-expression entailed increased secular norms and laws regarding homosexuality, religion took a greater role in influencing attitudes about homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Opinions towards homosexuality aside, researchers conducting a study of college graduates beginning graduate school in social work or counseling found that negative attitudes towards lesbians and gay men were more likely to be held by those who identified with Conservative Protestant religions (Newman, 2002).

Attitudes towards and the treatment of bisexuals is a topic of particular contention as polyamorous relationship patterns are rarely considered as less than sinful within Judeo-Christian teachings that emphasize monogamy (Dworkin, 2002). Coming out or disclosing of sexual orientation is associated with higher rates of suicidal ideation for bisexual women, hypothetically due to facing increasing amounts of discrimination after disclosing, due to previous ability to pass easier than most lesbians (Koh & Ross, 2006). This could also be linked to the unique position of the bisexual community, in that there is the potential for them to be ostracized or ridiculed by those who identify as gay or straight and the coming out process can be continual, as it depends on the gender of the current partner. In a study of 224 students from a large Midwestern university, researchers found that a majority of the population sampled to be mildly biphobic while nearly half (46%) fell within the moderate to severe range (Mulick & Wright, 2002). Unfortunately, research on the bisexual community and the pressures of existing within a dichotomized sexual framework has been limited and therefore, not as much is known.

### *Religious Institutions*

The Roman Catholic Church has perhaps some of the most clearly articulated doctrinal rejection of LGBTQ acts and individuals. Described as a “strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil,” same-sex attraction is seen as a choice that must be suppressed through a life of celibacy or reoriented into a heterosexual marriage where the potential for procreation exists (Clark, Brown & Hochstein, 1990; Ratzinger, 1994). Negative attitudes towards homosexuality were found to be strongly correlated with individuals living in a Catholic nation, although Protestants across the world were found to have more conservative sex-related attitudes and beliefs (Adamczyk & Pitt, 2009). Holding to sacred texts found in the Old Testament (and Torah) as well as commentary in the New Testament, Catholics, Protestants, the Church of Latter Day Saints, and different Jewish sects are readily able to condemn same-sex sexual acts (Davidson, 2000; McQueeney, 2009).

However, in the Episcopal Church, clergy members who identify as gay or lesbian have become increasingly visible over the past 30 years (Crew, 1997). This not only conveys a message of acceptance but also inadvertently allows hundreds, possibly thousands of parishioners to live or be in regular contact with someone considered to be an “other,” or outside the heterosexist norm. The impact of personal contact with a minority group is one of the potentially greatest reducers of prejudice as it increases likelihood of reducing particular beliefs (Davis, 1992; Garnets and Kimmel, 1993; Gonsiorek and Weinrich 1991). Great strides have also been taken in Judaism within more progressive Reform and Reconstruction movements to acknowledge and accept members of the LGBTQ community (Davidson, 2000). When researching this topic,

different denomination or religious groups must be acknowledged in order to account for churches that advocate opposing teachings on homosexuality, which may impact the results.

News reports and political activists continue to report discord between particular religious groups and proponents of the LGBQ culture, particularly in the area of legislation. This public sphere appears to mirror the inner conflict or identity dissonance occurring within many self-identified LGBQ individuals based upon their religious upbringings (Kubicek et al., 2009; Mahaffy, 1996). For example, in a study of 66 self-identified gay and lesbian individuals, nearly two-thirds experienced conflict between their religion of birth and their sexual identity (Schuck, 2001). Many expressed that they felt they had to refrain from attending religious services and reject their faith entirely in order to accept their sexual selves. When comparing levels of internalized homophobia in gay men between those who participate in Dignity, an organization of gay Catholic men, and a community sample of gay men with Catholic backgrounds, 69% of those in the community state that they no longer practice Catholicism (Wagner, Serafini, Rabkin, Remien & Williams, 1994). In a study of Jewish individuals, lack of recognition of their sexual identity along with perceptions of limited support and resources resulted in a lack of desire to be included in areas of religious practices, such as ritual participation, the importance of being Jewish, and expressing higher instances of religiosity (Cohen, Aviv & Kelman, 2009).

Accordingly, many LGBQ individuals have abandoned the Judeo-Christian tradition in favor of alternative religions such as Goddess Worship, Native American spirituality, paganism, and New Age religions, finding the latter more accepting

(Davidson, 2000; Dworkin, 2002). Even once LGBQ identity has been integrated and the individual has obtained some degree of self-acceptance, religious communities continue to be avoided for fear of being exposed in a non-affirming environment and subsequent condemnation or rejection (Morrow, 2003). The recent AIDS epidemic of the 1980s has affected this threat of exposure as people continue to display heightened negative reactions towards the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community despite increasing amounts of social tolerance (Kunkel & Temple, 1992). One indicator of the effect of such negativity can be determined from a study of religiosity in lesbian and bisexual women, in which there was no difference in levels of religiosity between those who had or had not attempted suicide (Mathy & Schillace, 2003). As religiosity tends to be a protective factor against suicidal intent, the absence of a difference is noteworthy, further indicating the unique relationship between a religious background and LGBQ identity. While this does not indicate that religion is necessarily a cause of suicide, it does propose that it might increase risk for those who identify as LGBQ, which occurs whenever a protective factor is lost. Of particular note, many prior researchers stated that the phenomenon occurring between LGBQ individuals and religious and spiritual practices, sometimes referenced as traditional family values, remains in need of far more study in order to better understand this continuing dynamic (Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002; Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

### *Basis for Research*

Members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer population have the potential to face tremendous obstacles in coming out. Whether rejections are real or imagined,

parental or peer, societal or religiously based, they affect an individual's ability to formulate their sexual identity or at least the timeline in which this occurs. Sexual identity models from Cass, Carrion and Lock, and McCarn and Fassinger are but a few of the many stage/phase development examples that hypothesize the internal and social process and accompanying implications. Previous research points to religion and religiosity as influencing factors in this developmental process due, in particular, to established values, beliefs, and homophobia within the religious community. The amount of homonegativity present varies greatly between different Christian and Jewish denominations but members of Catholic and conservative Protestant religious groups tend to hold the most negative attitudes towards homosexuality and members of the LGBTQ community. This negative sentiment has potentially enormous emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual consequences on the recipients, but its direct correlation remains vague. The purpose of this study is to then test the affect of exposure to these attitudes and teachings on coming out and sexual identity formation, focusing on a younger generation who has experienced the supplementary effects of an increasingly accepting society.

Specific research questions are as follows: Is the age of coming out influenced by the incorporation of religious experiences into daily life as a child? Is sexual identity formation influenced by gender, race, region of the country, familial closeness, and/or degree of the importance of religion? What is the relationship between sexual identity formation and incorporation of religious experience and attitudes in daily life?

CHAPTER 3  
METHODOLOGY

*Formulation*

This project is a quantitative research study with a cross-sectional design. The purpose of this study is to determine if religious practices of the family have an impact upon the age at which a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer individual comes out, for young adults, ages 18-30.

*Subject Selection*

To meet the inclusion criteria, participants must self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer and must be between the ages of 18 and 30, as well as being proficient in the English written language. Any person, who is not fluent in reading English, is outside of this age range or does not self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer was excluded from this study. Participants did not need to identify as religious in any way to be included. The researcher attempted to obtain a sample size of 200 participants, with a minimum sample size of 50 participants. The final sample size was 60 participants who met the two eligibility requirements and provided their informed consent; however, there were only 49 completed surveys.

Careful thought was given to the identity and age range of possible participants. In order to better determine the impact of religion on coming out, for purposes of this study, individuals must necessarily have already come out, at least to themselves. While

lesbian and gay are the most commonly recognized labels, coming out as bisexual has increasingly become included when identifying as other than straight. For this study it was decided to additionally utilize the term “queer” as it has gained increased usage, particularly from the academic community. While this might place some additional scrutiny on the study as queer identity has been rarely cited in the literature or previous research, informal inquiries into organizations and clubs on college campuses as well as community organizations have led to the conclusion that younger adults are increasingly self-identifying as queer or utilizing the term to encompass a wider range of sexual orientation and expression. Questioning individuals were not included as they do not yet self-identify on any particular portion of the sexuality spectrum and therefore, their results would be much more difficult to analyze. Transgender persons are not excluded from this survey as long as they identified as LGBTQ, but coming out as transgendered is a factor that is outside the study’s scope. The process of coming out as transgendered is, of course, completely separate and unique from sexual orientation as it involves issues of gender identification. The impact of religion on transgendered individuals would be an interesting study however, and should be researched in the future.

The age range was decided upon through several key factors. It was limited to a small cohort as the social environment of the United States continues to change and therefore considerable differences exist between the coming out process of an 18 year old today versus an 18 year old 20 years ago. The minimum age was cut off at 18 years in order to include only adults who are much more likely to have separated themselves from their home environment, at least physically. The maximum age was capped at 30 years as this is a cohort commonly used by other researchers. Additionally, those who turn 30



years in 2010, this being the year this study is conducted, were 18 years old on October 12, 1998; the day that Matthew Shepard was murdered. The media and community response to this homophobic act was “unprecedented and never-to-be-repeated,” bringing the controversial event to people all across the U.S. (Renna, 2008). This brutal death and the outcry of the LGBTQ community afterwards, continuing with the Matthew Shepard Act passed by Congress in 2009, is likely to have impacted 18 year olds coming to terms with their own sexuality.

Possible participants were recruited through various social networking sites (e.g., Facebook) and community resource mailing lists and/or websites (particularly LGBTQ community centers). The researcher contacted organizations that target the gay community throughout the United States, to determine their willingness to either email the survey link to their mailing list or to place a link to the survey on their website. Organizations were contacted via email, utilizing the personal and professional connections of the researcher. The posted link stated: “Do you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer? Are you between ages 18-28? Click here to complete a survey!” The participants self selected by following the available link to the Survey Monkey website, where they were asked several screening questions. These questions were: Do you self-identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer; and Are you currently between ages 18-28. If the person responded “yes” to both questions, then the participant was directed to the informed consent webpage, before commencing the survey. If the person responded “no” to either question, then the participant was informed that s/he does not qualify for this study.

The researcher attempted to recruit for diversity by contacting organizations throughout the United States, included those located in regions associated with greater amounts of religiosity. The researcher also attempted to contact organizations that appeal or target various sexual orientations, racial and ethnic groups, and genders.

### *Data Collection*

Participants were asked to voluntarily complete a one-time online questionnaire on Survey Monkey that took approximately 20-25 minutes. The researcher gathered demographic data and also asked each participant to recall particularities about their home, school, or the family members they lived with prior to answering the questions, in order for the participant to better answer the questions as they would have prior to the age of 18 or prior to moving out of their caretaker's home. Although the nature of a retrospective study can make it more unreliable as participants might remember things differently than they actually occurred, the perceived reality remains important as an influencing factor. The researcher used two different pre-existing measures: the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS) and the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religion and Spirituality (BMRS).

The Lesbian and Gay Identity Scale (LGIS) consists of 27 questions to measure six dimensions of sexual identity development. It was written by Jonathon Mohr and Ruth Fassinger, was published in a scientific journal for free use by the public, and is based upon issues discussed in queer literature. Intended to focus on internalized homonegativity through an assessment of "beliefs and feelings related to LG identity," the LGIS was tested on a sample of 590 lesbians and 414 gay men between ages 18-69, a

majority white and highly educated (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000, 70). Principal component analysis was conducted and items were chosen for the final version of the scales if, for both lesbians and gay males, items had a loading of at least .40 on one factor which led the researchers to retain 27 of the original 40 items. In one result pertinent to the current study, participation in religious organizations indicated as not being pro-gay was associated with below average levels of outness in the religious community of involvement (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). As this original study was also testing an Outness Inventory (OI) and the current study is not, comparisons will not be able to be made but the usage of religious involvement further indicate its relevance and the flexibility of the scale to be used with a measure that compares this.

For the LGIS, Individuals answer along a seven point scale with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 7 being “strongly agree,” with no other indicators of a number’s meaning. A large sample of partnered lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults provided support for the original LGIS, which was then reworded to create the LGBIS. The main difference was that wording of “lesbian/gay man” was replaced by “LGB person.” Although no published data currently exists on the LGBIS version of the tool, unpublished results from a national study appear to be comparable to results from the LGIS (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003). According to the researchers and creators of the LGIS, the psychometric properties of the LGBIS are expectedly analogous to those of the LGIS as indicated by two separate, but unpublished, studies: one conducted by the same researchers and one in a master’s thesis studying bisexual young adults (Mohr & Fassinger, 2003). Based upon continued evolution of identity and social norms, as well as an intellectualization of the term “queer,” this researcher decided to further expand the

LGIS to encompass queer-identified individuals. This was a minute change as it involved simply adding the letter “Q” to “LGB person” in each statement. While the original LGIS statement was “I am glad to be a lesbian/gay man,” the LGBIS changed it to “I am glad to be a LGB person,” and the LGBQIS has become “I am glad to be a LGBQ person.” This change was meant to enlarge the study to include individuals who identify along a spectrum, while not deviating from the intended means of measurement. There are six subscales for the LGIS: Internalized Homonegativity/Binegativity, Need for Privacy, Need for Acceptance, Identity Confusion, Difficult Process, and Superiority which are scored using the average of the questions that are pertinent. A second-order factor of Negative Identity combines the averages of Homonegativity, Need for Privacy, Need for Acceptance, and Difficult Process.

The Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religion and Spirituality (BMRS) measures experiences with religion and spirituality, in an attempt to identify and quantify which of these experiences influences various health outcomes. The working group from the Fetzer Institute who developed this publically available measure worked with the underlying notion that religion and spirituality impacted health outcomes behaviorally, socially, psychologically, and even physiologically, to some extent, all through a series of domains. These questions are divided into different sections such as “daily spiritual experiences,” “forgiveness,” and “religious and spiritual coping.” For purposes of this study, a majority of the headings were not included in the actual survey, as the electronic page layout would have become too lengthy. This measure was previously utilized by another researcher at Smith College and the only change made to this adapted measure was to exclude two questions that were already asked in the demographic portion of the

survey: what is your religion and what is your parents' religion. The version of the BMMRS used includes 48 questions that are answered along a four to eight point scale, depending upon the nature of the question. Questions about "daily spiritual experiences," such as "I find strength and comfort in my religion, or spirituality" are answered according to 1-Many times a day, 2-Every day, 3-Most days, 4-Some days, 5-Once in a while, and 6-Never or almost never. Other questions decrease options of experience to four choices, reference a four point agreement scale, degree of closeness scale, or involvement scale.

Previous studies have all supported high internal validity for each of the original twelve subscales. The version of the BMMRS that was utilized by this researcher could be broken down into eight subscales. Firstly, the current study uses the long form of "Daily Spiritual Experiences" that was comprised of 16 questions on aspects of life that relate to repeated spiritual experiences rather than ones of extraordinary significance (such as life and death) in order to determine the individual's perception of how these are integrated into daily existence. Second, one question for Values/Beliefs was taken from the 1999 version of the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religion and Spirituality. Third, one question was taken from the subscale on Commitment, used to measure intrinsic religious motivation. Fourth, the long form of the Forgiveness measure was utilized, which includes ten questions broken down into subcategories of confession, forgiveness by God, forgiveness by others, forgiveness of others, and forgiveness of self. Fifth, the long form of Private Religious Practices was included with an additional question regarding frequency of meditation included as provided by the 1999 version of the BMMRS. Sixth, the Religious and Spiritual Coping subscale focuses on how an

individual works through and understands stressful life events and is divided into sections on positive religious/spiritual coping, negative religious/spiritual coping, and overall religious/spiritual coping. Seventh, the short form on Organizational Religiousness was included and pertained to frequency of attendance of religious services and other activities at a place of worship. The eighth and final subscale was an Overall Self-Ranking and only included two questions asking the participant to evaluate their level of religiosity and spirituality. While the excluded questions could have provided additional understanding of the participants' religious life, the researcher felt it necessary to condense many of the subscales for the means of this study and in the interest of participants' time.

This survey was precluded by a page asking respondents to reflect upon their life prior to age 18 or before moving out of their caretaker's home. *What color were the walls or the room you slept in? Who was the most important person in your life? What did the entrance of your school look like? If you came out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer to your parents, how did they respond? When, if ever, was religion most important to you?* These questions were to be answered by the individual and respondents were not asked to include their responses. For the remainder of the survey, respondents were reminded to answer each question as they would have during that time of their life.

In order to guarantee anonymity, names were not included in any part of the survey. As it was a web-based survey, the researcher did not meet nor have indication of the participants' identities nor were any responses able to be linked to any particular participant so that respondents remained anonymous.

The study had the following risks. First, some questions might have been uncomfortable or remind participants of unhappy experiences. Second, if participants were already experiencing anxiety or depression, it is possible that some questions might have heightened or worsened the anxiety or depression. Although both risks were possibilities, the potential for such an adverse outcome was low. If participants became upset in any way as a result of these questions, counseling numbers and resources were provided on the informed consent page as well as the last page of the survey.

This study was completely voluntary. No financial compensation was given, but possible benefits of participation included enjoyment of sharing the information. It may also have served as a means of reflection. Participation may additionally help clinicians better work with the LGBTQ population as it might aid their understanding of the coming out process, particularly for individuals raised in a family that practices religion.

### *Data Analysis*

Coding of the data was done through Survey Monkey, which assigned a numerical value to each existing response for all questions. Missing or unusable data was assigned a value of 99. For three demographic questions there were responses that were outside of the range of normal values. Three responses for the question “Which one or two of the following best describes your racial or ethnic origin?” indicated two values, which were then coded together under separate numerical values. For the question “What sexual orientation do you self-identify with (not necessary to disclose to anyone else?),” two people responded with “Other.” One responded “straight with an attraction to women (primary interest in dating men, but sexual activity with women)” and another answered

“genderqueer.” As the first person does not meet the requirement of identifying as an LGBTQ person, this data was marked as unusable, as was the second as genderqueer is a gender category and is unrelated to sexual orientation. For the question “Which of the following best describes the religious affiliation of your family during childhood?” one person responded with “Hindu” and one responded with “Christian Non-denominational.” The first was coded as unusable as this study is limited to researching the effects of Judeo-Christian upbringing and the second response was placed under a separate code. All other data was useable and coded according to the predetermined numerical values. The final N for analysis was 49.

This coding was checked by the researcher and reversed coding was done by hand where indicated by the pre-existing measures. This data was then processed and analyzed by Marjorie Postal, a statistician employed by Smith College. The initial tests were a factor analysis of items in the two scales, including a varimax rotation. Next, a priori scaling (of each subscale for both measures) was profiled using mean, variance, and range (using average scoring for each subscale). In addition, a Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for each scale. Next, the relationship between all subscales was tested using a correlation matrix. Demographics were included in the correlation matrix. A T-Test was run for the variable of gender with all subscales to assess for difference between males and females. A one-way ANOVA was ran for three of the demographic questions (area lived for most of childhood, region of the US lived for most of childhood, and region of the US currently living). All statistical tests were two tailed and used an alpha of .05 or lower to indicate significance.



Some potential limitations of the study are its small sample size and the lack of racial diversity, both of which limit its external validity and therefore applicability to the general population. If more time had been allotted, the size of the sample would have increased substantially as there would have been the opportunity to recruit to additional groups and allow the snowballing to spread further. However, it should be acknowledged that these limitations, particularly the latter, are endemic to nearly all studies of the lesbian, gay, and bisexual population. Future researchers should continue to be mindful of recruiting for racial diversity when locating participants in order to create a sample that is more reflective of the general population.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

#### *Demographics of Sample*

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a relationship between being raised in a home that practices religion and the coming out process of an 18-30 year old who self identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. Individuals were determined to be eligible for participation if they self identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer and were between the ages of 18 and 30 years. The group that responded affirmatively to both questions and agreed to the informed consent was made up of 60 individuals. However, for a majority of the questions, only 49-55 participants responded. In order to better capture the span of responses from participants, only complete surveys were included. Of these participants, 23 were male (39%), 34 were female (57.6%), and 2 preferred not to disclose (3.4%) [see Figure 1]. Age was spread out over the range with a mean of 24.19 and a median of 23. Participants were not racially diverse and the sample was comprised of 1 Asian (1.7%), 2 Black or African American (3.4%), 51 White or Caucasian (86.4%), 2 Latino or Hispanic (although these were originally listed under “Other, please specify” and were condensed under one heading) (3.4%), 2 who identified as White and Hispanic (3.4%), and 1 who identified as White and Pacific Islander (1.7%). The limited nature of a diverse sampling is typical of quantitative studies of the LGBTQ population and indicates a continued need for researchers to focus on recruiting a racial diverse sample that is reflective of the population.

Figure 1-Sample Demographics					
	Range	Mean	Median	SD	Variance
Age	19 to 30	24.19	23	3.466	12.016
Coming out to Self	10 to 25	16.95	17	3.516	12.366
Coming out to Others	14 to 29	19.05	19	2.91	8.471

It is important to note that answers to other demographic questions were more evenly distributed. For area lived in for most of childhood, 8 participants identified urban (13.6%), 40 suburban (67.8%), and 11 rural (18.6%). For highest level of education obtained, 1 participant listed GED/HS diploma (1.7%), 18 listed “some college” (30.5%), 7 listed “AA” (11.9%), 15 listed “BA/BS” (25.4%), 9 listed “some graduate school” (15.3%), and 9 listed “graduate degree or higher” (15.3%). For region of the United States lived in for a majority of childhood, 9 were from the Northeast (15.5%), 15 from the Midwest (25.9%), 13 from the South (22.4%), and 21 from the West (36.2%). For region of the United States of current residence, 16 live in the Northeast (27.1%), 13 live in the Midwest (22%), 8 live in the South (13.6%), and 22 live in the West (37.3%).

The last five demographic questions focused on identity, coming out, family closeness, and religious affiliation during childhood. There were 22 participants who self-identified as gay (35.1%), 11 as lesbian (19.3%), 15 as bisexual (26.3%), and 11 as queer (19.3%). Age of coming out to self was along a range of 10-25 years with a mean of 16.95 and a median of 18. Age of coming out to others was along a range of 14-29 years with a mean of 19.05 and a median of 19 [see Figure 1]. For emotional closeness with family, 25 responded as very close (42.4%), 6 responded as somewhat close (10.2%), 23 as close in some areas (39%), 4 as limited closeness (6.8%), and 1 as not at all close

Figure 2-Nominal Demographics			
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	23	38.3	39
Female	34	56.7	57.6
Prefer not to Disclose	2	3.3	3.4
<b>Race</b>			
Asian	1	1.7	1.7
Black or AA	2	3.3	3.4
White	51	85	86.4
Latino/ Hispanic	2	3.3	3.4
White & Hispanic	2	3.3	3.4
White & Pacific Islander	1	1.7	1.7
<b>Area Lived for Most of Childhood</b>			
Urban	8	13.3	13.6
Suburban	40	66.7	67.8
Rural	11	18.3	18.6
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>			
GED/HS Diploma	1	1.7	1.7
Some college	18	30	30.5
AA	7	11.7	11.9
BA/BS	15	25	25.4
Some grad school	9	15	15.3
Grad school or higher	9	15	15.3
<b>Region of US lived for most of Childhood</b>			
Northeastern	9	15	15.5
Midwest	15	25	25.9
South	13	21.7	22.4
West	21	35	36.2
<b>Region of US Current</b>			
Northeastern	16	26.7	27.1
Midwest	13	21.7	22
South	8	13.3	13.6
West	22	36.7	37.3
<b>Sexual Orientation of Self-Identity</b>			
Gay	20	33.3	35.1
Lesbian	11	18.3	19.3
Bisexual	15	25	26.3
Queer	11	18.3	19.3
<b>Emotional Closeness with Family</b>			
Very close	25	41.7	42.4
Somewhat close	6	10	10.2
Close in some areas	23	38.3	39
Limited closeness	4	6.7	6.8
Not at all close	1	1.7	1.7
<b>Religious Affiliation of Childhood</b>			
None	9	15	15.3
Catholic	14	23.3	23.7
Protestant	23	38.3	39
Pentacostal/Evangelical	6	10	10.2
Jewish-Orthodox	1	1.7	1.7
Jewish-Conservative	2	3.3	3.4
Jewish-Reform	2	3.3	3.4
Christian Non-Denom	1	1.7	1.7
Hindu	1	1.7	1.7

(1.7%). For religious affiliation of childhood, 9 participants responded as none (15.3%), 14 as Catholic (23.7%), 23 as Protestant (39%), 6 as Pentacostal/Evangelical (10.2%), 1 as Jewish-Orthodox (1.7%), 2 as Jewish-Conservative (3.4%), 2 as Jewish-Reform (3.4%), Christian non-denominational (1.7%), and 1 as Hindu (1.7%).

### *Alphas and Description of Scales*

Cronbach's Alpha is a statistical test intended to assess the internal consistency of a scale. This multi-variable correlation produces an alpha that is typically measured between coefficient values of .00 to +1.00. In order to determine the reliability of the scale in question, the cutoff number above .60 is adequate, above .70 is moderate, and above .80 reflects strong internal consistency. Values below .60 are typically not viewed with significant internal validity.

A vast majority of the subscales had an alpha that reflected an internal validity that was either moderate or strong [see Figure 3]. Only one subscale in the LGBQIS measure, Superiority, had a less than reliable Alpha (0.575), although this is very close to the .60 cutoff. Additionally, there was one subscale in the BMMRS, Forgiveness, that had a low Alpha (additionally two of the subscales solely consisted of one question so an Alpha is not calculable) of 0.582. Again, this is very close to the cutoff. Because of their close proximity, these subscales were not thrown out, but it is important to be mindful of this limited reliability in drawing conclusive evidence based on these subscales.

Figure 3 outlines the subscales within the two measures, the number of items that comprised each subscale, the Cronbach's Alpha, the mean, and the median of responses. To more adequately understand the data, remember that the LGBQIS measure utilizes a

Likert 7-point scale, ranging from 1 of “disagree strongly” to 7 “agree strongly.” It is notable that for this respondent set, the mean of the subscales is solely within disagree to neutral values, which is the same for a majority of the medians.

<b>Figure 3-Characteristics of LGBQIS and BMMRS Subscales</b>				
	Number of items	Alpha	Mean	Median
<b>LGBQIS</b>				
Internalized Homonegativity	5	0.815	1.9232	1.6
Need for Privacy	6	0.862	3.9583	4.0833
Need for Acceptance	5	0.727	2.9339	2.6
Identity Confusion	4	0.906	2.3765	1.625
Difficulty Process	5	0.73	3.7571	3.6
Superiority	2	0.575	2.0357	1.5
Negative Identity	21	0.841	3.1432	2.9875
<b>BMMRS</b>				
Daily Spiritual Experiences	15	0.932	3.6349	3.5333
Values/Beliefs	1		2.3	2
Commitment	1		2.53	2
Forgiveness	10	0.582	2.6138	2.6
Private Religious Practice	5	0.785	5.4321	5.8
Religious & Spiritual Coping	10	0.709	2.27	2.4
Organizational Religiousness	2	0.891	3.8061	4
Overall Self-ranking	2	0.687	2.3163	2

Assessing the mean and median values for the BMMRS is slightly more challenging as different questions were scaled in different ways. For the Daily Spiritual Experiences, the mean and median values were between “most days” and “some days.” For Values/Beliefs and Commitment, the mean and median were in the mid range of agree. In the Forgiveness subscale, the means and medians were between “often” and “seldom.” In examining Private Religious Practice, the values were between “a few times a month” to “once a month.” For Religious & Spiritual Coping, the findings were within

“quite a bit” to “somewhat.” In the Organizational Religiousness subscale, the mean and median were “once or twice a month” but closer to “every month or so.” For overall self-ranking, the findings were around “moderately religious.”

### *Correlations and Relationships*

Two separate measures were utilized to understand the relationship between participant’s sexual identity formation and experiences of religion and spirituality. These subscales were tested for any association through a Pearson Correlation [see Figure 3]. Several significant correlations were suggested. There was a significant negative correlation between the subscales “need for acceptance” and “values/beliefs” ( $r=-.293$ ,  $p=.033$ , two tailed). This correlation indicates that as an LGBQ person’s need for other people to accept them (as measured by questions such as “I will never be able to accept my sexual orientation until all of the people in my life have accepted me” and “Being an LGBQ person makes me feel insecure around straight people”) is lower, their belief in a God who watched over them is higher. There was also a significant negative correlation between “difficult process” and “values/beliefs” ( $r=-.291$ ,  $p=.034$ , two tailed). Again, as belief in a God who watched over an LGBQ person was high, the difficulty of the coming process was lower (e.g., “admitting to myself that I’m an LGBQ person has been a very painful process” and a reversed scored “developing as an LGBQ person has been a fairly natural process for me”). A third significant negative correlation of the “values/beliefs” subscale was found with “superiority” ( $r=-.325$ ,  $p=.018$ , two tailed). As an LGBQ person’s belief in a God who watches over them is high, the level of superiority which is informed by “I look down on heterosexuals” and “straight people have boring lives

compared with LGBQ people” is low. “Superiority” has a significant negative correlation with “organizational religiousness” ( $r=-.320$ ,  $p=.025$ , two tailed). When superiority is low, the level of organizational religiousness of an LGBQ person is high (based on how often the respondent attended religious services and besides religious services, how often the respondent took part in other activities at a place of worship). A third significant negative correlation was found between “superiority” and “overall self ranking” ( $r=-.316$ ,  $p=.027$ , two tailed). When superiority is low, an LGBQ person’s overall self ranking as to what extent they consider themselves a religious or spiritual person is high. For the Pearson Correlation, these were the only relationships between subscales found to be significant.



**Figure 4-Pearson Correlations Between LGBQIS and BMMRS Subscales**

		Need for Privacy	Need for Acceptance	Identity Confusion	Difficult Process	Superiority	Internalized Homonegativity	Negative Identity	Daily Spiritual Exp	Values/Beliefs	Commitment	Forgiveness	Private Religious Practices	Relig Spiritual Coping	Organiz Religiousness	Overall Self-Ranking
Need for Privacy	Pearson Correlation	1	.590(**)	.416(**)	.641(**)	-.374(**)	.520(**)	.856(**)	-0.028	-0.063	-0.157	0.131	0.115	-0.032	0.186	0.058
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	56	0.000 56	0.001 56	0.000 56	0.005 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.840 55	0.654 53	0.262 53	0.349 53	0.414 53	0.826 50	0.201 49	0.694 49
Need for Acceptance	Pearson Correlation	.590(**)	1	.572(**)	.623(**)	-0.009	.585(**)	.829(**)	-0.129	-.293(*)	-0.079	-0.256	0.029	-0.116	0.048	0.005
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.000 56	56	0 56	0.000 56	0.948 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.350 55	0.033 53	0.572 53	0.064 53	0.837 53	0.424 50	0.742 49	0.972 49
Identity Confusion	Pearson Correlation	.416(**)	.572(**)	1	.486(**)	0.040	.508(**)	.588(**)	0.008	-0.133	0.003	-0.107	0.035	0.078	-0.038	0.021
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.001 56	0.000 56	56	0.000 56	0.767 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.952 55	0.342 53	0.982 53	0.445 53	0.804 53	0.593 50	0.796 49	0.887 49
Difficult Process	Pearson Correlation	.641(**)	.623(**)	.486(**)	1	-0.131	.533(**)	.855(**)	-0.110	-.291(*)	-0.250	-0.130	-0.186	-0.032	-0.022	-0.092
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	56	0.337 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.423 55	0.034 53	0.071 53	0.353 53	0.181 53	0.826 50	0.879 49	0.528 49
Superiority	Pearson Correlation	-.374(**)	-0.009	0.040	-0.131	1	-0.114	-0.208	-0.176	-.325(*)	-0.237	-0.256	-0.178	-0.180	-.320(*)	-.316(*)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.005 56	0.948 56	0.767 56	0.337 56	56	0.402 56	0.124 56	0.198 55	0.018 53	0.088 53	0.064 53	0.202 53	0.211 50	0.025 49	0.027 49
Internalized Homonegativity	Pearson Correlation	.520(**)	.585(**)	.508(**)	.533(**)	-0.114	1	.769(**)	-0.046	-0.135	-0.068	-0.036	0.041	-0.028	-0.082	0.051
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.402 56	56	0.000 56	0.738 55	0.334 53	0.626 53	0.800 53	0.769 53	0.844 50	0.575 49	0.729 49
Negative Identity	Pearson Correlation	.856(**)	.829(**)	.588(**)	.855(**)	-0.208	.769(**)	1	-0.092	-0.228	-0.175	-0.071	0.001	-0.059	0.051	0.005
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.000 56	0.124 56	0.000 56	56	0.506 55	0.101 53	0.211 53	0.613 53	0.993 53	0.686 50	0.730 49	0.974 49
Daily Spiritual Exp	Pearson Correlation	-0.028	-0.129	0.008	-0.110	-0.176	-0.046	-0.092	1	.752(**)	.689(**)	.637(**)	.654(**)	.789(**)	.490(**)	.806(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.840 55	0.350 55	0.952 55	0.423 55	0.198 55	0.738 55	0.506 55	55	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 50	0.000 49	0.000 49
Values/Beliefs	Pearson Correlation	-0.063	-.293(*)	-0.133	-.291(*)	-.325(*)	-0.135	-0.228	.752(**)	1	.766(**)	.664(**)	.591(**)	.634(**)	.456(**)	.685(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.654 53	0.033 53	0.342 53	0.034 53	0.018 53	0.334 53	0.101 53	0.000 53	53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 50	0.001 49	0.000 49
Commitment	Pearson Correlation	-0.157	-0.079	0.003	-0.250	-0.237	-0.068	-0.175	.689(**)	.766(**)	1	.475(**)	.695(**)	.633(**)	.558(**)	.764(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.262 53	0.572 53	0.982 53	0.071 53	0.088 53	0.626 53	0.211 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 50	0.000 49	0.000 49
Forgiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.131	-0.256	-0.107	-0.130	-0.256	-0.036	-0.071	.637(**)	.664(**)	.475(**)	1	.576(**)	.464(**)	.436(**)	.577(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.349 53	0.064 53	0.445 53	0.353 53	0.064 53	0.800 53	0.613 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.001 50	0.002 49	0.000 49
Private Religious Practices	Pearson Correlation	0.115	0.029	0.035	-0.186	-0.178	0.041	0.001	.654(**)	.591(**)	.695(**)	.576(**)	1	.461(**)	.753(**)	.743(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.414 53	0.837 53	0.804 53	0.181 53	0.202 53	0.769 53	0.993 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.000 53	0.001 50	0.000 49	0.000 49
Religious/Spiritual Coping	Pearson Correlation	-0.032	-0.116	0.078	-0.032	-0.180	-0.028	-0.059	.789(**)	.634(**)	.633(**)	.464(**)	.461(**)	1	.299(*)	.598(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.826 50	0.424 50	0.593 50	0.826 50	0.211 50	0.844 50	0.686 50	0.000 50	0.000 50	0.000 50	0.001 50	0.001 50	50	0.037 49	0.000 49
Organiz Religiousness	Pearson Correlation	0.186	0.048	-0.038	-0.022	-.320(*)	-0.082	0.051	.490(**)	.456(**)	.559(**)	.436(**)	.753(**)	.299(*)	1	.641(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.201 49	0.742 49	0.796 49	0.879 49	0.025 49	0.575 49	0.730 49	0.000 49	0.001 49	0.000 49	0.002 49	0.000 49	0.037 49	49	0.000 49
Overall Self-Ranking	Pearson Correlation	0.058	0.005	0.021	-0.092	-.316(*)	0.051	0.005	.806(**)	.685(**)	.764(**)	.577(**)	.743(**)	.599(**)	.641(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed) N	0.694 49	0.972 49	0.887 49	0.528 49	0.027 49	0.729 49	0.974 49	0.000 49	0.000 49	0.000 49	0.000 49	0.000 49	0.000 49	0.000 49	49

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### *Analysis of Demographics and Subscales*

For the demographics, different analysis was run to determine if there were any significant relationship between subscales and different responses of participants for the twelve demographic questions. First, a T-Test was run to determine if there was a difference in each subscale by gender, after excluding the two participants who preferred to not disclose. There was a significant difference in religious and spiritual coping ( $t(46)=2.327, p=.024$ , two-tailed). Participants who identified as male had a lower mean score on this subscale ( $m=2.0632$ ) when compared with females ( $m=2.3981$ ). Additionally, there was a significant difference in organizational religiousness ( $t(45)=2.239, p=.030$ ). Again, males had a lower mean score on this subscale ( $m=3.1316$ ) than females ( $m=4.2679$ ). There were no significant differences in any of the other LGBQIS or BMMRS subscales for the attribute of gender.

Many tests did not indicate the existence of a relationship between particular demographics and any of the subscales. For age and age of coming out to self, Pearson Correlations were run and no significant correlations were found. However, for age of coming out to others, Pearson Correlations were run and there were significant positive correlations with need for privacy ( $r=.367, p=.006$ , two-tailed) and difficult process ( $r=.384, p=.004$ , two-tailed). There were no significant differences with any of the other LGBQIS or BMMRS subscales. For area lived for most of childhood, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run to determine if there were differences in any of the subscales by type of area they lived in during childhood (urban/suburban/rural). There were no significant differences in any of the LGBQIS or BMMRS subscales. One-way ANOVAs were also run by region for the U.S. lived in for most of childhood as well as

current region of the country lived in and no significant differences were found in any of the LGBQIS or BMMRS subscales. A Pearson Correlation was run for emotional closeness with family to determine if there were relationships between rating of emotional closeness and any of the LGBQIS or BMMRS subscales but no significant correlations were found.

The participants of this study provided a great deal of information on their sexual identity formation and aspects of their religious experiences as a child. This data was analyzed using several different statistical tests and most of the correlations of the subscales from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Identity Scale and the Brief Multi-Measure of Religion and Spirituality were found to not be statistically significant. A few notable correlations were found, however, and these findings will be expounded upon in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

#### *Significant Findings*

This study is focused on how a religious upbringing influences at what age a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer individual comes out and what effect this might have on the development of a sexual identity. The sample is comprised of 60 participants, with 49 completed surveys, who are a mean age of 24.19 and are 86.4% White or Caucasian, with 39% male and 57.6% female. There were 22 participants who self-identified as gay (35.1%), 11 as lesbian (19.3%), 15 as bisexual (26.3%), and 11 as queer (19.3%).

The results showed that coming out to self was positively correlated with coming out to others ( $p=.698$ ). Coming out to self was in the age range of 10-25 years with a mean of 16.95 and a median of 19 years. Coming out to others was in the age range of 14-29 years with a mean of 19.05 and 19. When compared with the most recent research studies on coming out, the averages of these participants are between one to three years later. Several different rationales could account for this variance. Firstly, it could simply be a result of chance in that participants were randomly of older coming out ages. Secondly, it could indicate a societal regression to an older age of coming out. However, one theory this researcher would like to postulate would be to correlate this older age of coming out with the higher degree of religiosity found among participants. In other words, those who opted to participate in the study were more inclined to have an older age of coming out. As noted in the findings section, the mean values for the subscales of

the BMMRS were typically higher than the middle range. If participants are then believed to hold religious views, integrate religious beliefs, attend religious events, and label themselves as more religious than the average population, then this sample might be biased with a more religious upbringing. This suggests that there might be a correlation between a more religious sample and an older than average age of coming out.

While the increased amount of religiosity found in this sample is of particular note, another interesting correlation could be made with the degree of closeness with family. Again, this sample was biased towards a more close relationship with family as 25 responded as very close (42.4%), 6 responded as somewhat close (10.2%), 23 as close in some areas (39%), 4 as limited closeness (6.8%), and 1 as not at all close (1.7%). Essentially, 91.5% of the participants responded as very close, somewhat close, and as close in some areas versus the 8.5% who indicated limited closeness or not at all close. Again, there is the possibility of a correlation between the later mean of coming out and the increased closeness to family although a Pearson Correlation did not indicate any statistical significance.

Similarly, a majority of the respondents indicated a religious upbringing. For religious affiliation of childhood, 9 participants responded as none (15.3%), 14 as Catholic (23.7%), 23 as Protestant (39%), 6 as Pentacostal/Evangelical (10.2%), 1 as Jewish-Orthodox (1.7%), 2 as Jewish-Conservative (3.4%), 2 as Jewish-Reform (3.4%), Christian non-denominational (1.7%), and 1 as Hindu (1.7%). These results can be consolidated to 83% of the sample expressed affiliation to a Judeo-Christian religion. One might wonder how this strong bias towards affiliation with a religious upbringing also affects the age of coming out in the sample, though the data on this is inconclusive.

Minimal significant differences were found between gender groups and both the LGBQIS and BMMRS subscales, after excluding those who preferred not to disclose. There was a significant difference in religious and spiritual coping ( $t(46)=2.327$ ,  $p=.024$ , two-tailed). Males had a lower mean score on this subscale ( $m=2.0632$ ) than females ( $m=2.3981$ ). There was a significant difference in organizational religiousness ( $t(45)=2.239$ ,  $p=.030$ , two-tailed). Males had a lower mean score on this subscale ( $m=3.1316$ ) than females ( $m=4.2679$ ). This is interesting to note as women in the general population tend to come out at a later age and specifically within this sample, participants who identified as woman indicated an older age of coming out. If women indicate a higher degree of organizational religiousness (which is comprised of frequency of religious service attendance and frequency of attending other activities at a place of worship) and overall self-ranking as a religious person, then this might impact the age in which they come out.

Age of coming out to others was found to be significantly positively correlated with two LGBQIS subscales: Need for Privacy ( $r=.367$ ,  $p=.006$ , two-tailed) and Difficult Process ( $r=.384$ ,  $p=.004$ , two-tailed). The Need for Privacy subscale was comprised of six different variables and the Difficult Process was comprised of five variables, both of which are included in Appendix H. Although these were relatively weak, these findings are of particular significance because they are more general and therefore more comparable with the present literature and research. More will be discussed on this matter in a following section of this chapter.

In the Pearson Correlations, there were five significant findings. There was a significant negative correlation between the subscales “need for acceptance” and

“values/beliefs” ( $r=-.293$ ,  $p=.033$ , two tailed). There was also a significant negative correlation between “difficult process” and “values/beliefs” ( $r=-.291$ ,  $p=.034$ , two tailed). The Need for Acceptance subscale can be broken down into five separate questions, as seen in Appendix H. When compared with the Values/Beliefs subscale that consists of one question “I believe in a God who watches over me,” there was a negative correlation so that as one variable would decrease, the other would increase. This is a very important finding because it can be interpreted to mean that a strong belief in a watchmaker God results in needing the acceptance of others to a lesser degree. If participants are then less concerned with how others view or judge them for their sexual orientation, then their sexual identity formation can be an easier process. This finding is so crucial because it actually lies in direct opposition to the hypothesis that the increased importance of religion would negatively correlate with coming out and development of sexual identity. This would suggest that religion becomes a protective factor in the process. Similarly, the negative correlation between Values/Beliefs and Difficult Process subscales also goes against the hypothesis. Difficult Process was comprised of five questions and can be found in Appendix H. This would indicate that again, the stronger the belief in a watchmaker God, the easier and faster the coming out process has been. This would then demonstrate that religious views aid the coming out process, both to oneself and to others. These two correlations will be discussed further in light of other research.

A third significant negative correlation of the “values/beliefs” subscale was found with “superiority” ( $r=-.325$ ,  $p=.018$ ). “Superiority” also had a significant negative correlation with “organizational religiousness” ( $r=-.320$ ,  $p=.025$ ). A third significant negative correlation was found between “superiority” and “overall self ranking” ( $r=-.316$ ,

$p=.027$ , two tailed). Superiority is a subscale that is comprised of two questions: I look down on heterosexuals and straight people have boring lives compared with LGBTQ people. However, it is important to note that the Cronbach's Alpha of the subscale Superiority had a less than reliable Alpha (0.575), although this was very close to the .60 cutoff. In general, these results are not surprising. Participants who believed in a God who watched over them, attended religious services or other activities at a religious facility, or evaluated themselves as more religious and spiritual were less likely to exhibit feelings of superiority over the heterosexual community. While this is expected given general theological principles of the equality of humanity, or at the very least the importance of heterosexuals within Judeo-Christian churches, it does have implications for sexual identity formation. For these results, it is important to once again review the coming out models as the holding the dominance of the LGBTQ community over the heterosexual community tends to be an included, if not definitely staged, aspect of coming out.

Another small but meaningful aspect of this study was the high percent of participants who identified as queer. While very limited research has been conducted on the self-identified queer community as this label is still new and controversial within the gay community, the presence of nearly 20% of the sample indicates the increasing importance of including various means of self-labeling. This would allow researchers to improve the validity of future research by more accurately grouping and drawing subsequent conclusions on the LGBTQ community as separate and unique groups with differing identities, struggles, and coming out processes. Hopefully, this study will encourage future researchers to continue to utilize various terms for sexual orientation in



order to be more inclusive and improve means of measurement along with applicability to the greater population.

### *Answering Research Questions*

It is important to consider how these results answer the specific and overall research questions formulated in the beginning of the study. The first question: is the age of coming out influenced by the incorporation of religious experiences into daily life as a child? According to Pearson correlations comparing the demographic questions of age of coming out with different subscales from the BMMRS indicate that there is no significant relationship. Because of various limitations of this study that will be discussed further, the validity of this result is questionable. However, according to the sample of participants who responded to this study, this question cannot be responded to affirmatively.

The second research question: is sexual identity formation influenced by gender, race, region/population density of the area of the country lived in during childhood, familial closeness, and/or degree of the importance of religion? According to Pearson Correlations comparing subscales of sexual identity formation with the demographics of gender and emotional closeness with family for a majority of childhood, there are no significant relationships. A one-way ANOVA was run for both region of the country lived in during childhood and density of the community area (urban/suburban/rural) and no significant relationships were found. For the demographic of race, not enough of a diverse sample was collected to run any statistical analysis. For degree of the importance of religion, there was a negative significant correlation between the BMMRS subscale of

Overall Self-Ranking as religious and spiritual with the LGBQIS subscale of superiority, as mentioned previously. For this question, only one aspect of sexual identity formation (superiority) was found to be influenced by overall self-ranking, as indicated by the responses of this sample.

The third question is: what is the relationship between sexual identity formation and incorporation of religious experience and attitudes in daily life? Again, correlations between most of the LGBQIS subscales and BMMRS subscales were not of statistical significance. However, there were significant negative correlations between the BMMRS subscales of Values/Beliefs (in a God who watches over me) and Organizational Religiousness (frequency of religious service attendance and frequency of attending other activities at a place of worship). Again, this result is important to note as the relationship is in the opposite direction as previously hypothesized.

The initial research question is: how does a religious upbringing influence at what age a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer individual comes out as well as the development of a sexual identity? Most of the results from this study were not of significance but several indicate there is an effect. Some results suggest it makes sexual identity formation easier and faster while others suggest that aspects of the development process are ignored or delayed, but other results are inconclusive. While this study provided an initial analysis of the relationship between a childhood religious upbringing and coming out/sexual identity formation, clearly more research needs to be done.

### *Comparison with Previous Research*

Participants in this study indicated a negative correlation between superiority and the three subscales of belief in a watchmaker God, attendance of religious services and other events at a religious institution, and overall self-ranking as a religious and spiritual person. As previously mentioned, there are many coming out models that explicitly or implicitly include an element or stage of pride, which sometimes is manifested through feelings of superiority. McCarn and Fassinger, whose coming out model was cited in length earlier in this document, referred to phase 3 of lesbian group membership identity development “including an intense identification with lesbian culture and rejection of heterosexual society” (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996, 525). While other theorists have mentioned this phenomenon in differing terms, such as Celia Kitzinger’s reference to “political lesbians” who are lesbian in the core with a developed distaste of heterosexual men or Richard Troiden’s stage 3, “identity assumption,” of his coming out model which includes sentiment that the homosexual way of life is superior, the most empirically validated model by Vivienne Cass cited this in stage 5 (Eliason, 1996). Cass’s description of stage 5, “identity pride,” includes the development of an ‘us versus them’ mentality and the prioritizing of the LGBTQ identity above all else. This part of the stage is typically initiated in stage 4 when an LGBTQ individual begins to acknowledge the incongruence between how s/he views the self and possibly other members of the LGBTQ community, with how the individual thinks others see the self, which might include attitudes expressed in the media, church, or home (Cass, 1996). If someone who is beginning to identify as LGBTQ fails to develop an acute awareness of how society rejects LGBTQ identity or that a heteronormative society even exists, then the individual does not

adequately pass through that stage of coming out. This might even affect the level of commitment the individual holds towards their group identity as LGBTQ. If certain religious factors are affecting development of superiority, then the coming out process is certainly affected, whether this be lengthening the process overall, inhibiting completion of one of the stages, or changing the identity process completely.

The significant positive correlation between age of coming out to others with Need for Privacy and Difficult Process is both logical and is supported by some previous literature. Those who prefer to not discuss or inform others of their intimate same-sex partnerships or who experience a more difficult time acknowledging their sexual orientation would sensibly take longer to come out to others. In a study of experiences of religious conflict, it was found that perceived conflict and difficulty accepting an LGB identity were significantly correlated while additionally, the greater variance in age of coming out among respondents were among those more religiously conflicted (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). While the finding of the current study did not include any of the religious variables, this example remains comparable. Those who experienced more difficulty in their LGB identity development were both younger at age of coming out as well as older, but were not as present within the mean of other respondents. This meant that there was a divide between coming out earlier and a delayed coming out with the variable of religion and in this study, perceived difficulty. Unfortunately, comparing this current finding with other studies for issues relating to privacy and a difficult process related to issues outside of religion is outside the scope of the literature review and this current study.

The result of a statistically significant negative correlation between belief in a watchmaker God and both need for acceptance and difficult process is in opposition to

the literature. In a study of young men who have sex with men, respondents who reported a religious upbringing as Christian, Pentecostal, or Evangelical also usually reported exposure to the most severely homophobic messages in church (Kubicek et al., 2009). Similarly, in a study of coming out to parents, participants who expressed a stronger adherence to a particular religion found it to be or related it to a perceived more negative reaction (Potoczniak, Crosbie-Burnett & Saltzburg, 2009). Although these studies are not directly comparable, they do indicate the more negative or homophobic messages that sometimes accompany Judeo-Christian religious beliefs, including one in a God who watches over people. Based upon the impact of receiving these messages simultaneously, the researcher had hypothesized that an increased belief would be correlated with increased need for acceptance and a more difficult process. The finding was the exact opposite, indicating that belief in a watchmaker God aids the coming out process, making it easier and faster. It is difficult to say if this is a result of a younger cohort (18-30 years) that faces less discrimination from religious groups, a bias of the sample, or one of many other potential factors. Part of the difficulty in contrasting these findings to the current literature is that relatively few studies, particularly empirical ones, have directly attempted to examine the affect of religion on coming out as LGBTQ.

#### *Strengths of the Study*

Despite the small number of significant findings, there were still many strengths of this research study. Although the efforts were unsuccessful, the researcher tried to recruit for diversity, recognizing its importance. The methods, including an anonymous and a web-based survey, were both well chosen as they provided an easier avenue to

respond to personal questions and were more likely to appeal to this particular age group and population. The researcher created an easy to navigate, well-formatted survey to lesson internal errors. The survey was piloted to someone in the target population and to a fellow researcher outside of the target group. In order to aid participants in reflecting more accurately on their perceptions of a religious upbringing, the researcher utilized different sensory data to evoke childhood memories. As mentioned previously, the researcher also included the label of “queer” in the demographics, which was beneficial in that it pushes the research community forward to provide more inclusive labels that are used by members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer community. These aspects of the study were useful and allowed for significant findings to emerge.

#### *Shortcomings and Biases*

The current study also exhibited some limitations. The most problematic issue was the small sample size which decreases statistical power. Additionally, the sample demonstrated homogeneity, particularly in the area of racial diversity as an overwhelming majority of participants identified as white. The sample was also biased towards religiosity, education, and emotional closeness with family, making it less generalizable. The survey itself was lengthy and a number of participants left the survey incomplete, which might have occurred less often if the content had been condensed through use of another, shorter measure. In terms of procedure, the recruitment efforts and breadth of recruitment could have been increased along with the amount of time that the survey was accessible to the public.

The measures themselves were developed by professional researchers and are both available to the public for personal use. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Identity Scale was limited in that it is a self-report measure and asks participants to respond in their current mind frame. This does not describe longitudinal development and just captures one brief measure of time. The measure did not encompass the coming out process or the movement through the coming out identity models. Additionally, this measure had not previously been modified, to the knowledge of the researcher, to include a queer identity, which might have impacted the results in some manner. The sample of this study responded in a slightly biased manner to this survey through mean values in the Disagree Strongly to neutral position. The Brief Multi-Measure of Religion and Spirituality was conducted through a reflective study which is more unreliable. The limitation of this measure was that it relied upon a relatively small number of questions, sometimes less than three, to assess a particular area of religiosity or religious experience. This measure also focused on frequency of action for most of the questions versus particular beliefs or specific practices. The participants of this study responded again in a biased manner towards more religious attitudes and frequency so the use of another measure for religiosity might be warranted for future research.

#### *Implications for Further Research and Practice*

The most important implication of this study for future areas of research is the need to continue to broaden and include various sexual identity labels in the demographic questions for those who continue to reach the lesbian and gay community. As labels have changed, it is important for researchers to remain culturally sensitive and provide avenues

that would not dissuade potential participants from continuing through the survey.

Another implication for future research is the continued difficulty of obtaining a diverse respondent sample. It would be interesting to consider why it is difficult for researchers to access LGBQ communities of color and what methods could be utilized to improve the inclusivity of research projects. Specifically, as the results of this study were inconclusive, it is important and certainly useful for future researchers to continue to gain more information on the relationship between religion and coming out as LGBQ.

Therefore, this researcher would recommend further studies that examine this relationship, potentially utilizing different and more valid and reliable measures.

More importantly, this study carries several implications for social work practice. It is notable that each participant holds a unique coming out story and means of navigating sexual identity formation. Therefore, it is important for clinicians working with LGBQ clients to remember to hold onto a degree of curiosity without presupposing the process of the individual. It is also of crucial importance, particularly in light of the previous and current literature, to provide space for clients to discuss their religious upbringing and the level to which homosexuality is discussed, accepted, or condemned in their communities, churches, and homes no matter the general sentiment of the geographic area. It is also potentially useful for social workers to keep various coming out models or different aspects of sexual identity formation in mind when working with LGBQ clients in order to better assess the current state of the client as well as potential areas of development in the future. This study can help those clinicians increase their knowledge, skill base, and compassion for this developing and increasingly visible community. The results indicate that religious upbringing affects the coming out process



and sexual identity development for different self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer individuals by different means.

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APPENDIX A

HSR APPROVAL LETTER



SMITH COLLEGE  
School for  
Social Work

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Smith College  
Northampton, Massachusetts 01063  
T (413) 585-7950  
F (413) 585-7994

January 20, 2010

Marissa Puntigam

Dear Marissa,

Your amended materials have been reviewed. All of the revisions have been completed and we are happy to give final approval to this very interesting study.

*Please note the following requirements:*

**Consent Forms:** All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

**Maintaining Data:** You must retain all data and other documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

*In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:*

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

**Renewal:** You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

**Completion:** You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.  
Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Jennifer Perloff, Research Advisor

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study  
Smith College • Northampton, MA**

.....

**Title of Study: The Effect of Religion on Coming out as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Queer**

**Investigator: Marissa Puntigam, Smith College SSW Student**

.....

**Introduction**

- You are being asked to be in a research study of how being raised in a family that practices religion influences the coming out process of a lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer (LGBQ) individual.
- You self-identified as a possible participant and are eligible if you are between ages 18-30 and self identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer.
- Please read this form before agreeing to be in the study.

**Purpose of Study**

- The purpose of the study to determine if the religious practices of the family has an impact upon the age at which an LGBQ individual comes out. This research will be used to aid therapists in better understanding the coming out process and potential obstacles to coming out.
- Ultimately, this research will be included in a Master’s of Social Work thesis, will be presented at Smith College and potentially published as an article in a research journal.

**Description of the Study Procedures**

- If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following: participate in a one-time online questionnaire on Survey Monkey that will take approximately 20-25 minutes.

**Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Study**

- The study has the following risks. First, some questions posed might be embarrassing, uncomfortable, or remind you of unhappy experiences. Second, if you are already experiencing anxiety or depression, it is possible that some questions might heighten feelings of anxiety or depression. If you become upset in any way as a result of these questions, counseling numbers and resources will be provided below, as well as on the last page of the survey.

**Benefits of Being in the Study**

- This study is completely voluntary. No financial compensation will be given, but possible benefits of participation include enjoyment of sharing the information. It may also serve as a means of reflection. Your participation may additionally help therapists better serve members of the LGBQ population.

**Confidentiality**

- This study is anonymous. We will not be collecting or retaining any information about your identity and there will be no way to trace your responses back to you. Your data will be kept in a secure location for three years as required by Federal guidelines and will be destroyed after this point.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw**

- The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study *at any time* without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study or Smith College.

You have the right not to answer any question, as well as to withdraw completely from the questionnaire at any point during the process. Please note, once you have completed the final page and hit the final button we cannot remove you as we will not be able to tell which set of responses is yours.

**Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns**

- You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact me, Marissa Puntigam at researcher.2010@live.com. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review at (413) 585-7974.
- If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them to the number above. Alternatively, concerns can be reported by completing a Participant Complaint Form, which can be found on the IRB website at <http://www.smith.edu/irb/>

**Consent**

- **BY CHECKING “I AGREE” BELOW, YOU ARE INDICATING THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION ABOVE AND THAT YOU HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.**
- We suggest you print a copy of this form to keep for your records.

I agree and will continue

I do not agree and wish to exit

.....

Provider's List (All resources are freely available)

- **The GLBT National Hotline's** phone number is 1-888-843-4564
- **The GLBT National Youth Talkline** (up to age 25) is 1-800-246-PRIDE (1-800-246-7743).
- Or access <http://www.glbtnearme.org/> to find local resources
- **Counseling On-Line:** [www.befrienders.org/email.html](http://www.befrienders.org/email.html) (Confidential 24-Hour email)
- **IYG** - peer counseling for gay, lesbian & bisexual youth - 800.347.8336
- **Mental Health** Crisis Line- 800.222.8220
- **National Hopeline Network**, The Hope Line connects people to certified counselors 24 hours a day, seven days a week. 800.SUICIDE(784-2433) <http://www.hopeline.com>
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline** - a 24-hour, free, and confidential service. Those in need of help can call 1-800-273-TALK (8255).

## APPENDIX C

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your gender?
  - A. Male
  - B. Female
  - C. Transgender (Male to Female)
  - D. Transgender (Female to Male)
  - E. Prefer not to disclose
  
2. How old are you, in years?
  
3. Which one or two of the following best describes your racial or ethnic origin?
  - A. American Indian or Alaska Native
  - B. Asian
  - C. Black or African American
  - D. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
  - E. White (Caucasian)
  - F. Other, please specify: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Which of the following best describes the area you lived in for a majority of your childhood?
  - A. Urban
  - B. Suburban
  - C. Rural
  
5. What is your highest level of education?
  - A. Less than high school
  - B. GED/High school diploma
  - C. Some college
  - D. AA/Associates degree
  - E. Bachelor's degree
  - F. Some graduate school
  - G. Graduate degree or higher
  
6. What region best described the area of the country you lived in for a majority of your childhood?
  - A. Northeastern
  - B. Midwest
  - C. South
  - D. West
  
7. What region best described the area of the country you live in currently?
  - E. Northeastern

- F. Midwest
- G. South
- H. West

8. What sexual orientation do you self-identify with (not necessary to disclose to anyone else)?
  - A. Gay
  - B. Lesbian
  - C. Bisexual
  - D. Queer
  - E. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
9. How old were you when you first came out to yourself as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer? Please provide your age in years.
10. If you have come out to another person, how old were you the first time you told someone you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer? Please provide your age in years.
11. Which of the following best describes the emotional closeness you had with your family for a majority of your childhood?
  - A. Very close/emotionally intimate
  - B. Somewhat close
  - C. Close in some areas, not as close in others
  - D. Limited closeness/not very close
  - E. Not at all close
12. Which of the following best describes the religious affiliation of your family during your childhood?
  - A. No religious affiliation
  - B. Christian-Catholic
  - C. Christian-Protestant
  - D. Christian-Pentecostal/Evangelical
  - E. Jewish-Orthodox
  - F. Jewish-Conservative
  - G. Jewish-Reform
  - H. Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND QUEER IDENTITY SCALE

For each of the following statements, mark the response that best indicates your experience as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer (LGBQ) person. Please be as honest as possible in your responses.

- 1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7  
Disagree Strongly Agree Strongly
1. \_\_\_\_\_ I prefer to keep my same-sex romantic relationships rather private.
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ I will never be able to accept my sexual orientation until all of the people in my life have accepted me.
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ I would rather be straight if I could.
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Coming out to my friends and family has been a very lengthy process.
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ I'm not totally sure what my sexual orientation is.
  6. \_\_\_\_\_ I keep careful control over who knows about my same-sex romantic relationships.
  7. \_\_\_\_\_ I often wonder whether others judge me for my sexual orientation.
  8. \_\_\_\_\_ I am glad to be an LGBQ person.
  9. \_\_\_\_\_ I look down on heterosexuals.
  10. \_\_\_\_\_ I keep changing my mind about my sexual orientation.
  11. \_\_\_\_\_ My private sexual behavior is nobody's business.
  12. \_\_\_\_\_ I can't feel comfortable knowing that others judge me negatively for my sexual orientation.
  13. \_\_\_\_\_ Homosexual lifestyles are not as fulfilling as heterosexual lifestyles.
  14. \_\_\_\_\_ Admitting to myself that I'm an LGBQ person has been a very painful process.
  15. \_\_\_\_\_ If you are not careful about whom you come out to, you can get very hurt.
  16. \_\_\_\_\_ Being an LGBQ person makes me feel insecure around straight people.
  17. \_\_\_\_\_ I'm proud to be part of the LGBQ community.
  18. \_\_\_\_\_ Developing as an LGBQ person has been a fairly natural process for me.
  19. \_\_\_\_\_ I can't decide whether I am bisexual or homosexual.
  20. \_\_\_\_\_ I think very carefully before coming out to someone.
  21. \_\_\_\_\_ I think a lot about how my sexual orientation affects the way people see me.
  22. \_\_\_\_\_ Admitting to myself that I'm an LGBQ person has been a very slow process.
  23. \_\_\_\_\_ Straight people have boring lives compared with LGBQ people.
  24. \_\_\_\_\_ My sexual orientation is a very personal and private matter.
  25. \_\_\_\_\_ I wish I were heterosexual.
  26. \_\_\_\_\_ I get very confused when I try to figure out my sexual orientation.
  27. \_\_\_\_\_ I have felt comfortable with my sexual identity just about from the start.

## APPENDIX E

### THE BRIEF MULTI-DIMENSIONAL MEASURE OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The following questions ask you about your experiences with spirituality and religion. A number of questions use the word God. If this word is not a comfortable word, please use another word that represents what you pray to or what is holy for you. Please choose the answer that best applies to you as a child or adolescent.

#### DAILY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

The following questions deal with possible spiritual experiences. To what extent can you say you experience the following:

1. I feel God's presence.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

2. I experience a connection to all of life.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

3. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

4. I find strength and comfort in my religion, or spirituality.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while



Never or almost never

5. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

6. I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

7. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

8. I feel God's love for me, directly.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

9. I feel God's love for me through others.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days

Once in a while

Never or almost never

10. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.

Many times a day

Every day

Most days

Some days  
Once in a while  
Never or almost never

11. I feel thankful for my blessings.  
Many times a day  
Every day  
Most days  
Some days  
Once in a while  
Never or almost never

12. I feel a selfless caring for others  
Many times a day  
Every day  
Most days  
Some days  
Once in a while  
Never or almost never

13. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.  
Many times a day  
Every day  
Most days  
Some days  
Once in a while  
Never or almost never

14. I desire to be closer to God or in union with God.  
Not at all close  
Somewhat close  
Very close  
As close as possible

15. In general, how close do you feel to God?  
Not at all close  
Somewhat close  
Very close  
As close as possible

16. I believe in a God who watches over me.  
Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

17. I try hard to carry my religious or spiritual beliefs into all my other dealings in life.

Strongly agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

18. It is easy for me to admit that I am wrong.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

19. If I hear a sermon, I usually think about the things that I have done wrong.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

20. I believe that God has forgiven me for the things I have done wrong.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

21. I believe that there are times when God has punished me.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

22. I believe that when people say they forgive me for something I did they really mean it.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

23. I often feel that no matter what I do now I will never make up for the mistakes I made in the past.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

24. I am able to make up pretty easily with friends who have hurt me in some way.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

25. I have grudges which I have held onto for months or years.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

26. I find it hard to forgive myself for some things that I have done.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

27. I often feel like I have failed to live the right kind of life.

Always or almost always

Often

Seldom

Never

28. How often do you pray privately in places other than at church or synagogue?

More than once a day

Once a day

A few times a week

Once a week

A few times a month

Once a month

Less than once a month

Never

29. Within your religious or spiritual tradition, how often do you meditate?

More than once a day

Once a day

A few times a week

Once a week

A few times a month

Once a month

Less than once a month

Never

30. How often do you watch or listen to religious programs on TV, radio, or internet?

More than once a day

Once a day  
A few times a week  
Once a week  
A few times a month  
Once a month  
Less than once a month  
Never

31. How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature?

More than once a day  
Once a day  
A few times a week  
Once a week  
A few times a month  
Once a month  
Less than once a month  
Never

32. How often are prayers or grace said before or after meals in your home?

At all meals  
Once a day  
At least once a week  
Only on special occasions  
Never

#### RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL COPING

Think about how you try to understand and deal with major problems in your life. To what extent is each of the following involved in the way you cope?

33. I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force.

A great deal  
Quite a bit  
Somewhat  
Not at all

34. I work together with God as partners to get through hard times.

A great deal  
Quite a bit  
Somewhat  
Not at all

35. I look to God for strength, support, and guidance in crises.

A great deal  
Quite a bit  
Somewhat  
Not at all

36. I try to find the lesson from God in crises.

A great deal

Quite a bit

Somewhat

Not at all

37. I confess my sins and I ask for God's forgiveness.

A great deal

Quite a bit

Somewhat

Not at all

38. I feel that God is angry with me.

A great deal

Quite a bit

Somewhat

Not at all

39. I wonder whether God has abandoned me.

A great deal

Quite a bit

Somewhat

Not at all

40. I feel God is punishing me for my sins.

A great deal

Quite a bit

Somewhat

Not at all

41. I am angry at God.

A great deal

Quite a bit

Somewhat

Not at all

42. To what extent is your religion involved in understanding or dealing with stressful situations in any way?

Very involved

Somewhat involved

Not very involved

Not involved at all

43. How often do you go to religious services?

More than once a week

Every week or more often  
Once or twice a month  
Every month or so  
Once or twice a year  
Never

44. Besides religious services, how often do you take part in other activities at a place of worship?

More than once a week  
Every week or more often  
Once or twice a month  
Every month or so  
Once or twice a year  
Never

45. To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?

Very religious  
Moderately religious  
Slightly religious  
Not religious at all

46. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?

Very spiritual  
Moderately spiritual  
Slightly spiritual  
Not spiritual

## APPENDIX F

### INDIVIDUAL RECRUITMENT

Sexual identity, Coming out, and Religious upbringing.

Do you identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer? Are you between ages 18-30?

How does being raised in a family that practices religion influence the coming out process of a lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer (LGBQ) individual?

Please consider participating in a 20-25 minute online survey that is completely anonymous. Information will be used for Masters in Social Work thesis.

Click here \*\*\* to be directed to the survey.



## APPENDIX G

### AGENCY RECRUITMENT

Greetings,

I am a second year MSW student at Smith College School for Social Work. In partial fulfillment of my master's degree, I am currently conducting research that explores the connection between sexual identity formation and religious upbringing. The purpose of this study is to determine if religious practices of the family have an impact upon the age at which a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer individual comes out, for young adults ages 18-30.

My research is being conducted through an anonymous internet survey posted on Survey Monkey and is open to individuals between ages 18-30 who self-identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or queer. I will be asking 12 demographic questions along with using two pre-existing measures: the Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religion and Spirituality (BMRS) and the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS). The BMRS measures experiences with religion and spirituality while the LGBIS measures sexual orientation identity development.

I would like to request your assistance in recruiting potential participants. Possible methods would include either posting a link to my survey on your webpage or sending out my survey link to your members or contacts. If you would be willing to assist me in either of these ways or have additional methods or ideas to recruit potential participants, please contact me at [researcher.2010@live.com](mailto:researcher.2010@live.com). I have attached copies of my measures for your convenience.

Please be assured that my research project has been approved by the Smith College Institutional Review Board and meets the requirements ensuring participant safety and wellbeing.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Marissa Puntigam  
Smith College School for Social Work

## APPENDIX H

### SUBSCALES

#### **The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Identity Scale**

NOTE: Items that are in italicized should be reverse scored.

##### Internalized homonegativity:

I would rather be straight if I could,

*I am glad to be an LGBQ person.*

Homosexual lifestyles are not as fulfilling as heterosexual lifestyles.

*I'm proud to be part of the LGBQ community.*

I wish I were heterosexual.

##### Need for Privacy:

I prefer to keep my same-sex romantic relationships rather private.

I keep careful control over who knows about my same-sex romantic relationships.

My private sexual behavior is nobody's business.

If you are not careful about whom you come out to, you can get very hurt.

I think very carefully before coming out to someone.

My sexual orientation is a very personal and private matter.

##### Need for Acceptance:

I will never be able to accept my sexual orientation until all of the people in my life have accepted me.

I often wonder whether others judge me for my sexual orientation.

I can't feel comfortable knowing that others judge me negatively for my sexual orientation.

Being an LGBQ person makes me feel insecure around straight people.

I think a lot about how my sexual orientation affects the way people see me.

##### Identity Confusion:

I'm not totally sure what my sexual orientation is.

I keep changing my mind about my sexual orientation.

I can't decide whether I am bisexual or homosexual.

I get very confused when I try to figure out my sexual orientation.

##### Difficult Process:

Coming out to my friends and family has been a very lengthy process.

Admitting to myself that I'm an LGBQ person has been a very painful process.

*Developing as an LGBQ person has been a fairly natural process for me.*

Admitting to myself that I'm an LGBQ person has been a very slow process.

*I have felt comfortable with my sexual identity just about from the start.*

Superiority:

I look down on heterosexuals.

Straight people have boring lives compared with LGBTQ people.

*Negative Identity* = average of Homonegativity, Need for Privacy, Need for Acceptance, and Difficult Process

### **The Brief Multi-Measure of Religion and Spirituality**

Daily Spiritual Experiences:

1. I feel God's presence.
2. I experience a connection to all of life.
3. During worship, or at other times when connecting with God, I feel joy which lifts me out of my daily concerns.
4. I find strength and comfort in my religion, or spirituality.
5. I feel deep inner peace or harmony.
6. I ask for God's help in the midst of daily activities.
7. I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities.
8. I feel God's love for me, directly.
9. I feel God's love for me through others.
10. I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation.
11. I feel thankful for my blessings.
12. I feel a selfless caring for others
13. I accept others even when they do things I think are wrong.
14. I desire to be closer to God or in union with God.
15. In general, how close do you feel to God?

Values/Beliefs:

16. I believe in a God who watches over me.

Commitment:

17. I try hard to carry my religious or spiritual beliefs into all my other dealings in life.

Forgiveness:

18. It is easy for me to admit that I am wrong.
19. If I hear a sermon, I usually think about the things that I have done wrong.
20. I believe that God has forgiven me for the things I have done wrong.
21. I believe that there are times when God has punished me.
22. I believe that when people say they forgive me for something I did they really mean it.
23. I often feel that no matter what I do now I will never make up for the mistakes I made in the past.
24. I am able to make up pretty easily with friends who have hurt me in some way.
25. I have grudges which I have held onto for months or years.
26. I find it hard to forgive myself for some things that I have done.

27. I often feel like I have failed to live the right kind of life.

Private Religious Practices:

- 28. How often do you pray privately in places other than at church or synagogue?
- 29. Within your religious or spiritual tradition, how often do you meditate?
- 30. How often do you watch or listen to religious programs on TV, radio, or internet?
- 31. How often do you read the Bible or other religious literature?
- 32. How often are prayers or grace said before or after meals in your home?

Religious and Spiritual Coping:

- 33. I think about how my life is part of a larger spiritual force.
- 34. I work together with God as partners to get through hard times.
- 35. I look to God for strength, support, and guidance in crises.
- 36. I try to find the lesson from God in crises.
- 37. I confess my sins and I ask for God's forgiveness.
- 38. I feel that God is angry with me.
- 39. I wonder whether God has abandoned me.
- 40. I feel God is punishing me for my sins.
- 41. I am angry at God.
- 42. To what extent is your religion involved in understanding or dealing with stressful situations in any way?

Organizational Religiousness:

- 43. How often do you go to religious services?
- 44. Besides religious services, how often do you take part in other activities at a place of worship?

Overall Self-Ranking:

- 45. To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?
- 46. To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person?