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Faithful Allies: The Experiences of LGB-Affirming Christian Clergy

J. Jane H. Dewey
Seton Hall University

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Faithful Allies: The Experiences of LGB-affirming Christian Clergy

By

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2011
APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Doctoral Candidate, Jane H. Dewey, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ph.D. during this Spring Semester 2011.

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This work is dedicated to clergy-allies across religious traditions (including my father, Rev. Dennis Dewey and grandfather, Rev. Keith Dewey) who have taken risks to create safe spiritual space for our gay, lesbian and bisexual brothers and sisters.

I am indebted to my mentor Dr. Lewis Schlosser whose support was unshakeable and guidance invaluable from beginning to end. I am so thankful for the love and support of my incredible parents, Susan and Dennis, who taught me to live with open eyes and an open heart. I am much indebted to my partner (and soon to be husband), Alan, who coached and kept me laughing every step of the way. Finally, I am eternally grateful to my grandmothers (Flo Dewey and Shirley Hart), two of the wisest women I have known, and grandfathers (Keith Dewey and Jim Hart) for their loving presence in my life.
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Abstract

This study explores a subset of Christian clergy who are allies of the LGB community and invested in creating changes in their churches, denominations and communities toward the end of making them more affirming and inclusive. As leaders within a faith community that has historically set up barriers to the LGB community, these men and women are in a unique position to create change from within that may have far-reaching implications. The findings provide detailed information about the factors that fostered the development of their worldviews, the behavioral manifestation of their advocacy, the conditions that have sustained their efforts and the practices they have implemented in order to manage their potentially conflicting roles as clergy and allies.

Keywords: Clergy allies, LGB-affirming clergy, LGB advocacy
This study seeks to explore the following questions: How do LGB-affirming clergy view their denominational policies pertaining to LGB inclusion and participation? What activities are LGB-affirming clergy engaged in with the aim of fostering the well-being of LGB persons within their church or denomination? What activities are LGB-affirming clergy engaged in with the aim of fostering the well-being of the larger LGB community? What factors (i.e., personal, interpersonal, theological, experiential) influence a clergy member to initially be or to become LGB-affirming? What other social advocacy activities do LGB-affirming clergy engage in? What impact, if any, do clergy believe their stance could have on their congregation and the larger society?

The aim of this study is, then, is to explore the thoughts, feelings, influences, motives and actions of these LGB-affirming religious leaders (clergy who openly welcome LGB individuals into their congregations, disagree with denominational rulings that restrict gays and lesbians from marrying and being ordained, address the religious and spiritual needs unique to the LGB community, and engage in social advocacy activities that are geared toward reducing homonegativity in Christianity and society). In particular, this study sets out to examine the experiences of Christian clergy within denominations that—though the denomination may continue to be deeply divided on the issue—have formally adopted exclusionary policies pertaining to LGB ordination, leadership within the church, membership and/or marriage.

**Researching Sexual Minority Issues**

“Sexual minority” is an umbrella phrase that has come to be represented by the acronyms LGBTQ and LGBTI—which attempt to include all people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and/or questioning. Feminist and
Queer theoretical paradigms have long resisted the notion of packaging people into restrictive "one term fits most" categories. Queer Theory in particular has called for the deconstruction of labels such as gay and straight because such definitional terminology inevitably renders a number of people and their experiences invisible (Kirsch, 2000). The adoption of the term "queer" seeks to ameliorate the current practice of rigid categorization by creating an identity defined by its "indeterminacy" and "elasticity" (Jagose, 1998, p. 2).

Setting out to study the experience of LGB-affirming clergy, I am keenly aware of the extent to which empirical research relies on labeling and categorization. I am also conscientious of the fact that studying clergy allies of the lesbian, gay and bisexual community limits the scope of this endeavor to one subset of sexual minorities—while inevitably excluding others. This study is limited in this way because oppressive religious rhetoric has focused almost exclusively on homosexual behavior, rather than on sexuality and gender as identities. In other words, the sexual behavior of lesbian, gay and bisexual people is what is referred to as "sinful" by many denominations and issues of identity—including gender identity—are frequently not attended to. The lack of clear denominational language pertaining to the inclusion/exclusion of gender divergent persons provides a major contrast to the clear, specific messages that pertain to homosexuality. An exploration of the affirming attitudes of clergy towards the transgender and intersex community is, therefore, beyond the scope of this study.

Religion, Culture and Homosexuality

In 2005, there were 1,214 reported hate crimes against the LGBT population—
representing nearly 14% of all hate crimes in the United States (FBI, 2006). Multiple national polls from the 1970’s to the 1990’s confirm that a large, stable majority (60-80%) of U.S. citizens have been strongly opposed to gay-marriage (Yang, 1997) and committed to the notion that sexual relations between members of the same sex are “immoral” or “wrong” (endorsed by approximately 70% of those polled between 1973 and 1991; Yang, 1997). While five states have currently legalized same-sex marriage and a 2011 poll found that 51% of voters oppose the national Defense of Marriage Act (Greenberg Quinlan Rosner, 2011, p 1), figures from a Pew Research Poll conducted in 2008 suggest that approximately 55% of Americans oppose and 36% of Americans are in support of same-sex marriage (Masci, 2008). In 2009, these figures remained nearly the same (changing a single percentage point each to 54% and 35%). The margins widened considerably among church-goers—with opposition to gay-marriage at 73% and support at 21% (Masci, 2008), suggesting that the interplay between religion and culture has influenced the heteronormative belief systems that persist in society (Crompton, 2003; Sands, 2007).

While some religious traditions accept members of the LGB community into all aspects of religious life and practice, many do not. In psychology, the days of pathologizing homosexuality ended when the term was officially removed from the category of mental disorders by the American Psychiatric Association in 1973 (APA, 1973). Yet, many religious groups remain resolute in their position that homosexuality is a sin and/or a chosen way of life (e.g., see excerpts from denominational position statements issued by the Roman Catholic Church, Southern Baptist Convention, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, National Baptist Convention, Church of Christ,
Assemblies of God and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (found in Table 1). Even among many religious circles that view homosexuality as a natural and acceptable variation of human sexuality, there remains intense debate over issues such as LGB marriage, ordination and adoptive rights (Thumma & Gray, 2005).

In contrast to the statistics mentioned previously, there is also evidence that society is moving in a more tolerant direction (Croteau, Bieschke, Fassinger & Manning, 2008; Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007; Herdt, 2001; Olson & Cadge 2002; Yang, 1997). Although most major religious groups have not—in terms of their official positions—moved as clearly in this direction (Pew, 2003), a growing number of clergy are questioning the comparative trend of continued intolerance within their religious communities (Jones & Cox, 2009). In many Christian denominations, for example, official policies restrict gay and lesbian members from being ordained into the clergy and restrict clergy members from conducting marriage ceremonies for gay and lesbian couples. Yet, hundreds of religious leaders from various denominations have taken a stand against official rulings such as these in both subtle and overt ways (Cadge, 2005).

As it is well-established that having an affirming faith experience can positively enrich the lives of religiously faithful gays and lesbians (Lease, Horne & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Rodrigues & Oullette, 2000; Thumma & Gray, 2005) and that negative interactions within one’s faith group can contribute to internalized homonegativity, social isolation, depression and anxiety (Allen & Oleson, 1999; Lease et al., 2005; Nicholson & Long 1990; Rodriguez & Oullette 2000; Ross and Rosser, 1996), it is worth exploring the means of influence that clergy can have in promoting the well-being of their LGB
parishioners and the larger LGB population. In the proposed study, I seek to explore the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of LGB-affirming Christian clergy toward that end.

**Background of Proposed Study**

In the summer of 2006 I attended a traditional Catholic wedding in upstate New York. The service was, for the most part, quite lovely—until the homily (i.e., the portion of the service during which the priest addresses the congregation with a spiritual message). The priest took the opportunity to send a clear message of condemnation to the gay community. He gestured to the soon to be husband and wife standing before him and said, “although some believe that marriage is so frivolous a thing as to be obtained by anyone, even homosexuals, I tell you that marriage is this: a sacred bond between a man and a woman.” His harsh, politically charged words were a sharp and grating contrast to the prayers, songs and loving blessings that had comprised the service up to that point.

Raised in a liberal, gay-friendly church, I was shocked by this message and embarrassed to be sitting idly in a pew as it was delivered. I wondered to myself, if this priest is saying these things at a wedding, what sort of messages does he communicate when he says weekly mass? And more importantly, what are his parishioners taking away from these homilies? In fact, there is substantial evidence to suggest that Americans frequently glean more than spiritual insights when they attend services of worship or related events (e.g., prayer services, congregational events, religious celebrations).

In a study assessing the frequency of political statements issued by clergy over the course of 95 worship services, Brewer, Kersh and Petersen (2003) noted 264 instances. There is also evidence to suggest that the political messages received by congregants influence their political attitudes, voting patterns and ideologies (Gilbert, 1993;
Huckfeldt, Plutzer & Sprague, 1993; Huckfeld & Sprague, 1995; Jones & Cox, 2009; Wald, Owen & Hill, 1988). Pertaining to voting patterns in particular, Gilbert (1993) stated “the influence [of congregational context] does not vary across religions: it is very consistent in direction and quite consistent in intensity” (p. 88). A more recent study conducted by Smith (2005) found that Roman Catholic parishes headed by liberal priests had significantly more liberal parishioners than did parishes headed by moderate and conservative priests. This finding is of particular interest because the study naturally controlled for the possibility that a liberal congregation elected or chose a liberal priest— in Catholicism priests are appointed to a parish by an established hierarchy, not hired directly by a congregation (as is the case in many mainline Protestant denominations).

The homonegative messages disseminated by many major religious groups worldwide have their roots in the Biblical tradition (ancient civilizations had a far more fluid conceptualization of sexuality, see Crompton, 2003 and Halperin, 1999) and became deeply entrenched in Christian doctrine in particular during the 13th century (Boswell, 1980; Compton, 2003; Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982). Within Christianity today, debate surrounding the marriage of gay and lesbian couples and the ordination of gay and lesbian clergy has generated divisions among congregations as well as within and between denominations (Olson & Cadge, 2002; Thumma & Gray 2005). The strained relationship between Christianity and homosexuality from the middle ages onward and the sheer number of adherents to the Christian faith in the United States today (79% of all adults; Pew, 2008) offer compelling reasons for focusing this study specifically on the Christian faith. Although all Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) have manifest histories of homonegative proclamations and activities (based on the ways in
which some religious leaders have interpreted religious texts), another rationale for focusing specifically on Christian clergy lies in the power afforded to Christianity—particularly in the United States (Schlosser, 2003).

Christians enjoy an often unspoken, palpable privilege in American society that comes from being both populous and overrepresented in positions of authority (Schlosser, 2003). Every U.S. president from George Washington to Barack Obama has been a Christian. Christian holidays have become, to an extent, synonymous with national, commercial holidays, and recesses from school and work typically reflect these holidays and not the holidays of minority religions (for further information on the construct of “Christian privilege,” please see Schlosser, 2003). In many historical circumstances in the United States, Christians have harnessed the power of their numbers and political positions to enact a great deal of social change. Clergy members and their congregations have played a profound role in, for example, women’s suffrage, the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement and toward obtaining reproductive rights for women (Davis, 2006; Findlay, 1993; Fowler, Hertzke & Olson, 1999; Friedland, 1998; Wuthnow, 1988).

This historical involvement provides a stark contrast to the oppressive nature of Christianity towards gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals and highlights, in my opinion, a fundamental paradox in Christian doctrine. Fixated on siphoning out what is “right,” “natural,” or “God’s will” regarding sexuality, the Christian faith runs the risk of overlooking the foundational principles of the faith (e.g., love, acceptance and respect for all people). Most scholars agree that there is currently no other topic on the American Christian docket more polarizing or politically charged than the inclusion of gays and lesbians in various aspects of religious life and practice (Cadge, 2005). Meanwhile,
Lesbian, gay and bisexual Christians may remain in a spiritual quagmire that has major implications for psychological health and well-being—a construct defined by Ryff (1989) that includes self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, perceived purpose and personal growth (Haldeman, 2004; Heerman et al., 2007; Lease et al., 2005).

A study by Wilcox (2002) suggested that there is an increasing trend among LGB individuals to consider leaving the religious tradition of their upbringing in pursuit of an “individualized spirituality” that is more congruent with positive self-perception and personal acceptance of one’s lesbian, gay or bisexual identity. Wilcox argued that, “such individualism is a necessity, without which [LGB Christians] would remain trapped in doctrinally-ordained closets” (p. 511). Demographic statistics collected by Singer and Deschamps (1994) have indicated that 62% of LGB individuals endorse the belief that religion is not an important part of their lives. This should be deeply concerning for churches whose memberships have been in constant decline—the status quo in mainline Protestant denominations in the United States today (Pew, 2008). Membership loss in U.S. churches may in part be a result of the general reluctance to make substantial reforms pertaining to inclusion.

Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

Two years after the American Psychiatric Association called for the removal of homosexuality from the mental disorders detailed in the DSM-III (American Psychiatric Association, 1973), the American Psychological Association issued a similar proclamation and conferred upon the field of psychology the task of de-stigmatizing homosexuality through research and practice (American Psychological Association,
1975; Conger, 1975). As described by Croteau et al. (2008), “psychology has undergone a radical transformation and the prevailing model has shifted from pathology to affirmation and from locating homosexuality as the problem to identifying anti-LGBT social and institutional prejudices and practices as the problem” (p. 194). Religion, by and large, has not experienced this shift.

Although there is ample evidence to suggest that religious practice and spirituality are positive predictors of sound mental health (Aranda, 2008; Ellison, 1995; George, Larson, Koening, & McCullough, 2000; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Ventis, 1995), this benefit appears to lose significance within the LGB community (Lease et al., 2005). Gay and lesbian Christians in particular exhibit increased anxiety, a greater sense of alienation and poorer self-esteem than gays and lesbians who are non-religious (Yip, 1997).

Rodriguez and Oulette (2000), among others, have emphasized that the integration of one’s religious and LGB identities is the most psychologically beneficial outcome for LGB persons who seek to remain a part of their religious group (Primiano, 1993; Rodriguez & Oulette, 2000; Shokeid, 1995; Wilcox, 2002).

It is in this domain that LGB-affirming clergy may have the greatest impact. As leaders who control the moral messages received by a community, clergy are in a unique position to challenge the status quo and effect profound change on multiple levels (e.g., individual, community, societal). In the popular media we are overly exposed to the anti-gay rhetoric of individuals like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Jones and Cox (2009) have provided evidence that there is a counter-voice within the clergy that receives far less press. In analyzing the results of a sweeping survey of mainline Protestant clergy on the issues of theology and gay and lesbian rights, Jones and Cox found that mainline
Protestant clergy members are significantly more supportive of LGB rights than the general population. Despite the official denominational policies, parishioners in mainline Protestant churches are generally receiving more tolerant and accepting messages from the pulpit than ever before.

Further evidence that these pastors and priests exist can be found in the LGB-affirming religious enclaves that have existed within most mainstream Christian denominations since the 1960’s (Thumma & Gray 2005). Some of these affirming subsidiaries are church-sanctioned while others are not officially recognized by the larger denomination. Although the visibility of these groups is often limited, Lease et al. (2005) suggested that their impact could be impressive due to the significant negative relationship that exists between the presence of an affirming faith group and the endorsement of internalized homonegativity. Since internalized homonegativity is a strong predictor of poor mental health outcomes (Allen & Oleson, 1999; Lease et al, 2005; Nicholson & Long 1990; Ross & Rosser, 1996), these findings indirectly suggest that the presence of an affirming faith group promotes psychological well-being for LBG persons. Based on what is known about the scope of influence clergy can have on individuals and congregations, it stands to reason that when clergy facilitate affirming faith experiences for LGB parishioners, the impact may be more pronounced (Heermann, Wiggins & Rutter, 2007).

This study has a number of potentially important, and intersecting, outcomes. In addition to being the first of its kind in terms of the population under study, it is my intention to make a contribution to the literature that may inspire change in congregational attitudes, behaviors and, eventually, denominational legislation pertaining
to the full inclusion of LGB members. For those ministers who are gay-tolerant or even quietly gay-friendly, I hope that the words and actions of LGB-affirming colleagues will be a source of inspiration and support. More importantly, this study will introduce members of the LGB community—who may be grappling with religious faith conflict—to the words of LGB-affirming clergy and, thus, to the notion that there are members of the clergy who believe that LGB and religious identities need not be mutually exclusive.

Application to the Field of Counseling Psychology

The field of counseling psychology in particular has a deep appreciation and respect for the notion that all individuals exist in a complex, contextual web. While scholars in the field of sociology have recently started to explore the ways in which clergy approach the socially, politically and spiritually loaded topic of LGB inclusion/exclusion in Christianity, a counseling psychology study is better suited to explore a particular human component of this process in greater depth. In other words, where sociologists have asked “who is doing what?” this study sets out to investigate, “how is the who doing what they are doing and why?” From what context do LGB-affirming clergy emerge, what do they understand is their mission and how do they go about it? Sociologists Cadge and Wildeman (2008) have provided an excellent platform from which to launch a more nuanced investigation with particular relevance to the field of counseling psychology.

Conclusions

As previously described, this is a study of the Christian clergy who disagree with the policies of their denominations regarding limitations on LGB inclusion and an exploration of the methods they employ to foster change from within. This study is
overdue in that the personal stories of LGB-affirming members of the clergy have never before been studied or systematically documented. The literature of psychology and the popular media are rife with examples of the harmful effects that antagonistic religious messages can have on LGB persons. Christian clergy in the United States are in a unique position to foster social change and promote their well-being—but this sort of advocacy can come at a price. What is it like to be in tension with denominational policies? Where does the impetus to work for change come from and what sustains it? How are personal beliefs and professional duties reconciled? These and many related questions will be explored in this study.

Research Questions

(1) How do LGB-affirming clergy view their denominational policies pertaining to LGB inclusion and participation?

(2) What activities are LGB-affirming clergy engaged in with the aim of fostering the well-being of LGB persons within their church or denomination?

(3) What activities are LGB-affirming clergy engaged in with the aim of fostering the well-being of the larger LGB community?

(4) What factors influence a clergy member to initially be or to become LGB-affirming?

(5) What other social advocacy activities do LGB-affirming clergy engage in?

(6) What impact, if any, do clergy believe their stance could have on their congregation? Their denomination? The larger context of Christianity? American Society?

Definitions

Bisexual Men and Women: Individuals whose emotional, erotic, and relational preferences are toward both same- and other-sex, either serially or simultaneously, and
for whom some aspect of their self-labeling acknowledges the same-sex attachments; designation as bisexual refers to the sex(es) of one’s (actual or imagined) intimate partner choices, not gender expression, which may take a variety of forms (Fassinger & Arseneau, 2007, p. 21)

Catholicism: One of the three major branches of Christianity; Catholics account for 24% of Christians in the United States (Pew, 2008, p. 19).

Clergy: Men and (in some religious denominations) women who are ordained to perform ministerial or priestly functions in churches and other religious institutions.

Christian privilege: The status that has been granted to Christians as a result of their number of adherents and historically sanctioned monopoly on positions of power and authority in the United States. This privilege enables Christians to deny or ignore the oppression experienced by religious minorities because Christians, as the powerful and valued majority, have not faced such oppression (Schlosser, 2003).

Denominations: A cluster of congregations (e.g., American Baptist Church, Southern Baptist Convention and National Baptist Convention) that belong to a single administrative structure characterized, ideally, by like-minded doctrines and practices (Pew, 2008). Denominations “symbolize a culture that comprises distinctive theological doctrines, worship rituals, and even an identity that shapes a way of being religious in our society” (Thimma & Gray, 2005, p. 1).

Denominational Family: A group of religious denominations with a common historical origin that influences how they practice and how they align on political and social issues (Pew, 2008).
Eastern Orthodox: One of the three major branches of Christianity; Eastern Orthodox accounts for 1% of Christians in the United States (Pew, 2008, p. 19).

Gay Men: Men whose primary emotional, erotic, and relational preferences are same-sex and for whom some aspect of their self-labeling acknowledges these same-sex attachments; designation as gay refers to the sex of one’s (actual or imagined) intimate partner choices, not gender expression, which may take a variety of forms (Fassinger & Arsenneau, 2007, p. 21)

Heterosexism: A conscious or unconscious belief that heterosexuality is “better” than homosexuality—leading to the denial and stigmatization of non-heterosexual relationships and behaviors (Fassigner, 1991).

Homophobia: The fear and/or hatred of lesbian, gay and bisexual people (Weinberg, 1972).

Homonegativity: Both the overt and subtle anti-gay messages and experiences that lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals are subjected to on a continual basis from family, friends and/or society (Bieschke et al., 2005).

Heteronormativity: The assumption that heterosexuality is the normal, natural and ideal relational drive for human beings and that anything that is not heterosexual must be deviant or pathological (Yep, 2003)

Internalized Homophobia: The personal acceptance of and endorsement of sexual stigma as part of the individual’s value system and self-concept (Herek, Gillis, & Cogan, 2009).

Lesbians: Women whose primary emotional, erotic, and relational preferences are same-sex and for whom some aspect of their self-labeling acknowledges these same-sex attachments; designation as lesbian refers to the sex of one’s (actual or imagined)
intimate partner choices, not gender expression, which may take a variety of forms (Fassinger & Arsenecau, 2007, p. 21)

LGB: The acronym that has come to stand for three distinct but related sexual minority groups: lesbians, gay men and bisexual men and women.

LGB-affirming clergy: Members of the clergy who welcome LGB individuals into their congregations, disagree with denominational rulings that restrict gays and lesbians from marrying and being ordained, address the religious and spiritual needs unique to the LGB community, and engage in social advocacy activities within or outside their place of worship that are geared toward reducing homonegativity in Christianity and society.

LGB-friendly clergy: Members of the clergy who welcome LGB individuals into their congregations and disagree with denominational rulings that restricts gays and lesbians from marrying and being ordained into the clergy.

Mainline Protestant Churches: Each denomination (e.g., Baptist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, etc.) can have congregations with membership in all or any of the three families of religious tradition (i.e., mainline Protestant, evangelical Protestant and historically black Protestant). The following denominations contain largely mainline “families”: United Methodist Church, American Baptist Church (USA), Presbyterian Church (USA), Lutheran Church, Anglican/Episcopal Church and Congregationalist Church (Pew, 2008). The term mainline refers to the denominations first brought to America in the earliest waves of immigration from Europe (17th and 18th centuries; Noll, 1992).

Protestantism: One of the three major branches of Christianity; a religious conglomerate comprised of more than a dozen self-governed denominations consisting of dozens to hundreds of diverse congregations (Pew, 2008). Protestant denominations and individual

**Sexual Orientation:** Labels such as heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual that describe an intricate interweave of feelings, attitudes, behavior patterns and sexual preferences regarding intimate partnership with another person (Fassinger, 1991).

**Well-being:** A construct defined by Ryff (1989) as being comprised of the following principles that contribute to psychological health: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, environmental mastery, perceived purpose and personal growth.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Intersection of Religion, Sexuality and Mental Health

Worthington (2004) suggested that, “religion and sexuality are inextricably intertwined for many people because virtually every religion regulates sexual behavior and dictates a specific set of values regarding human sexuality” (p. 741). At the crux of the sexuality deliberation across Biblical religious traditions is the question of what, in terms of human sexual relationships, is appropriate in the eyes of God (Olson & Cadge, 2002; Worthington, 2004). The notion of same-sex intimacy as “sinful” or intrinsically “evil” has been forwarded by religious traditions for centuries (Crompton, 2003; Siker, 2008). This strong and enduring message can have profoundly damaging effects on the mental health of religious gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals (Allen & Oleson, 1999; Lease et al., 2005; Nicholson & Long, 1990; Rodriguez & Oullette, 2000; Ross & Rosser, 1996).

As noted in Chapter I, it appears that religious practice can and often does have a positive impact on mental health and well-being (Aranda, 2008; Ellison, 1995; George, Larson, Koenig & McCullough, 2000; King, Cummings & Whetstone, 2005; Ventis, 1995), this is not necessarily the case within the LGB community (Heermann, Wiggins & Rutter, 2007; Lease, Horne & Noffsinger-Fritzler, 2005). Yip (1997) suggested that, on average, gay and lesbian Christians have increased anxiety, a greater sense of alienation and poorer self-esteem than gays and lesbians who are non-religious. For gays and lesbians, religious devotion can actually be a source of psychological harm leading to internalized heterosexism and homophobia (Heermann et al., 2007; Lease et al., 2005).
Wilcox (2003) proposed that the term sexuality has come to imply sexual orientation; which has come to imply homosexuality. In other words, the heterosexual majority has a non-sexualized identity—really a “non-identity” because they comprise the “norm”—which creates the falsehood that, “sexuality is somehow the special province of nonheterosexuals.” It is precisely this inference that “underlies the stereotypes of lesbian, gay and bisexual people as promiscuous and obsessed with sex” (Wilcox, 2003, p. 325). This reductionist viewpoint ignores the equally important non-sexual aspects of emotional intimacy (Fassigner & Arsenau, 2007) and effectively diminishes the same-sex attracted person to a sexual deviant and, therefore, a “sinner.”

Conservative and fundamentalist religious traditions in particular convey clear homophobic messages based on this notion of sinfulness (Fulton, Gorsuch & Maynard, 1999; Rowatt, Tsang, Kelly, LaMartina, McCuller & McKinley, 2006). For religious adherents who are LGB, these messages can be confusing, isolating and psychologically harmful (Beckstead & Israel, 2007). The psychological dissonance that results from having both a conservative religious identity and an LGB identity is often so profound that it leads some individuals to enter therapy with the goal of altering their sexual orientation. There is a strong correlation between conservative religiosity and motivation to engage in conversion or “reparative” therapies with mental health professionals or “ex-gay ministries” with members of the clergy (Tozer & Hayes, 2004; Worthington, 2004).

The assumptions underlying these practices are outlined by Worthington (2004) and include the following: (1) heterosexuality is morally superior to homosexuality and bisexuality, (2) the causes of same-sex attractions are known and understood, (3) same-sex attraction is a choice and (4) same-sex attraction can be altered (p. 745). Beckstead
and Israel (2007) suggest that conversion therapies reinforce negative LGB stereotypes, set the client up for failure from the start, and cause the client to blame him or herself when treatment goals are not met. These conditions increase the likelihood of “self-hatred, confusion, hopelessness, discrimination, intimacy difficulties and suicidal ideation.” (Beckstead & Israel, 2007, p. 229). Although not officially banned by the American Psychological and American Psychiatric Associations, these organizations have, respectively, (1) issued guidelines for working with LGB clients that contradict the assumptions of conversion therapy and (2) issued a strong warning against the practice (APA, 2000; American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

While some Christian denominations are overt in their homonegative stances (e.g., sermons that include messages about the sinfulness of acting on same-sex attractions), homonegativity is also conveyed in subtle ways (e.g., faith activities such as retreats established solely for heterosexual, married couples). Although the former has a more obvious and direct effect, any type of perceived homonegative interaction within one’s faith group can contribute to internalized homonegativity, social isolation, depression, anxiety and withdrawal from the faith community (Allen & Oleson, 1999; Heermann, Wiggins & Rutter, 2007; Lease et al., 2005; Nicholson & Long, 1990; Rodriguez & Oullette 2000; Ross and Rosser, 1996).

Managing LGB and Christian identities. The increased risk of depression and suicidal ideation among individuals who attempt to reconcile their LGB identity with their non-affirming religious identity is especially troubling (Schuck & Liddle, 2000). In the words of a 32-year-old gay, Mormon man named Stuart Matis, “straight members have absolutely no idea what it is like to grow up gay in this church… it is a life of
constant torment, self-hatred and internalized homophobia." Matis had struggled since the age of seven to reconcile his gay and religious identities; he had been through conversion attempts and suffered from major depression for several years. In 2000, Matis shot and killed himself inside his church (Miller, 2000).

Clearly, Matis' story is a worst-case scenario, but it speaks to the power of the internal discord that can result from living with two central identities in serious conflict with one another. In the weeks and months before his death, Matis' religious leaders and faith community in Santa Clara, California were aggressively campaigning for a gay-marriage ban in the state. Matis' family speculated that it was Matis' inability to reconcile his identities, coupled with the overt homonegative messages of the church's campaign that drove him to take his life in such a public way (Miller, 2000).

Identity management strategies. Rodriguez and Oulette (2000) suggested that there are four general strategies employed to manage religious and LGB identities: a) rejecting the religious identity, b) rejecting the homosexual identity, c) separating and compartmentalizing the conflicting identities and d) integrating identities. Rejecting the religious identity involves leaving the religious tradition and either: joining a different tradition that does not espouse negative views about homosexuality, seeking spiritual fulfillment outside of organized religion or departing from a religious/spiritual identity altogether. Rejecting the homosexual identity involves either abstaining from same-sex sexual activity or engaging in a process, like conversion therapy, with the goal of becoming heterosexually oriented. Separation and compartmentalization involves creating strict cognitive and emotional boundaries around religious and sexual identities and vigilantly guarding one from the other. Identity integration involves a process of
reconciling and merging beliefs about these two identities and creating a centralized understanding of the self as a composite of both in addition to other parts of identity (Rodriguez & Oulette, 2000).

Of these identity management strategies, the rejection of a person’s homosexual identity has the potential for the greatest psychological harm due to the ethically questionable assumptions underlying conversion and ex-gay ministry interventions (for a complete list of these assumptions see Worthington, 2004; Beckstead & Isreal, 2007; Rodriguez & Oulette, 2000). Why do some religiously devout LGB individuals engage in these processes? Haldemann (2004) explained that, “the depth to which religious identity can be embedded in the psyche cannot be underestimated” (p. 694) While forgoing both the emotional and physical intimacy of a partnership and the support of the LGB community may seem like an unthinkable sacrifice, “religious affiliation can serve as a central, organizing aspect of identity that the individual cannot relinquish, even at the price of sexual orientation” (Haldemann, 2004, p. 694).

It is also important to note that there are other aspects of identity and culture that may influence the identity management strategy employed. Racial and ethnic minorities, for example, may be especially adept at compartmentalizing various identities in social contexts where one or more of their identities is regularly negated (Beckstead & Isreal, 2007). The compartmentalizing of identities serves a protective purpose in the moment, but will likely have psychological consequences. The strategy of outright rejection of one’s sexual orientation might also appeal to a person who has other oppressed minority statuses insofar as the taking on of a heterosexual identity may afford
a degree of otherwise inaccessible societal privilege (Beckstead & Israel, 2007; Bing, 2004).

Revolving the religious identity is an increasingly common coping strategy (Wilcox, 2002). Oftentimes individuals who adopt this strategy choose to adopt an “individualized spirituality” that is more congruent with their sense of self. The constructs of spirituality and religion are often regarded synonymously, but in the literature pertaining to LGB mental health, they diverge in important ways. Where religiosity has been correlated with internalized homophobia and anxiety, spirituality correlates with improved psychological well-being. Whereas spirituality acts as a buffer in a world that demands “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1980), religiosity can act as heteronormative accomplice, compromising the sense of belonging and legitimacy of LGB believers (Heermann, Wiggins & Rutter, 2007; Lease et al., 2005; Love, 1997; Mahaffy, 1996).

Affirming faith experiences. The integration of religious and LGB identities is primarily fostered by the regular occurrence of affirming faith experiences. Having an affirming faith experience has been shown to positively enrich the lives of religiously faithful gay, lesbian and bisexual Christians (Lease, Horne & Noff-Frazier, 2005; Rodrigues & Oullette, 2000; Thumma & Gray, 2005). For reconciliation to occur between a person’s LGB and religious identities, an affirming faith experience is a critical component. If a member of the clergy delivers this affirming faith experience, its impact may be especially healing and helpful to the process of reconciliation (Heermann, Wiggins & Rutter, 2007).
Rodriguez and Oulette (2000) conducted a study on the LGB and religious identity integration processes involving gay and lesbian members of a "gay-positive" church (i.e., the Metropolitan Community Church of New York; MCC/NY). Metropolitan Community Churches specifically and deliberately affirm LGB Christians as part of their central mission. Beyond being "gay-friendly," these churches self-identify as "gay-positive" (i.e., they subscribe to "gay-theology" which reinterprets the bible in a way that celebrates homosexuality and bisexuality) and are often headed by a lesbian or gay pastor. Rodriguez and Outlette (2000) found that most participants in the study believed that their involvement with MCC/NY had been very important in their identity integration process.

But, membership in a gay-positive church is not the only way to experience the type of affirmation that fosters identity integration. In fact, some LGB Christians find these churches to be too theologically and ritualistically different from the religious traditions of their upbringing (Thumma & Gray, 2005). For LGB Christians who seek affirmation specifically from their denominations of origin, there are a couple of options. Lesbian, gay and bisexual mainline Protestants have the option of joining a "reconciling" congregation. These are churches that openly acknowledge their unease with their denomination's official position statements on LGB inclusion and are committed to being as affirming and welcoming as possible (within the boundaries established by the denomination). There are hundreds of reconciling congregations across mainline Protestant denominations (Cadge, 2002; Thumma & Gray, 2005).

For evangelical Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians, finding a reconciling congregation may not be possible, but affirming communities of faithful
adherents and religious leaders do exist in nearly every denomination (Thumma & Gray, 2005). These denominational enclaves conduct their worship services and activities outside the auspice of and are rarely officially recognized by the denomination from which they emerged. These affirming communities of faith are comprised of both LGB and straight clergy and congregants who disagree with the larger denominations' heteronormative and/or homophobic policies. These alternative communities may aid in identity integration in a way that remaining part of the larger religious denomination may not (please see Thumma & Gray, 2005 for a complete list of these organizations and the denominations from which they evolved).

**Intersection of Christianity, Homosexuality and Culture**

The previous section discussed the myriad ways in which one's religious identity can impact one's LGB identity and vice versa. The psychological implications of marginalization and discrimination as well as the healing effects of affirmation and acceptance were explored. The following section delves into the history of the relationship between Christianity and homosexuality and the current manifestations of this history in the Christian faith as it is practiced in the United States today.

**History of Christianity and homosexuality.** Crompton (2003) chronicled the history of homosexuality and civilization from ancient Greece through the age of enlightenment. He finds a strong historical basis for the notion that the advent of the Biblical tradition in general and Christianity in particular played a predominant role in the transition of a stance of tolerance and respect towards gays and lesbians (in ancient Greece and to a lesser extent in ancient Rome; Halperin, 1999) to one of condemnation and contempt. Crompton suggests that Constantine I, Rome's first Christian emperor, was
likely the first political figure to call for the death of priests suspected of being gay. This was in the 4th Century of the Common Era a few decades before early Christian writers "transformed the Sodom story [Genesis 19:1-28] from a tale of selfish greed and mistreatment of aliens to an indictment of all consensual homosexual acts." (p. 537)

As more Biblical verses began to be interpreted by theologians and politicians as condemning homosexuality by associating it with natural disasters and societal problems (e.g., Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:26, 27; I Corinthians, 6:9; I Timothy, 1:10), a public hysteria was effectively set into motion. The occurrence of famines, wars, earthquakes and invasions were equated with the wrath of God as a result of the sexual acts of gay men (Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982). This early anti-gay propaganda was most notable during Justinian's 6th Century CE reign in Rome and, later, during the 9th Century Council of Paris. The Council of Paris was particularly important in this regard because it established a link between heresy and homosexuality—making homosexual acts more easily punishable (Crompton, 2003).

Greenberg and Bystryn (1982) suggested that the hostility of Christianity toward homosexuality was a function of the general hostility toward sexual pleasure common to this era—a hostility born to a larger extent from the ascetic movement into which Christianity emerged. Entering into this cultural milieu, early Christian writers became conduits of the antagonism toward homosexuality of the time. Denunciation of homosexuality by Christian priests became very common in the 11th and 12th Century when ecclesiastical codes were established that called for the death by burning of unrepentant, gay priests. In the 13th Century, Saint Thomas Aquinas published his famous Summa Theologica, a theological text that "appealed to the Greco-Roman notion of
natural law and called all non-procreative sex treasonous rebellion against God" (p. 538). The writing of Aquinas has formed the core of the religious argument against homosexuality (particularly in Catholicism) to this day (Gaudet, 2007; Sands, 2007).

Influenced by the ecclesiastical reaction to homosexuality and the power of the Medieval Christian Church, secular European society began to codify laws banning acts of sodomy in the 13th century. The laws cited Biblical passages predominantly from the book of Leviticus and "played on superstitious fears" that had been passed down through the centuries. Crompton (2003) noted that some of these laws were "ingenious in their cruelty, as in the case of the Fuero Real of Alfonso X of Castile (1255), who ordered that convicted men should be castrated and then, three days later, hung by their legs until they died" (p. 538). The 13th century witnessed a resurgence of the Justinian inspired codes in powerful European countries and city states like Spain, England, France and Italy. These new variations called for "sodomites" to be castrated and then stoned or burned to death (Greenberg & Bystryn, 1982).

According to Greenberg and Bystryn (1982), "by the end of the 13th century, the major elements in the Christian response toward homosexuality had been created," and the theological argument that "reconstructed sodomy as a sin against nature far worse than other sexual sins" was made firm (p. 542). At this point in history the term Christian referred almost exclusively to followers of Catholicism. Protestantism would not enter the scene until the reformation in the 16th century fundamentally divided the faith. Unfortunately, a more tolerant stance toward homosexuality was not one of the many reforms that led to this historic schism.
As described by Crompton (2003), the Protestant Reformation led to greater religious and moral freedom in Europe, but not in the domains of sex and sexuality. One of the most influential pioneers of Protestantism, John Calvin, called for the continued executions of gays and lesbians—an operation that spread throughout Switzerland, Scotland, the Netherlands and England (Crompton, 2003). Gay men were far more likely than lesbians to be persecuted and prosecuted (i.e., there are hundreds of documented cases of gay men being exiled or put to death in the 17th and 18th centuries in England and the Netherlands), but, there is at least one documented case of a lesbian woman who was sentenced in 1532 to death by drowning in Geneva based on a law stating that “anyone committing impurity with a beast, or a man with a man, or a woman with a woman” should receive the death penalty (Crompton, 2003, p. 325).

Puritanism—a strict form of Protestantism—gained momentum in England in the middle of the 17th century. Under Catholic and Protestant monarchies, religion had an undeniably powerful influence on politics and legislation; under the influence of Puritanism, the role of religion in politics was even more direct—especially in the American colonies (Crompton, 2003; Noll, 1992). In Massachusetts Bay, Rhode Island and Connecticut, direct verses from the bible were written into colony codes pertaining to homosexuality—each calling for the death penalty (Crompton, 2003). The Pennsylvanian Quakers decided upon a more lenient sentence of six months imprisonment, but this was overturned by the English government and replaced with the death penalty. Although capital punishment for sodomy was infrequently (if ever) carried out in the colonies, these laws would remain on the books in some states well into the 20th century (Crompton, 2003).
Christianity and homosexuality in America today. According to Wilcox (2003), when the visibility of lesbians and gay men increased as a result of the gay liberation movement in the 1970's, religious communities felt compelled to detail what their churches would and would not tolerate from their parishioners and clergy in terms of sexuality. Wilcox suggests that the questions at the core of these denominational differences are: (1) what is the nature of and God’s opinion of homosexuality, (2) should homosexual persons be ordained into the clergy, and (3) should the denomination marry same-sex couples? A critical caveat to this discussion is, of course, that the official statements of any given denomination on issues related to LGBT rights are not necessarily representative of every (or even most) of the clergy and lay members who belong to that denomination. In other words, it is important to keep in mind that intra-denominational beliefs and opinions may vary considerably.

Denominational assumptions regarding homosexuality. One of the fundamental differences dividing the Christian faith into liberal, moderate and conservative camps is each denomination’s professed understanding as it pertains to the origins of and God’s plan for sexuality. Statements issued by most evangelical denominations suggest a general consensus that homosexuality is a choice—a choice that is unacceptable to God (Sands, 2007). The Church of Christ, for example, has the following statement on their official website: "Homosexuality is a lifestyle. It is a choice made by those who desire the unnatural" (Church of Christ, n.d.). The official website of the Southern Baptist Convention offers a similar opinion, “a homosexual person does not exist…men and women who consider themselves homosexual are really intrinsically heterosexual but they have a sexual identity problem and, as a result, might struggle with same-sex
attractions, or engage in homosexual behaviors” (The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Church, 2005).

Although it condemns homosexual sex-acts with the same vigor as evangelical Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholic tradition does not view homosexuality as a choice. Rather, the Vatican has issued statements suggesting a belief that homosexuality is a human condition in need of treatment:

Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not. (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986, paragraph 3)

This is the classic “hate the sin, love the sinner” paradigm because it does not condemn LGB persons for having same-sex attraction, but for acting on that attraction. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS; also called Mormonism) is similar to Catholicism in this regard. The LDS Church makes a clear distinction between feelings of attraction and acting on those attractions and only condemns the latter (Duffy, 2007).

The evangelical Protestant, LDS and Roman Catholic traditions have a very similar understanding of God’s opinion pertaining to same-sex relations. In sum, homosexuality must be a sin because it departs from the Biblical tradition of sexual intercourse taking place exclusively between a husband and a wife. The Roman Catholic tradition in particular bases its condemnation of sexual activity between same-sex
partners on Thomas Aquinas' interpretation of natural law—a theory suggesting that non-procreative sex is a violation against nature and therefore against God as the architect of the natural order (Gaudet, 2007; Sands, 2007).

The statements issued by mainline Protestant churches—sometimes referred to as "old-line" because they were the foundational American denominations from which the evangelical branches departed—vary widely. On the whole, this denominational family is less likely to view homosexuality as a choice and is more likely to vocalize support for LGB civil rights. Yet, like the evangelical and conservative denominational family, the mainline denominations, by and large, stop short of condoning homosexual relationships. The American Baptist Church, for example, offers this succinct statement, "The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching" (American Baptist Churches, USA, 1992). Most mainline denominations have statements that suggest a commitment to on-going discussion. Take, for example, the following statement issued by the Presbyterian Church, USA:

Homosexuality presents a particular problem for the church. It seems to be contrary to the teaching of scripture. It seems to repudiate the heterosexual process which gave us life...[.] Further, many believe that such an orientation can be changed simply by personal decision or by the creation of healthy environments for the young. The church should be aware of the partial nature of our knowledge of homosexuality. For instance, whether or not sexual orientation is something unchosen and unchangeable for most people is a matter of crucial significance which continues to be unsettled among scientists or ethicists. The church should be sensitive to the difficulty of rejecting a person's
sexual orientation without rejecting the person. It should be open to more light on what goes into shaping one's sexual preferences and reexamine its life and teaching in relation to people who are seeking affirmation and needing acceptance and who are apparently not free to change their orientations.” (Presbyterian Church, USA, 1993, p. 213).

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the United Methodist Church (UMC) have issued similar statements. These three denominations, PC-USA, ELCA and UMC, have asked their respective congregations to engage in dialogue about homosexuality and have provided varying degrees of support for them to do so (i.e., funding and structured resource materials)—of the three, ELCA has provided the most and PC-USA the least (Cadge, Olson & Wildeman, 2006).

The United Church of Christ (UCC) and the Episcopal Church have issued the most inclusive and affirming statements of any of mainline denominations. The United Church of Christ in particular has made LGB advocacy a central component of its current ministry. In 1985, during a time when many denominations were entering the debate, UCC decided to enter a “Covenant of Openness and Affirmation” by issuing the following statement:

[T]he fifteenth General Synod of the United Church of Christ encourages a policy on nondiscrimination in employment, volunteer service and membership policies with regard to sexual orientation; encourages Associations, Conferences and all related organizations to adopt a similar policy; and encourages the congregations of the United Church of Christ to adopt a nondiscrimination policy and a
Covenant of Openness and Affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation within the community of faith. (United Church of Christ, 1985)

The United Church of Christ is also the only denomination to formally address inclusion of the transgendered community: “be it resolved that all congregations of the United Church of Christ are encouraged to welcome transgender people into membership, ministry, and full participation” (UCC, 2003). The Episcopal Church was one of the first, along with UCC, to openly affirm LGB members, to perform marital unions and to ordain LGB priests and bishops. The current position of the Episcopal Church on homosexuality can be best understood within the context of its very recent reassertion of its views on gay ordination as described in the following section. Available policy statements for the ten largest Christian denominations in the United States regarding homosexuality can be found in Table 1.
<table>
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<th>Denomination</th>
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<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>&quot;Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder. Therefore special concern and pastoral attention should be directed toward those who have this condition, lest they be led to believe that the living out of this orientation in homosexual activity is a morally acceptable option. It is not.&quot; (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1986, paragraph 3)</td>
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<td>Southern Baptist Convention (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;Homosexuality is not a &quot;valid alternative lifestyle.&quot; The Bible condemns it as sin. It is not, however, unforgivable sin. The same redemption available to all sinners is available to homosexuals. They, too, may become new creations in Christ...[A] homosexual person does not exist. Homosexuality should be considered as an adjective—a behavior—and not as a noun or label defining a person...[M]en and women who consider themselves homosexual are really intrinsically heterosexual but they have a sexual identity problem and, as a result, might struggle with same-sex attractions, or engage in homosexual behaviors.&quot; (Ethics &amp; Religious Liberties Commission of the SBC, 2005)</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Methodist Church (Mainline Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;The United Methodist Church does not condone the practice of homosexuality and considers this practice incompatible with Christian teaching. We affirm that God’s grace is available to all. We will seek to live together in Christian community, welcoming, forgiving, and loving one another, as Christ has loved and accepted us. We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian and gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons.&quot; (United Methodist Church, 2000a, 161 F)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Mainline Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;The ELCA recognizes that it has a pastoral responsibility to all children of God. This includes a pastoral responsibility to those who are same-gender in their orientation and to those who are seeking counsel about their sexual self-understanding. All are encouraged to avail themselves of the means of grace and pastoral care...While Lutherans hold various convictions regarding lifelong, monogamous, same-gender relationships, this church is united on many critical issues. It opposes all forms of verbal or physical harassment and assault based on sexual orientation. It supports legislation and policies to protect civil rights and to prohibit discrimination in housing, employment, and public services. It has called upon congregations and members to welcome, care for, and support same-gender couples and their families, and to advocate for their legal protection.&quot; (Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, 2009, p. 16-17)</td>
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People inquire about our position on those who consider themselves so-called gays and lesbians. My response is that we love them as sons and daughters of God. They may have certain inclinations which are powerful and which may be difficult to control. Most people have inclinations of one kind or another at various times. If they do not act upon these inclinations, then they can go forward as do all other members of the Church. If they violate the law of chastity and the moral standards of the Church, then they are subject to the discipline of the Church, just as others are. We want to help these people, to strengthen them, to assist them with their problems and to help them with their difficulties. But we cannot stand idle if they indulge in immoral activity, if they try to uphold and defend and live in a so-called same-sex marriage situation. To permit such would be to make light of the very serious and sacred foundation of God-sanctioned marriage and its very purpose, the rearing of families."

"The National Baptist Convention USA Inc., does not have an official position on any issues with regards to Homosexuality. Historically, we as a Convention have not sought to endorse particular positions on behalf of local Baptist Churches. This is in keeping with the nature of a Baptist policy which does not permit us to make authoritative, pontifical, doctrinal statements or creeds on behalf of our constituency. We believe in the local freedom of each member of our Convention to decide for itself on such issues as Homosexuality. However, if you were to take a poll of traditional, missionary Black Baptist Churches, it is very safe to say that you will find a majority of them: against Homosexuality/Lesbianism as a legitimate expression of God's will and against ordaining practicing Homosexuals/Lesbians for any type of ministry in the Body of Christ." (National Baptist Convention, n.d.)

"Homosexuality is a lifestyle. It is a choice made by those who desire the unnatural. Can a homosexual person repent and be forgiven by God? The answer is yes. God remains consistent in His condemnation of homosexuality as He does for all other sins. Homosexuality is indeed an unacceptable lifestyle before our Lord God Almighty. By the written Word of the Most High God we cannot condone or embrace homosexuality within the church." (Church of Christ, n.d.)

"Homosexual behavior is sin because it is disobedient to scriptural teachings (General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2001, I.A). Homosexual behavior is sin because it is contrary to God's created order for the family and human relationships (General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2001a, I.B.)."

"We believe, in the light of Biblical revelation, that the growing cultural acceptance of homosexual identity and behavior, male and female, is symptomatic of a broader spiritual disorder that threatens the family, the government, and the church (General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2001b, I)."

"Whatever the causes of such a condition may be...homosexual orientation is profoundly 'unnatural' without implying that such a person's sexual orientation is a matter of conscious, deliberate choice. However, this fact cannot be used by the homosexual as an excuse to justify homosexual behavior. As a sinful human being, the homosexual is accountable to God for homosexual thoughts, words and deeds." (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 1985, p. 35)
**American Baptist Churches, USA**
(Mainline Protestant Tradition)

"Homosexuality presents a particular problem for the church. It seems to be contrary to the teaching of scripture. It seems to repudiate the heterosexual process which gave us life. Further, many believe that such an orientation can be changed simply by personal decision or by the creation of healthy environments for the young. The church though should be aware of the partial nature of our knowledge of homosexuality. For instance, whether or not sexual orientation is something unchosen and unchangeable for most people is a matter of crucial significance which continues to be unsettled among scientists or ethicists. The church should be sensitive to the difficulty of rejecting a person's sexual orientation without rejecting the person. It should be open to more light on what goes into shaping one's sexual preferences and reexamine its life and teaching in relation to people who are seeking affirmation and needing acceptance and who are apparently not free to change their orientations." (PC-USA, 1993, p. 213).

"Persons who manifest homosexual behavior must be treated with the profound respect and pastoral tenderness due all people of God. There can be no place within the Christian faith for the response to homosexual persons of mingled contempt, hatred, and fear that is called homophobia. Homosexual persons are encompassed by the searching love of Christ. The church must turn from its fear and hatred to move toward the homosexual community in love and to welcome homosexual inquirers to its congregations. It should free them to be candid about their identity and convictions, and it should also share honestly and humbly with them in seeking the vision of God's intention for the sexual dimensions of their lives..." (PC-USA, 1978, p. 236-4)

**Presbyterian Church, USA**
(Mainline Protestant Tradition)

"We reaffirm Resolution A069 of the 65th General Convention (1976) that homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the Church."

(General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2003, A069-F-2)

**Anglican/Episcopal Church**
(Mainline Protestant Tradition)

"The General Board voted 'To amend the document entitled We Are American Baptists by adding the following statement to the section A Biblical People: Who submits to the teaching of Scripture that God's design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman, and acknowledge that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical Teaching.'" (American Baptist Churches, USA, 2005)

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**Denominational positions regarding LGB ordination and marriage.** Given the backdrop of how the denominational families approach homosexuality, the stances taken on the contentious issues of gay ordination and gay marriage are somewhat predictable. Wellman (1999) suggested that denominations cluster into four typologies: exclusivist, semi-exclusivist, semi-inclusivist and inclusivist. Wellman also offers a theory as to why denominations cleave off into groups: namely that the creation of “outgroups” against
which “ingroups” can rally creates a necessary tension that promotes group cohesion, solidarity and adherence. In sociology, this has come to be known as subcultural identity theory (Coser, 1956); in psychology, it bears a resemblance to Gordon Allport’s (1954) seminal articulation of the persistence of ingroups and outgroups.

According to Wellman (1999), exclusivist denominations are those that oppose gay rights, same-sex unions and the ordination of sexually active gays and lesbians (i.e., Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, National Association of Evangelicals, Southern Baptist Convention and Roman Catholic Church). Exclusivist denominations represent one extreme and unwavering side of the argument (associated with evangelical, conservative denominations and right-wing ideology). The opposite side is equally steadfast in their inclusivist position (associated with liberal mainline denominations and leftist ideology). Inclusivist denominations are those that advocate aggressively for the rights of gays and lesbians, include them fully in the life of the church (including ordination) and perform LGB commitment ceremonies (i.e., Quakers, United Church of Christ, Metropolitan Community Churches and Moravian Churches).

What lies between the positions at either pole is a turbulently ambivalent middle ground that Wellman (1999) further distills into the categories semi-inclusivist and semi-exclusivist. Semi-exclusivist denominations are less condemnatory in their rhetoric on homosexuality (i.e., tending toward the belief that to be gay is not sinful, but to have gay sex may be), generally support gay civil rights, but continue to have binding policies opposed to gay marriage and ordination. Semi-inclusivist denominations (of which the Episcopal Church is the sole Christian representative according to Wellman, 1999), do
not necessarily condone gay marriage or gay ordination, but have left a door open to the possibility of these activities.

Wellman’s (1999) middle ground typologies may be too nebulous to structure into distinct entities when looking solely at the Christian faith (Wellman also includes Jewish denominations)—especially considering very recent events in the Episcopal Church. When controversy over the consecration of a gay bishop nearly divided the denomination in 2003, the Episcopal Church declared a moratorium on further LGB ordinations while it deliberated. In recent weeks, the moratorium has been lifted and the Episcopal Church has moved decisively in the direction of LGB ordination. If the Episcopal Church is able to follow through and codify its recent actions, it seems that it might be a better fit for the inclusivistic category on both the issues of LGB marriage (Episcopal pastors have long been performing unity ceremonies; Byham, 2007) and LGB ordination. It is also quite possible that the rancor that threatened to divide the Church in 2003 will continue to prevent it from enforcing LGB inclusive policies.

Another argument against Wellman’s middle-ground typologies is that such defined containers cannot account for important differences. The Episcopal Church (categorized as semi-inclusivist) and mainline churches like PC-USA, UMC and ELCA (categorized as semi-exclusivist), for example, do not vary substantially in their rhetoric, rather, they vary in how much power their governing bodies have over their congregations. The level of autonomy granted to local governing bodies (e.g., synods, presbyteries) creates a scenario where both change and schism are more likely to occur in the Episcopal Church. PC-USA, UMC and ELCA have more centralized and powerful
governing bodies that have the power to penalize synods, presbyteries and churches should they step out of the lines set forth by their democratically created legislation.

Christian denominations in the United States truly run the sociopolitical gamut on a variety of issues pertaining to LGB inclusion/exclusion. Rather than four quadrants, then, I would argue in favor of plotting denominations along an exclusivist-inclusivist continuum. Available policy statements for the ten largest Christian denominations in the United States pertaining to LGB marriage and LGB ordination can be found in Table 2 and Table 3, respectively.

Table 2

Position Statements of Largest Denominations on the issue of LGB Marriage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>“The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions. The common good requires that laws recognize, promote and protect marriage as the basis of the family, the primary unit of society. Legal recognition of homosexual unions or placing them on the same level as marriage would mean not only the approval of deviant behavior, with the consequence of making it a model in present-day society, but would also obscure basic values which belong to the common inheritance of humanity. The Church cannot fail to defend these values, for the good of men and women and for the good of society itself.” (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 2003, section 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Baptist Convention (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>“We affirm God's plan for marriage and sexual intimacy – one man, and one woman, for life...[T]he evangelical Christian community leads efforts to preserve the traditional definition of marriage and to oppose acceptance of homosexuality for one primary reason—Biblical revelation. For those who believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God there is no confusion about the proper definition of marriage or the immorality of homosexuality.” (Ethics &amp; Religious Liberties Commission of the SBC, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Methodist Church (Mainline Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>“Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches” (United Methodist Church, 2008b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Position on Same-Sex Relationships</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (Mainline Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;We in the ELCA recognize that many of our sisters and brothers in same-gender relationships sincerely desire the support of other Christians for living faithfully in all aspects of their lives, including their sexual fidelity. In response, we have drawn deeply on our Lutheran theological heritage and Scripture. This has led, however, to differing and conscience-bound understandings about the place of such relationships within the Christian community. We have come to various conclusions concerning how to regard lifelong, monogamous same-gender relationships, including whether and how to publicly recognize their lifelong commitments.&quot; (Task Force for ELCA Studies on Sexuality, 2009, p. 16-17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) (Mormon Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recognizes that same-sex marriage can be an emotional and divisive issue. However, the Church teaches that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is the basic unit of society (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2006).&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Baptist Convention (Historically Black Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>No official position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Christ (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;By the written Word of the Most High God we cannot condone or embrace homosexuality within the church.&quot; (Church of Christ, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assemblies of God (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;No minister shall perform any type of marriage, cohabitation, or covenant ceremony for persons who are of the same sex. Such a ceremony would endorse homosexuality which is a sin and strictly forbidden in God's Word (Leviticus 18:22, 20:13; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9; 1 Timothy 1:9-11). Any minister of our Fellowship who performs a ceremony for these types of disapproved relations, unless innocently deceived into doing so, shall be dismissed from the Fellowship.&quot; (General Assembly of the Assemblies of God, 2007, §5.d.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;As a Christian body in this country, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod believes it has the duty and responsibility to speak publicly in support of traditional marriage. In the present context, we and other Christians cannot be silent. Accordingly, we as a church body urge our leaders, congregations, and members—particularly our 212,000 members in California, Florida, and Arizona—to give a public witness against the social acceptance and legal recognition of homosexual 'marriage.'&quot; (Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, 2008)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Baptist Churches, USA (Mainline Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>&quot;We affirm that God through Jesus Christ calls us to be a Biblical people who submit to the teaching of Scripture that God's design for sexual intimacy places it within the context of marriage between one man and one woman, and acknowledge that the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Biblical teaching.&quot; (Office of the General Secretary of the American Baptist Church, USA, 2007, Addendum 65)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Presbyterian Church, USA (Mainline Protestant Tradition)

"Inasmuch as the session is responsible and accountable for determination of the appropriate use of the church buildings and facilities (G-10.102e), it should not allow the use of the church facilities for a same sex union ceremony that the session determines to be the same as a marriage ceremony. Likewise, since a Christian marriage performed in accordance with the Directory for Worship can only involve a covenant between a woman and a man, it would not be proper for a minister of the Word and Sacrament to perform a same sex union ceremony that the minister determines to be the same as a marriage ceremony (Presbyterian Church USA, 1991, p. 395).

### Anglican/Episcopal Church (Mainline Protestant Tradition)

"We recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions." (General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2003, 615.F.4)

"The 76th General Convention reaffirmed the inclusive nature of the Episcopal Church’s ordination process and agreed to spend the next three years developing resources that could be used for blessing same-gender relationships...Resolution C054 calls for the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in conjunction with the House of Bishops, to invite church-wide participation in collecting and developing theological resources and liturgies for blessing same-gender relationships. The commission is to report on its efforts to General Convention 2012." (Schjonberg, 2009, p. 1)

### Roman Catholic

"Deep-seated homosexual tendencies, which are found in a number of men and women, are also objectively disordered and, for those same people, often constitute a trial. Such persons must be accepted with respect and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. They are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter. In the light of such teaching, this Dicastery, in accord with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, believes it necessary to state clearly that the Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called "gay culture". (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2005, section 2)

### Southern Baptist Convention (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)

"Within the Southern Baptist Convention, the licensing and ordination of ministers is a local church matter. There is no denominational ordination service. The Southern Baptist convention neither frocks nor defrocks ministers." (Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.)

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**Table 3**

**Position Statements of Largest Denominations on the Issue of Ordination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian Church, USA</td>
<td>&quot;Inasmuch as the session is responsible and accountable for determination of the appropriate use of the church buildings and facilities (G-10.102e), it should not allow the use of the church facilities for a same sex union ceremony that the session determines to be the same as a marriage ceremony. Likewise, since a Christian marriage performed in accordance with the Directory for Worship can only involve a covenant between a woman and a man, it would not be proper for a minister of the Word and Sacrament to perform a same sex union ceremony that the minister determines to be the same as a marriage ceremony (Presbyterian Church USA, 1991, p. 395).&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican/Episcopal Church</td>
<td>&quot;We recognize that local faith communities are operating within the bounds of our common life as they explore and experience liturgies celebrating and blessing same-sex unions.&quot; (General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2003, 615.F.4) &quot;The 76th General Convention reaffirmed the inclusive nature of the Episcopal Church’s ordination process and agreed to spend the next three years developing resources that could be used for blessing same-gender relationships...Resolution C054 calls for the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, in conjunction with the House of Bishops, to invite church-wide participation in collecting and developing theological resources and liturgies for blessing same-gender relationships. The commission is to report on its efforts to General Convention 2012.&quot; (Schjonberg, 2009, p. 1)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>&quot;Deep-seated homosexual tendencies, which are found in a number of men and women, are also objectively disordered and, for those same people, often constitute a trial. Such persons must be accepted with respect and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. They are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter. In the light of such teaching, this Dicastery, in accord with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, believes it necessary to state clearly that the Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called &quot;gay culture&quot;. (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2005, section 2)&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Baptist Convention</td>
<td>&quot;Within the Southern Baptist Convention, the licensing and ordination of ministers is a local church matter. There is no denominational ordination service. The Southern Baptist convention neither frocks nor defrocks ministers.&quot; (Southern Baptist Convention, n.d.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>denominations</th>
<th>official position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United Methodist Church</td>
<td>The practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. Therefore self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be certified as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in The United Methodist Church. (United Methodist Church, 2008b, 304.3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelical Lutheran Church in America</td>
<td>Married ordained ministers are expected to live in fidelity to their spouses, giving expression to sexual intimacy within a marriage relationship that is mutual, chaste, and faithful. Ordained ministers who are homosexual in their self-understanding are expected to abstain from homosexual sexual relationships. (The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1990, section III)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)</td>
<td>No official position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Baptist Convention (Historically Black Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>No official position.</td>
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<td>Church of Christ (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>By the written Word of the Most High God we cannot condone or embrace homosexuality within the church. (Church of Christ, n.d.)</td>
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<td>Assemblies of God (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>No official position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (Evangelical Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>No official position.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Baptist Churches, USA (Mainline Protestant Tradition)</td>
<td>In Charleston, W.V., Biennial Meeting delegates again wrestled with the subject, affirming (1,124 yes, 539 no, 46 abstentions) a Statement of Concern on Homosexuality and the Church brought through the signature process by the Clarksburg (W.V.) Baptist Church. The statement rejected 'the homosexual lifestyle, homosexual marriage, ordination of homosexual clergy or establishment of gay churches or gay caucuses' while affirming 'that the church should love and minister to the homosexual.' (American Baptist Churches, USA, 1991)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Current constitutional law in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is that self-affirming, practicing homosexual persons may not be ordained as ministers of the Word and Sacrament, elders, or deacons. (Minutes of the 205th General Assembly 1993, p. 322)

Those who are called to office in the church are to lead a life in obedience to Scripture and in conformity to the historic confessional standards of the church. Among these standards is the requirement to live either in fidelity within the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman (W-4.9001), or chastity in singleness. Persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders, or ministers of the Word and Sacrament. (Book of Order, 1997, G-6.0106b)

Christian privilege. Christian privilege (Schlosser, 2003), in the same vein as White privilege (McIntosh, 1998), male privilege (Bern & Bem, 1970), and heterosexual privilege, is what has come to be known as a “non-conscious ideology” (a term coined by Bern & Bem, 1970, p. 89). In a society that favors, for example, white skin, Caucasians need not think about themselves as having a “race” because the general societal message is that White is the “favored norm” and no conscious recognition of “difference” is triggered (i.e., Bern and Bem, [1970] gave the illustrative example of a fish in water not realizing that it is wet until and unless it is removed from its known environment).

Schlosser (2003), the first to apply the notion of a non-conscious ideology to Christianity, suggested that Christians tend not to pay enough attention to the oppression experienced
by religious minorities in the United States because Christians, as the powerful and valued majority, have not faced such oppression.

Schlosser (2003) listed several examples of privileges that Christians enjoy:

- Christians can be sure to hear music on the radio and watch specials on television that celebrate the holidays of the Christian religion; Christians can be sure that their holy day is taken into account when states pass laws (e.g., the sale of liquor) and when retail stores decide their hours; Christians can assume that they will not have to work or go to school on their significant religious holidays; Christians do not need to educate their children to be aware of religious persecution for their own daily physical and emotional protection; Christians do not need to worry about the ramifications of disclosing their religious identity to others; Christians can write about Christian Privilege without being seen as self-interested or self-serving (for a more detailed list of privileges, please see Schlosser, 2003, p. 48-49).

The creation of the terminology “Christian Privilege” is described by Schlosser (2003) as “breaking a sacred taboo because both subtle and obvious pressures exist to ensure that these privileges continue to be in the sole domain of Christians.” (p. 47) He suggests that the pressures that maintain Christian Privilege are akin to the conscious and unconscious mechanisms through which male privilege, white privilege and heterosexual privilege are maintained. The primary vehicle of this maintenance is silence. Schlosser, Ali, Ackerman and Dowrey (2009) note that religious minorities are largely ignored in the literature pertaining to multicultural clinical and research competencies in the field of psychology. They argue that ignoring the cultural experiences and values of minority
religious groups and excluding religion as an ethnic descriptor serves to perpetuate the oppressive status quo in the field of psychology and in the larger American society.

The privileged status afforded to Christians in the United States has important implications for the LGB community. Socio-politically, Christians bear the most responsibility for the perpetuation of heterosexism in American society as the group with the greatest number of adherents and the greatest societal privilege. Seventy-eight percent of the people who are old enough to vote in the United States are Christians (Pew, 2008, p. 5). The on-going fight to prohibit gay-marriage has resulted in the federal government and 41 state governments adopting Defense of Marriage Acts (DOMAs), which legally define marriage solely as the union of a man and a woman (Masci, 2008, p 2). This is one of the most striking modern examples of how Christian values and beliefs influence politics and the lives of lesbian, gay and bisexual citizens.

Clergy Composition and Scope of Influence on LGB Issues

On May 29, 2009 Rev. Art Cribbs declared that he would no longer preside over wedding ceremonies until gay couples were afforded the legal right to marry in the state of California (NPR, 2009). While publicly taking such an affirming stance is somewhat atypical, there is substantial evidence to suggest that: (1) Christian clergy in the U.S. communicate their beliefs about important social issues (such as beliefs about homosexuality) to their congregants and (2) these messages influence the voting behaviors and opinions of a significant portion of those congregants (Bjarnason & Welch, 2004; Gillbert, 1993; Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt & Folanza, 1998; Olson & Crawford, 2001; Smidt, 2003; Smith, 2005).
According to a 2003 study conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “clergy are nearly as likely to address homosexuality from the pulpit as they are to speak out about abortion or prayer in school” (p. 1) Evangelical Christian clergy speak more readily and more negatively about homosexuality than do mainline Protestant clergy and Catholic priests, and this has shown to influence congregational beliefs and attitudes. Fifty-five percent of evangelical Christians who attended worship services in which a member of the clergy preached on the topic of homosexuality endorsed very unfavorable views about gay people. For Christians in mainline congregations where homosexuality had been brought up, this figure dropped to 29% (Pew Forum on Religion, 2003, p. 1).

Likewise, denominational family and degree of religiosity influence the extent to which people view physical intimacy between same-sex partners as sinful. The figure is 88% amongst highly committed white evangelical Protestants, 64% amongst highly committed white Catholics, and 74% amongst black Protestants (Pew Forum on Religion, 2003, p. 6). In denominational families in which homosexuality is viewed as a choice or an adopted lifestyle by the clergy (as evidenced by the backing of congregational statements that assert this belief), between 53-60% of parishioners also endorse this belief.

Jones and Cox (2009) found that 45% of mainline clergy report that their views on gay and lesbian issues are more liberal today than they were ten years ago, whereas 14% suggested that their views have grown more conservative (Jones & Cox, 2009, p. 2). In comparisons across denominations, most LGB supportive clergy cluster in the UCC and Episcopal Churches and least supportive clergy in the UMC and ABC-USA.
Churches. Members of the clergy presiding over PC-USA, ELCA and Disciples of Christ (DOC) congregations fall somewhere in the middle, clustering more closely toward a supportive posture.

**LGB Affirming Clergy**

Men and women of the clergy are in a unique position to impact their congregations, their denominations and their communities (Bjarnason & Welch, 2004; Gillbert, 1993; Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt & Poloma, 1998; Pew Forum, 2003; Smith, 2005). When their values and beliefs coincide with those of their governing bodies, there is greater freedom and even encouragement to flex their opinions publicly. There is markedly less freedom for clergy who do not agree with the positions outlined by their denominations. Many quietly LGB affirming clergy who serve denominations with LGB-excluding policies (i.e., the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and nearly all evangelical and most mainline Protestant churches) are reluctant to vocalize their beliefs about homosexuality for fear of (1) dividing their congregations and (2) jeopardizing their careers (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008; Olson & Cadge, 2002).

Despite these fears, there are pastors and priests in many denominations who openly advocate for the full inclusion of LGB individuals in the life of the church (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008; Thumma & Gray, 2005). Who are these men and women and how do they reconcile their personal sense of what is right with their responsibilities to the denomination? What life circumstances have influenced the development of these convictions? How have they exhibited their ally status to their congregants and communities? Cadge and Wildeman (2008) were the first to qualitatively explore how mainline Protestant clergy have broached the topic of homosexuality with their
congregants. They studied pastors in the ELCA, UMC and PC-USA denominations and found three distinct leadership styles: pastors as facilitators (claiming a neutral stance), pastors as quiet advocates (claiming a personal pro-LGB inclusion stance that they gradually and subtly expressed to their congregants) and pastors as outward advocates (claiming a strong, overt and frequently expressed pro-LGB inclusion stance).

The third group of pastors “took clear positions around homosexuality in their congregations, denominations, and broader communities, positioning themselves as people committed to creating broader institutional change” (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008, p. 598). It is noteworthy that these pastors all belong to denominations considered by Wellman (1998) to be semi-exclusivist—the ELCA, UMC and PC-USA currently have policies that prohibit gay marriage and gay ordination. The current study seeks to explore these agents of change in even greater depth and to broaden the sample criterion to include LGB-affirming clergy from any denomination considered to be exclusivist or semi-exclusivist. Further selection criteria and a methodological outline are detailed in the chapter that follows.
Chapter III: Methodology

Overview of Methodology

Empirical research pertaining to LGB-affirming Christian clergy is limited to a handful of sociological studies (Cadge & Wildeman, 2007; 2008; Olson & Cadge, 2002; Jones & Cox, 2009). These studies have evidenced the existence of LGB-affirming clergy and outlined some of the activities in which they are engaged, but have stopped short of exploring life narratives, motivations and role-management strategies of clergy allies who serve denominations that have LGB excluding policies (e.g., regarding membership, marriage and/or ordination). To explore the lived experiences and motivations of LGB-affirming clergy and how they reconcile their potentially conflicting roles as religious leaders and allies, a qualitative approach that allows for the collection of in-depth interview data is indicated.

Qualitative methods are especially useful for exploring phenomena for the first time and/or for studying a particular phenomenon in greater depth (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999; Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess & Ladany, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). Elliot et al. (1999) explained, “The aim of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations.” (p. 216) Although qualitative methods have long been underutilized in the field of psychology, they are gaining greater acceptance as valid tools of empirical inquiry (Haverkamp, Ponterotto & Morrow, 2005).

Consensual Qualitative Research. Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR, developed by Hill et al., 1997 and updated by Hill et al., 2005) is a qualitative method of data collection and analysis based on the following principles: a) semi-structured
interviews to provide for a consistent data collection across individuals while also leaving room for additional probes as appropriate to the particular experiences and responses of the participant b) a data analysis process that incorporates multiple reviewers to allow for discourse among people with potentially differing perspectives, c) the importance of consensus to arrive at judgments about the meaning of data, d) the presence of at least one external auditor to check the work of the primary team of reviewers, and e) a data analysis that focuses on domains, core ideas and cross-analysis (Hill et al., 2005, p. 196).

Consensual Qualitative Research is a relatively new but well-respected methodology (Haverkamp, Ponterotto & Morrow, 2005) that pulls from three established predecessors: phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985), grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and comprehensive process analysis (Elliot, 1989). Hill et al. (1997) found each of these methodologies to be lacking in meaningful ways and set out to create a method that drew on the strengths of each and compensated for perceived weaknesses. The result was a method built on both post-positivist and constructivist philosophies. The post-positivist paradigm can be best understood in comparison to the positivist paradigm from which it emerged. As described by Ponterotto (2005), positivists believe in “an objective, apprehendable reality” whereas post-positivists believe in “an objective reality that is only imperfectly apprehendable.” (p. 129)

The scientific method employed by the natural sciences comes from a positivist tradition. In psychology, quantitative methodologies generally fall along a positivist-postpositivist spectrum, whereas qualitative methodologies are usually more influenced by constructivism (Ponterotto, 2005). Constructivism is more relativistic in its assumptions pertaining to reality—suggesting that there are many, varied realities that are
potentially equally valid and that reality is unique to every individual’s thoughts, perceptions and lived experiences (Hill et al., 1997, 2005; Elliot et al., 1999; Ponterotto, 2005). There is also an emphasis in constructivism on the impact of interaction in forming these realities—the reality of interviewer impacts the interviewee and vice versa (Ponterotto, 2005). Consensual Qualitative Research marries these fairly dichotomous paradigms in an effort to form a qualitative approach that acknowledges and accepts the constructivist assumption that there are “multiple, equally valid, socially constructed versions of ‘the truth,’” but attempts to limit the interactional influence of the researcher on the subject (i.e., through the use of semi-structured interviews) and on the data (i.e., by discussing biases beforehand and utilizing more than one analyst)—a post-positivist requirement (Hill et al., 2005, p. 197).

Hill et al. (2005) state that the CQR method is predominantly constructivist but contains postpositive elements. Ponterotto (2005) argued that CQR leans more in the direction of postpositivism. Ontologically speaking, Ponterotto suggested that the role of the collective decision-making by a team implies not that there are multiply valid realities but that “one true approximal reality” can be reached and should be utilized above individual deductions (p. 133) Also, he noted that in the extant CQR literature, the number and length of participant quotes is more limited than is the case in more centrally constructivist methodologies (i.e., grounded theory and phenomenology). Hill et al. (2005) noted that postpositive elements are implicit in the semi-structured interview process, in the third-person author’s voice and in the checking of biases, but that the essence of the method is more constructivist than postpositive.
Both the postpositivist and constructivist qualities of CQR appeal to me as a researcher with a philosophical orientation that lies between these two schools of thought. While I believe that there are multiple realities that can be perceived and truths that can be deduced, I find unchecked relativism in research disconcerting. I am in favor of locating an approximation of truth that can be agreed upon by individuals with differing opinions and lived experiences. The fact that consensus is a key component of CQR is important to me. Additionally, semi-structured interviews imply a means of data collection that provides continuity from one participant’s interview to the next. This, in my opinion, makes qualitative data more manageable and more meaningful. Finally, I agree with Hill et al. (2005) that identifying personal biases and expectations—a constructivist notion—is not enough. Making an effort to bracket biases and restrict their impact on the interview and data analysis process is an important postpositivist addition that is unique to the CQR method. The biases and expectations of the researchers for this project appear later in this chapter.

**Preserving scientific integrity.** The following section addresses the scientific merits of this study in light of the seven guidelines for publishing qualitative research outlined by Elliot et al. (1999). Elliot et al. (1999) conducted an analysis of the extant guidelines for qualitative research studies in the social sciences and developed a framework for evaluating the empirical rigor of qualitative research manuscripts and doctoral dissertations. The seven guidelines that they distilled from their comprehensive literature review are frequently referenced in other peer-reviewed psychology articles (Ponterotto, 2005). The Elliot et al. (1999) guidelines are as follows: owning one's
perspective, situating the sample, grounding examples, providing credibility checks, coherence, accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks and resonating with readers.

**Owning one’s perspective.** Elliot et al. (1999) stressed the importance of full-disclosure regarding the values, biases, theoretical orientations, personal research orientations, scholarly interests and presuppositions of all researchers involved in the process. In CQR, Hill et al. (2005) called for researchers to report biases and expectations to one another (i.e., members of the research team) and to their readers so that anyone reading the study has knowledge of these influences as he or she evaluates the findings. Hill et al. (2005) suggested that biases should initially be reported in the *Participants* section and “an honest assessment of how expectations and biases influenced the data analysis” should also be included in the *Discussion* section (p. 198). Prior to beginning data collection, research teams should meet to discuss biases and expectations created by various demographic characteristics and feelings/reactions to the topic. Demographic characteristics of the members of the data analysis team and a summary of our biases/expectations can be found later in this chapter.

**Situating the sample.** Demographic information is important to the merit of a qualitative study because it clues the reader into “the range of persons and situations to which findings might be relevant” (Elliot et al., 1999, p. 221). Generalizability is limited in qualitative research. Any extensions made must be “modest in their scope” and “thoroughly grounded in the particulars of the informants and their situations.” (p. 217). When researchers do not report sample demographics, they compromise their reader’s ability to judge to whom these findings might apply—leading to the potential of undergeneralizing, or, worse, overgeneralizing the findings. To guard against this, the
sample's demographic information (including age, race, gender, sexual-orientation, ability status, denominational affiliation, geographic region and number of years ordained) will be reported in the Participants section of this chapter.

**Grounding examples.** Elliot et al. (1999) stated that it is poor practice to draw abstract themes from the data without sharing examples in the form of quotations from the participants. They suggest including both direct quotations and condensed accounts or summaries from some of the participants to ground the themes. In CQR, it is customary to provide a table indicating if the responses were considered "general," "typical," or "variant" (in terms of quantity) regarding a particular theme (Hill et al., 2005). This will allow readers to have a sense of how the participants clustered in a single glance. The themes will be further grounded with direct quotations in the body of the discussion.

**Providing credibility checks.** Elliot et al. (1999) suggested the use of one or more of following methods for ensuring credibility of the process: (a) checking understandings with the original informants or others similar to them, (b) using multiple qualitative analysts, an additional analytic auditor, or the original analyst for a verification step of reviewing the data for discrepancies, overstatements or errors, (c) comparing two or more varied qualitative perspectives; or (d) where appropriate, triangulation with external factors or quantitative data. Consensual Qualitative Research employs all of these as either required or suggested methods. In CQR, the primary team consists of multiple analysts, there is an auditor involved throughout the process, and triangulation and follow-up with participants to check understanding are encouraged practices (Hill et al., 1997, 2005).
**Coherence.** For a qualitative study to have coherence, themes should be integrated in a way that paints a comprehensive picture. A series of isolated, disjointed themes without reference to the relationships between and among these themes paints a disorganizing picture for the reader (Elliot et al., 1999). The frequency labels previously described (i.e., general, typical and variant) provide a hierarchical structure to the core ideas in CQR. Hill et al. (2005) suggested that “charting the results to depict visually the relationship among categories across domains” is common practice in the extant CQR literature. (p. 202) Hill et al. also takes this notion of coherence further in their instructions regarding the Discussion section. The Discussion section should, “relate the results back to the literature and pull the results together in some meaningful way, perhaps by beginning to develop theory to make sense of the data.” (p. 204) Depicting thematic relationships in this way provides coherence. To this end, a table is provided in Chapter IV (Table 1) that summarizes the domains and their categories and provides a numerical frequency of cases in which each is represented. Chapter V provides a reflective synthesis of the results as they relate to the literature and regarding their independent implications.

**Accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks.** Elliot et al. (1999) encouraged researchers to be very clear regarding the compositions of their sample and the scope of their findings. Although all qualitative research shares the collective limitation of restricted generalizability, the degree to which generalizability is restricted can vary. Researchers should be prudent in describing to whom the findings might apply. If a more general understanding of some human experience is the goal, researchers must
ensure that they have an adequate sample (in terms of both numbers and demographic characteristics). Limitations should be clearly and openly addressed.

**Resonating with readers.** The final quality check offered by Elliot et al. (1999) involves how the study makes the reader/reviewer of the dissertation or journal article feel after reading it. If the reader "is struck by how the researcher has brought the interviewees' experience to life" and feels that they have personally gained something valuable from reading it (p. 224; e.g., regarding their future work with clients, regarding ideas for future research), the researchers have effectively created an account of their study that resonates with readers. Accurately grounding conclusions with examples from the data (i.e., the human experience) seems paramount to this goal of resonance.

**Participants**

**Interviewees.** The sample was pulled from members of the clergy ordained and employed by any Christian denomination that holds an official policy prohibiting gay ordination, gay marriage and/or gay membership. Thirteen ordained, practicing clergy members representing four mainline Protestant denominations (eight from the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., 61.53%; three from the Mennonite Church, U.S.A., 23.1%; one from the American Baptist Church, 7.7%; one from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in American, 7.7%) participated in this study. Of the participants, seven were women (53.85%) and six were men (46.15%). Participants ranged in age from 44 to 64 (M = 53.5, SD = 7.6). All participants identified racially as White/Caucasian with a range of European ethnic backgrounds (i.e., German, Scottish, Irish, English, Swiss, Norwegian, Italian). Regarding educational background, all participants held at least a masters degree with one participant attaining two masters degrees and another, a doctoral degree. Three
of the thirteen participants (23.1%) endorsed being raised in a different Christian tradition from the tradition into which they were ordained, and one participant (7.7%) endorsed being raised with “no affiliation.” The length of time participants reported serving their current congregations ranged from one to 20 years (M = 10, SD = 6.4).

**Interviewer and judges.** All interviews were conducted by the primary researcher: a 29-year-old, White, heterosexual, female, graduate student in a counseling psychology Ph.D. program who was raised in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. and who is the daughter of a Presbyterian minister and the granddaughter of a Methodist minister. Other members of the team included a 38 year-old, heterosexual, Ashkenazi Jewish male Associate professor, a 27-year-old, White, heterosexual, male counseling psychology Ph.D. student raised in the Southern Baptist Church, and a 52-year-old, White, heterosexual, male Associate professor born into the Roman Catholic tradition. Detailed information about the biases and expectations discussions held by the research team and auditor is described later in this chapter.

**Inclusion criteria.** To be eligible for this study, potential participants had to self identify as LGB-affirming, full-time, ordained members of the clergy who are currently serving a congregation (i.e., a parish or church) with at least one policy that limits LGB involvement in the life of the church (i.e., membership, marriage and/or ordination exclusions). LGB-affirming clergy were defined in the recruitment materials as those who openly welcome LGB individuals into their congregations, disagree with denominational rulings that restrict gays and lesbians from marrying and being ordained, address the religious and spiritual needs unique to the LGB community, and engage in
social advocacy activities that are geared toward reducing homonegativity in Christianity and society.

Because this is a study of clergy-allies, it was also important that participants self-identified as heterosexual/straight. While LGB-affirming straight clergy may feel as strongly committed to their cause as LGB clergy who advocate, they do not experience societal heterosexism firsthand. Therefore, while valid and worthy of study, the experience of LGB clergy who advocate for LGB rights in church and society is likely markedly different than the experiences of straight, LGB-affirming clergy. The rationale for including only straight-identified clergy in this study is to increase the homogeneity of the sample as much as possible to preserve the integrity of the findings (Hill et al., 2005).

Recruitment. LGB affirming Christian clergy likely vary considerably in the degree to which they are able to be vocal. Within some denominations, being a very vocal ally can jeopardize a clergyperson’s livelihood. It was therefore reasonable to consider LGB affirming clergy to be a somewhat hidden population—with parameters that are largely unknown. Snowball sampling is a common and useful method of recruiting participants who are members of hidden or hard to access groups (Heckathorn, 1997). According to Faugier and Sargeant (1997), snowball sampling is particularly helpful “in locating members of special populations where the focus of the study is on a sensitive issue.” (p. 792) Recruitment for this study was conducted using this sampling mechanism.

Noy (2008) suggested that, beyond being a method used as a last resort for populations that cannot be sampled another way, snowball sampling has unique merits
and should be considered regardless of the degree of accessibility. Because it infiltrates a social network and builds upon itself in multiple directions, snowball sampling "generates a unique type of social knowledge—knowledge which is emergent, political and interactional." (Noy, 2008, p. 327) Snowball sampling occurs when a researcher asks members of the population of interest to ask other members to be part of the study and/or to ask additional members to take part. Each person who receives the message will potentially become a recruiter, themselves. Hence, the process unfolds in an organic, dynamic way.

For this study, the initial message was sent via e-mail to 80 individuals (clergy and non-clergy) who were known to have ties to LGB affirming congregations and Christian organizations. The e-mail asked that they consider participating in the study (if they identified as an LGB affirming clergy person) or forward the recruitment information to members of the clergy who they believed would meet the inclusion criteria. The presumption was that recipients of the e-mail would do one of the following: (1) decline participation but forward the e-mail to others, (2) offer their participation and forward the e-mail to others, (3) offer their participation but decline to forward the e-mail to others, or (4) decline both to participate and to forward the e-mail to others. Within the first 48 hours, 16 clergy responded to the call. Of the 16, three did not meet the inclusion criteria (e.g., two individuals self-identified as being gay and one individual was retired). The sample was, then, comprised of 13 of the first 16 to respond. As this number met the sample size requirements for the CQR methodology, no further recruitment efforts were necessary.
Protection of participants. Potential participants were informed that this project was completely voluntary and that they would suffer no negative consequences if they ultimately decided not to participate. They were informed of their right not to answer every question or to discontinue their participation at any time. It was not expected that participation in this study would cause any harm outside of what is normally encountered in daily life and several safeguards were taken to protect the identity of the participants. Although the interviews were audio-taped to ensure accuracy of the content, no names were used on the tapes or in the transcripts. Audiotapes were kept in a secure location, and only the primary team had access to the tapes. The audiotapes will be destroyed after successful completion of the dissertation process.

Data collection. Hill et al. (1997; 2005) suggested that the sample be comprised of a homogenous group of 8-15 participants who have knowledge and life experience surrounding the phenomenon being studied. Sample size is dependent upon the degree of homogeneity in the sample and length and number of interviews. Small samples (8-12) can be used when the sample is highly homogenous and/or participants are each interviewed more than once. Larger samples (13-15) are recommended for studies with a less homogenous sample and the limitation of one interview per participant. The participants in this sample are homogenous in some ways (clergy belong to same racial category and are all from mainline Protestant denominations) and heterogenous in others (gender, ethnic background, geographic location). It does not appear that the sample is heterogenous enough, however, to require a breakdown into homogenous subgroups (Hill et al., 2005) and, therefore, a sample of thirteen participants is more than adequate.
Measures

Demographic form and ATLG-S. Prior to interview, participants were asked to complete and return informed consent documentation, a demographic form and the Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale – Short Form (ATLG-S; Herek, 1998). The ATLG-S is a 10-item measure that assesses the attitudes of heterosexual adults towards lesbians and gay men. This measure utilizes a 9-point Likert-type scale (1=strongly disagree, 9=strongly agree) and takes under five minutes to complete. The short form is considered to be as psychometrically robust as the lengthier version (coefficient $\alpha = .92$) with both components (i.e., ATG-S [questions pertaining to attitudes toward gay men] and ATL-S [questions pertaining to attitudes toward lesbians]), correlating strongly with its respective counterparts in the extended measure (ATG with ATG-S, $r = .96$; ATL with ATL-S, $r = .95$; ATLG with ATLG-S, $r = .97$; p. 213). Internal consistency levels are also high on the two scales of the short form (ATL-S, $\alpha = .87$; ATG-S, $\alpha = .91$; Herek, 1994, p. 14).

Construct validity for the short form has also been illustrated by significant correlations with other measures (e.g., higher scores indicating more negative attitudes correlated with traditionalist attitudes regarding sex roles, endorsement of authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, etc.). Herek (1994) recommended use of the short form over and above the long form “unless a larger number of items is explicitly desired” (Herek, 1994, p. 223). Information regarding the psychometric properties of this measure is provided here to confirm that it is a valid and reliable tool. That said, as the sample size is far too small to draw empirical conclusions quantitatively, the measure is
being used only as a means to triangulate the qualitative data (as is recommended for CQR studies by Hill et al., 2005).

**Interview protocol.** Hill et al. (2005) recommended constructing an interview protocol with 8-10 set questions (for interview length of approximately one hour) and thinking of possible probes ahead of time. According to Hill, interview questions should be created and modified based on a thorough literature review, current theory, the researcher’s knowledge of the topic and experience with the population of interest. An important final step to developing the protocol involves conducting one or two pilot interview(s) that will not be included in the formal analysis. Pilot participants can provide the primary investigator with important feedback regarding the wording and applicability of questions and may even suggest additional questions and probes that the investigator had not considered (Hill et al., 1997; 2005).

A pilot interview was conducted in September 2009 with a member of the clergy who met the full inclusion criteria for this study, but was not among the 13 who agreed to participate in the study. After the interview, this individual was given the opportunity to provide the primary investigator with feedback about the interview protocol (further information about the final protocol is provided in the following section). All interviews were conducted by the primary investigator over the telephone and lasted between 45 minutes and 1.5 hours. Interviews followed a semi-structured format with the possibility for additional probes.

The following interview questions and probes were developed by the primary investigator with the assistance of a research team and a faculty mentor familiar with the CQR method. They were modified based on feedback from a member of the clergy who
answered the questions in a pilot interview and based on feedback from the dissertation committee:

1. What does it mean to be LGB-affirming in your way of thinking?
2. How did you come to be LGB-affirming in both your personal life and your life as a religious leader? (Probes: What life experiences contributed to your perspective? What messages—whether negative or positive—did you get from your parents and other significant people in your life pertaining to the LGB community?)
3. In what other social advocacy activities have you been engaged? (Probe: On a scale of 1-10, how central is advocacy to your work as a minister/pastor/priest? What does the word advocacy mean to you?)
4. What is your understanding of your denomination’s current position pertaining to homosexuality, and how do you feel about that position? (Probes: What is your personal position on gay and lesbian marriage? Have you been called upon to perform a ceremony? How would you feel if you were called upon to perform a gay or lesbian marriage/blessing ceremony? What is your personal position on gay and lesbian ordination? To what extent do you advocate for gay marriage and/or gay ordination?)
5. What is the theological grounding of your viewpoint? (How do you understand human sexuality and how sexual orientation comes to be?)
6. What have been the costs/gains for you as a result of being LGB-affirming?
7. In what specific ways have you been an LGB advocate? (Probes: Within the church? Within the larger community? To your knowledge, are there lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals within your church? Do you feel that the spiritual needs of LGB parishioners are somewhat unique? How do LGB parishioners know that you are available to help with their spiritual needs? How have you incorporated this message into your sermons or homilies? In what situations do you tend to hold back?)
8. How do you negotiate situations in which you are confronted with bias against gay people from fellow members of clergy? (Probes: Give an example of a situation that you have faced. How have you challenged your less gay-friendly or even anti-gay colleagues?)

9. How have you approached dealing with superiors who disagree with your position?

10. How have you dealt with parishioners who have expressed disagreement with your viewpoint?

11. What impact do you believe your stance is having on your congregation? (Probes: Your denomination? The larger context of Christianity? American Society?)

12. How is it that bias against the LGB community has become part of the fabric of Christianity in this country?

13. Is there anything I have not asked about that you had hoped to discuss regarding this issue? Any concluding thoughts?

Procedures

The data analysis was conducted by a primary research team of three investigators and one external auditor. As outlined by Hill et al. (2005), the data analysis should only begin after the team has had a thoughtful discussion about the biases and expectations each bring to the analysis. Bracketing biases is a process that is inevitably ongoing, but it begins with this dialogue.

Team dialogue about biases and expectations. In August 2009, our team met via telephone-conference to discuss biases and expectations. Each member of the team shared information about their religious affiliations and demographic characteristics and discussed how this might impact their analysis. As previously outlined, the team consists of two members raised in Christian traditions (Presbyterian Church USA and Southern
Baptist Convention), one raised in a Conservative Jewish tradition and one who was born into a Roman Catholic family but has not identified with any organized religious tradition. The three team-members who identified as being raised in a religious tradition have shifted in their religious affiliations to varying degrees—the two Christian members now identify more as independently spiritual and the Jewish member now identifies with the Reform Jewish tradition.

Regarding biases and expectations, the following themes emerged: (a) LGB-affirming clergy probably have a personal reason to be committed to this area of advocacy (e.g., a close friend or family member who is gay, lesbian or bisexual had a difficult time reconciling his/her religious identity with his or her LGB identity), (b) affirming clergy likely have congregations that are deeply divided and may have had some difficulty with members leaving the Church, (c) LGB-advocacy will likely be more subtle than what those of us in secular psychology might think of as advocacy, (d) the team anticipated a lack of participation from denominations with an established hierarchy (e.g., where being LGB-affirming may directly impact career advancement), (e) the team anticipated finding stronger, more recognizable advocacy efforts within mainline traditions than within evangelical/conservative traditions, (f) team anticipated that many LGB-affirming clergy might express surprise about the number of LGB issues that emerged for their members—and perhaps even members of the community—once they began to take an affirming stance, (g) team anticipated that some or most LGB-affirming clergy would describe an experience in which at least a small nucleus of their members were in opposition to their advocacy efforts.
As the team discussed aspects of our identities that led us to be interested in pursuing this research study, it became apparent that each of us has relatives or close friends who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual. We have all known someone in the LGB community who has struggled because of an antagonistic religious experience and these stories have moved us. For the two members of the research team who were raised in Protestant traditions, LGB restrictive policies within their respective denominations caused them to feel ill-at-ease; both noted that this was a precipitating factor in their adoption of a more individualistic spirituality. A bias that we all share is a general sense of mistrust and ill-ease regarding what we perceive to be the sociopolitical agenda of the “Christian-right” in the United States—which we collectively believe has been disseminating an ideology that is psychologically harmful to the LGB community as well as religious minorities. Going into the analysis, we were aware that these are shared biases and that we need to be cognizant of their potential effects on our analysis.

Finally, we were aware that—with the exceptions of age, religion and gender—our team is a fairly homogenous group of heterosexually-identified, educated, middle-class, White people. We recognize that our demographic context colors the lens through which we interpret the world. We agree with Hill et al. (2005) that “bracketing biases”—both those that are conscious and those that are a result of our cultural milieus—is important so that readers of the study are aware of factors that may have impacted our analytic partiality (so that they may determine for themselves to what extent this has occurred). As suggested by Hill et al (2005), an honest assessment of how our expectations and biases influenced our data analysis is detailed in Chapter V.
Consensual Qualitative Research Process. Once all interview data had been transcribed in late January 2010, the primary team began meeting for weekly analysis meetings. The CQR data analysis involves progression through three stages: (1) coding of domains, (2) coding of core ideas and (3) cross-analysis of categories (i.e., themes).

Coding of domains. The coding of domains allows for data to be extracted and clustered with data that are related. We began this process with a “start list” (Hill, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994) of possible domain titles. A “start list” of domains evolves from the literature, interview and research questions. The CQR method allows for domains to change slightly or considerably as data are incorporated into them (i.e., domains may be added, merged, or removed; a detailed description of how our start list evolved to reflect the emerging data can be found in Chapter V). The process of placing the data into domains was conducted independently by each of the primary team members (judges). After each judge assigned the data to domains independently for every transcript, the team met to compare work, have a dialogue and arrive at consensus.

Coding of core ideas. The next step in the process was the coding of core ideas for the domains and their respective data across cases. The coding of core ideas involves creating summaries of the data that “capture the essence of what was said in fewer words and with greater clarity” (Hill et al., 2005, p. 200). This process distills the words of the participants into their core messages and makes them easier to compare across cases. The judges took turns as primary coders during this stage. After creating core ideas, the primary judge then sent his or her work to the secondary judges to review and edit prior to the weekly meeting. During these meetings, the secondary judges suggested changes (e.g., rewording of core ideas, addition of a core ideas, deletion of core ideas thought to
be redundant, etc.) to the primary judge and all judges discussed until consensus was achieved. After the primary team reached consensus, the auditor then reviewed the consensus versions of the core idea documents. The auditor’s feedback included comments about placement of participants’ responses, domain titles and wording of core ideas. The auditor also picked up on a few core ideas that the primary team of judges had not captured.

**Cross-analysis.** The cross-analysis process involves the creation of categories within each domain and the placement of core ideas into these categories. Core ideas within each category are then tallied and frequency labels of general, typical or variant are applied. Our team’s approach to the cross-analysis involved three steps. First, each judge independently came up with category titles for every domain without placing the data. These category “outlines” were then presented to one another during our meetings, discussed and modified based on the consensus process. Each judge was assigned 4-5 domains for which he or she would place the data into categories. Every domain’s categories and data placement was reviewed by the primary team until all judges felt that the data were adequately represented. The cross-analysis was then sent to the auditor for review of category titles and data placement. Third, once final consensus had been achieved, categories were classified as general, typical, or variant as outlined by CQR guidelines (Hill et al., 2005). These classifications describe the frequency of case occurrence. Categories were described as **General** if all or all but one of the cases were represented (12-13), **Typical** if more than half of the cases (up to the cutoff for general) were represented (7-11) and **Variant** if at least two cases (up to the cutoff for typical) were represented (2-6).
Chapter IV: Results

Data analysis yielded thirteen domains related to how clergy perceive themselves and their LGB advocacy within denominations with LGB excluding policies: (1) personal conceptualization of being LGB affirming, (2) factors and contexts that impacted the development of an LGB affirming identity, (3) general social advocacy, (4) understanding of feelings and opinions regarding denominational positions pertaining to homosexuality, (5) conceptualization of human sexuality, (6) costs associated with being LGB affirming, (7) gains associated with being LGB affirming, (8) manifestation of LGB advocacy, (9) purposeful abstentions from advocacy, (10) beliefs concerning spiritual needs of LGB parishioners, (11) handling expressions of LGB bias, (12) impact of LGB stance, and (13) historical beliefs, LGB attitudes and Christianity. A table of categories, subcategories and frequencies can be found in Table 4. The surnames used in the narratives below are pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants.

Table 4

Frequency by Domain, Category and Subcategory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain/Category/Subcategory</th>
<th>Frequency/# of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal Conceptualization of Being LGB Affirming</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Have an open/inclusive/accepting stance toward all</td>
<td>General/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Use influence as clergy to spread affirming messages</td>
<td>General/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Be supportive of same-sex marriage</td>
<td>General/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Support for same-sex marriage is self-evident</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Support for same-sex marriage was discussed but is less behaviorally evident</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Be supportive of LGB ordination</td>
<td>General/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Have positive involvement with LGB people, community and allies</td>
<td>Typical/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Advocate openly and politically within the denomination</td>
<td>Typical/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Factors and contexts that impacted the development of an LGB affirming identity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Received messages from parents, culture and significant people regarding LGB community</td>
<td>Typical/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Tolerant messages within the home</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Intolerant messages within the home</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Mixed messages within the home</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Had close interpersonal relationships with LGB individuals</td>
<td>Typical/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Critical experiences in development of views</td>
<td>Typical/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Received no messages or neutral messages about LGB community while growing up</td>
<td>Variant/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Had contact with LGB individuals</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Becoming LGB affirming has been a journey</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. From intolerant to affirming</td>
<td>Variant/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. From affirming to more actively affirming</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Exposure to other issues regarding diversity and oppression had an impact</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Knowing LGB people is the best education</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Struggled with exclusionary church policies</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Positive influence from other identities</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General Social Advocacy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Advocacy is the central focus of advocacy</td>
<td>Typical/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Behavioral manifestations of advocacy</td>
<td>Typical/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Advocacy involves personal action</td>
<td>Typical/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Advocacy is a less central focus of advocacy</td>
<td>Variant/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Advocacy is about providing justice for people</td>
<td>Variant/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Factors influencing advocacy</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Understanding, feelings and opinions regarding denominational positions pertaining to homosexuality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Denominational position on homosexuality is wrong or unjust</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Change to denominational positions are occurring or are becoming more likely</td>
<td>Typical/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Denominational position states homosexuality is sinful or wrong</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Denominational position states that sexual behavior is only permissible within the confines of heterosexual marriage</td>
<td>Variant/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Denominational position is fueled by prejudice</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Denominational position is not representative of the views of all or most within the denomination</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Denominational positions can lead to disciplinary action</td>
<td>Variant/2</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptualization of human sexuality</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Theological grounding of LGB affirming stance</td>
<td>General/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Affirmative interpretation of Biblical passages</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. God's/Jesus' love for all people and/or welcoming those who are marginalized is biblically based</td>
<td>Typical/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. All people are created &quot;good&quot; and in God's image</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Homosexuality and same-sex behavior not a &quot;sin&quot;</td>
<td>Variety/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Author's of bible did not have a complete understanding of the concept of homosexuality</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Bible an evolving document and/or subject to interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>G. Belief that homosexuality is biologically determined and a natural aspect of human development</td>
<td>General/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Sexuality is a God-given gift</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Some same-sex sexual behavior is determined by choice</td>
<td>Variant/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. P's knowledge of sexual orientation is incomplete</td>
<td>Variant/2</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Costs associated with being LGB affirming</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Professional costs</td>
<td>General/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Viewpoint has created a rift with some parishioners and/or caused some people to leave/not to join P's church</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. P has faced or is at risk for disciplinary action by the denomination</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Congregation has faced negative consequences</td>
<td>Variant/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Personal costs</td>
<td>Typical/11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Negative emotions</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Advocacy work requires significant time and energy</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Perceived negative impact on family</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Costs have been minimal</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gains associated with being LGB affirming</th>
<th>Typical/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Expansion of opportunities for ministry</td>
<td>Typical/8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Developing new friendships/relationships</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Meaningful to help people who are hurt spiritually and/or feel disenfranchised</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Communicates a message of unconditional acceptance to congregation</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Witnessing change regarding attitudes toward LGB community</td>
<td>Variant/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Personal integrity</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manifestations of LGB advocacy</th>
<th>General/13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Has incorporated affirming messages into sermons</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Has performed or participated in gay marriages/ordination as a pastor</td>
<td>Typical/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Has engaged in political action</td>
<td>Typical/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Has been involved with the work of affirming denominational organization(s)</td>
<td>Typical/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Has participated in advocacy work at the congregational level</td>
<td>Variant/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. LGB advocacy is implicit</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purposeful abstentions from advocacy</th>
<th>Typical/7</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Abstains when senses message won’t be well received or will result in discomfort/disagreement</td>
<td>Variant/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Exercises caution regarding talking about LGB issues excessively</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Has instances in which holding back viewpoint is necessary</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Abstention can be strategic</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
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<tr>
<th>Beliefs concerning spiritual needs of LGB parishioners</th>
<th>Typical/11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. LGB parishioners have unique spiritual needs</td>
<td>Variant/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Unique needs resulting from culturally reinforced negation</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Unique needs for acceptance</td>
<td>Variant/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Unique needs for healing and self-building</td>
<td>Variant/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. LGB parishioners do not have unique spiritual needs</td>
<td>Variant/14</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Handling expressions of LGB bias</th>
<th>Typical/10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Avoid conversation</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Engage in compassionate conversation</td>
<td>Typical/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Directly address LGB bias</td>
<td>Typical/18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. No experience with superiors who are biased</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Respectfully disagree</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Personalize/humanize the issue</td>
<td>Variant/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Impact of Affirming LGB Stance

A. Perception that stance has had an impact
   a. On congregational stance and/or commitment to advocacy
   b. On congregational growth
   c. On individuals
   d. On denomination
   e. On larger Christian context

B. Perception that stance has had little/no impact
   a. On denomination
   b. On larger Christian context

C. Impact of stance exists in the context of a larger movement

D. Desired impact

Perceived factors contributing to LGB bias in Christianity and society

A. Role of political, ideological and historical perspectives
B. Fear of sexuality or issues not understood
C. Interpretation of Bible in intolerant or judgmental ways
D. Heterosexism may be related to other forms of prejudice

Other

A. Glad research is being done
B. Awareness of conversations between denominations with historical ties

Personal Conceptualization of Being LGB Affirming

In this domain four general categories and two typical categories emerged. The general categories were: (A) have an open/inclusive/accepting stance toward all, (B) use influence as clergy to spread affirmative messages, (C) be supportive of same-sex marriage (within which one typical subcategory emerged: (a) support for same-sex marriage is self-evident, and one variant subcategory emerged: (b) support for same-sex marriage was discussed but is less behaviorally evident) and (D) be supportive of LGB ordination. The typical categories were: (E) have positive involvement with LGB people, (F) community and allies and advocate socially and (G) politically within the denomination.
As outlined above, participants generally made statements suggesting that being LGB affirming means having an “open,” “inclusive,” and/or “accepting” stance towards all people. Rev. Walker described this as going beyond a neutral stance and saying, “God made you that way and it is good and you are welcome here because you are good like the rest of us are good and made by God.” Rev. Thomas described acceptance in this way:

To be truly affirming, I think, means accepting people where they are and not trying to change them, like to convert them to not being GLBT, for example, but to meet people where they are. Especially when talking about spirituality I think that’s important to kind of see where people are and figure out how you can join them on their journey through life. So to be affirming is to be accepting of who and where they are and to be willing to be genuine and let them be genuine as well in return in that relationship.

Rev. Roberts talked about LGB affirmation in this way, “For me it means to be inclusive, welcoming and providing opportunities for folks of any sexual orientation to participate fully in the life of the church.”

Participants also generally stated that using their influence as clergy to spread affirming messages was a component of being an LGB affirming religious leader. As described by Rev. Thomas:

Well, in the church, in the congregation, I preach about this…I’m not afraid to use the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, in prayers, in announcements and in sermons, and so it’s something that people have
been educated about. And we have informational things, adult education
and Bible studies, and I have done it various times on this topic. I’m very
clear in my new member class, this is our mission statement, this is our
welcome statement, it’s part of our ministry on purpose, we really do
reach out to GLBT people, we advertise in their newspapers and we go to
their events and we really do want them here and so you need to know that
now before you join.

Participants described including LGB affirming messages in sermons in both subtle and
overt ways. These approaches are expanded upon below (see domain heading:
Manifestations of LGB advocacy).

Generally, being supportive of same-sex marriage and LGB ordination were both
noted as important components of being affirming. Regarding same-sex marriage, it was
typically the case that support was behaviorally self-evident (i.e., ten participants stated
that they had performed one or more same-sex union ceremonies), but a variant
subcategory also emerged with three participants who discussed feeling supportive of gay
marriage but being less action oriented on this issue. All three stated, however, that if
asked they, could envision themselves performing a union in the future.

Having positive involvement with the LGB community was a typical response
regarding what it means to be LGB affirming. Rev. Mitchell provided an example
involving sharing church space, “The LGBT community was looking for places to meet
so I allowed the church space for their meetings... and so it’s kind of opened up... use of
space has been one way I’ve really worked at that.” Rev. Smith described being,
“involved in the latest gay-pride event where there was a spiritual service.” Rev. Lewis
talked about participating in, "annual interfaith services that were put on by and basically for LGBT individuals and their families," and stated, "Those have been some good experiences. I mean the primary value of those has been to get to meet some of those folks but also to just let them know that there are clergy in the area that support them."

Another typical response was to talk about the importance of advocating socially and politically within the denomination. Nine participants spoke of being particularly vocal and involved at this level. One in particular, Rev. Clark, spoke about being even more involved at the denominational level than at the congregational level for fear that issues of LGB marriage and ordination could divide his congregation. Rev. Clark spoke of feeling unable to directly preach about the issue of LGB ordination, but that he has been able to state "very clearly where I'm coming from" while in "discussions in my [denominational] boards on amendments to open up ordination of gays and lesbians."

Participants discussed varying degrees of involvement with denominational organizations geared toward changing LGB excluding policies. One participant discussed being a major figure in an unofficial leadership movement working to unite the efforts of several LGB advocacy groups within the denomination. Three participants described authoring a petition to their denomination calling for "repentance over the harm that we have done in dehumanizing [LGBT] sisters and brothers in the church."

Factors and Contexts that Impacted the Development of an LGB Affirming Identity

In this domain, three typical and seven variant categories emerged. The first typical category—A) received messages from parents, culture and significant people regarding LGB community—contained three variant subcategories: a) tolerant messages within the home, b) intolerant messages and c) mixed messages. The other two typical
categories were: B) had close interpersonal relationships with LGB individuals and C) critical experiences in development of views. The variant categories were: D) received no messages or neutral messages about LGB community while growing up, E) had contact with LGB individuals, F) becoming LGB affirming has been a journey (from which emerged two variant subcategories: a) from intolerant to affirming and b) from affirming to more actively affirming), G) exposure to other issues regarding diversity and oppression had an impact H) knowing LGB people is the best education, I) struggled with exclusionary church policies, and J) positive influence from other identities.

As outlined above, participants typically noted receiving messages from parents, culture and significant people regarding the LGB community while growing up. The content of these messages, however, was quite variable and resulted in three variant subcategories for those who had received message of tolerance (four participants) versus mixed messages (i.e., some tolerant and some intolerant; three participants) versus messages of intolerance (five participants). Rev. Carter described a tolerant message that she received:

My parents taught me to be extremely accepting of people in a whole variety of ways and I believe I remember asking as a teenager at some point...I must have first heard the word homosexual or maybe a derogatory term and asked my mother what it meant and she said kind of matter-of-factly, 'it's when a man loves a man and a woman loves a woman in a sexual, romantic way.' I may not have her words exactly but I remember it was very matter-of-fact and it was just, you know, there was no...certainly no judgment connected to it... [I] probably didn't get a
whole lot of specific messages about homosexuality itself but generally
the message to me was: people are people.

Rev. Clark provided an example of an intolerant message he received:

My parents were extremely conservative and traditional and so, I mean, I
didn’t get any sense of fairness towards others in that regard, from them
that’s for sure. If anything I do remember my father was extremely
militaristic and, you know, was making fun of gay guys.

The three participants who described receiving mixed messages all had one parent who
expressed intolerant views regarding homosexuality and one who expressed tolerant or
accepting views. Rev. Wilson provided the following example:

My dad felt folks are born this way [LGB] and you shouldn’t punish or
penalize people for being born that way. I actually don’t know where he
would fall on gay marriage. But my sense is he probably would feel like
gay and lesbian people deserve to be married just like everyone else
although I haven’t specifically talked about that with him. My mom has a
more…the typical conservative religious objections to it. She feels like it’s
not scriptural. My dad has a different view of scripture than my mom.

Typically, participants stated that they had close interpersonal relationships with
LGB individuals. Rev. Mitchell provided the following example:

The big piece with the gay community came when the guy that I had gone
with, dated all through college, we left college, thought about getting
married and then he came out and he really taught me a whole lot about,
about what it means to be gay in this country and I got very protective of
him in a way. So I think that was probably the big educational piece where I realized I had to, I had to be open to everybody, you know, it was a natural thing and he was still the same person he was, he was just an open gay man at that point.

Other participants described knowing LGB people as close friends, members of their extended family, fellow ministers, college roommates, and former boyfriends/girlfriends. One participant reported having more than one child who identifies as gay.

Another typical response pattern was to describe a critical event, a pivotal moment in the development of the participant’s affirming viewpoint. These events ranged from something as impersonal as watching a scene from a movie to direct personal experiences confronting issues facing the LGB community at a time when it was very unpopular to do so, as in the cases of Revs. Carter and Collins, respectively:

A key moment that I remember and sort of a turning point for me was a particular movie that was about AIDS, HIV/AIDS. It was called An Early Frost, Aidan Quinn was in it and he played someone dying of AIDS. And they showed, one of the first times that it was shown on TV that I recall, a kiss between the two of them, the partners, and I was just struck with how loving and tender it was and, and even though it was a movie, not real life, it suddenly really clicked in me that for people to, what would be the word, despise that, to condemn that or even for me to think it was odd or negative in any way was, was wrong... didn’t make sense. And so that was kind of a key point and since then there’s been all that’s happened in the
church and it just seemed more and more evident that, that it’s just wrong to say anybody cannot be part of normal life because of who they love.

Rev. Collins shared the following experience:

When I began ministry in the early seventies, one of my closest and best friends in ministry happened to be gay. He had married and had children...we raised our families together and we were very, very close.

We spent, during the 70s, endless hours and nights of going over what that meant [his sexual orientation] and why it was so secret...and I soon came to the realization that that kind of secrecy and that kind of harm is not good for the church or for anyone and I needed to be a part of undoing that.

Other critical experiences included being influenced by professors, classes or other clergy (in college and/or seminary), being impacted by the biased treatment of gay patient’s who were suffering from AIDS in the 1980’s, and the experience of having close friends or romantic partners come out.

Regarding messages received as children, six participants spoke of the absence of negative or positive messages regarding the LGB community. Rev. Walker stated, for example, “As a child I, I didn’t even know what it meant, I didn’t know...as a child I didn’t get any messages, really, I don’t think, because it was just, it was not talked about, it wasn’t on the radar.” Regarding messages she received about the LGB community, Rev. Campbell stated similarly, “Absolutely none...cause all sex was dirty. So it didn’t really matter who was doing what with whom. It was all dirty.”
Three participants spoke about how exposure to other issues of diversity and oppression had impacted them (i.e., awareness of privilege associated with being able-bodied, male and/or White). Five others discussed how knowing LGB individuals is often the best education. Rev. Nelson, for example, stated, “Just getting to know gay and lesbian people is probably the strongest education, I believe. I believe most people who are homophobic don’t know any gay or lesbian people and I find that to be shockingly true when I make the rounds. It’s just like most racists don’t know any black people.”

Five participants referred to their affirming development as a “journey.” Of those who described it this way, two participants described themselves as having moved from an intolerant position to an affirming one and three described a journey where the starting point was affirming and they then moved into a more actively affirming stance. The primary experience (intolerant to affirming) is captured below by Rev. Lewis:

I went through an experience of kind of a fundamentalist Christian kind of conversion, kind of at the tail end of what they historically call the Jesus movement that was big on the west coast that attracted a lot of people that were kind of alternative culture people, but as a result of that it led me for probably 10 years down a path where homosexuality and anything related to LGBT perspectives was really condemned as sinful...[But] as I moved out of those circles and continued to broaden out myself theologically, educationally and experientially...I found myself opening and rethinking a lot of those ideas and kind of going to back to a prior time when I had kind of a more open mind in general, more acceptance to you know things that were different from my own experience. And then probably the most
profound influences were beginning to make friendships with some people along the way over the last 15 years who were gay.

The latter experience (from affirming to more actively affirming) is captured by the words of Rev. Nelson and Rev. Mitchell, respectively:

Well, like most people it was a personal evolution. I don’t ever remember being not affirming, but I do remember growing in my affirmation. So I would say it was a question of personal experience and personal growth and then eventually merging that with religious conviction...[A]s I came to know folks who were gay and lesbian and went through all the different stages of, ‘gee aren’t they nice people anyway,’ and ‘you know it really doesn’t make any difference,’ and all those sort of preliminary understandings one comes to when one is developing personal consciousness, it just became a natural evolution for me. It just couldn’t be any other way...[A]nd then as I came to understand the debates about, you know, I don’t know what the right word is, why people develop sexual orientation one way or the other...I began to understand it from more of a psychological and biological point of view. It just, it just became no issue for me and what became the issue for me was homophobia.

Rev. Mitchell provided the following description of her experience:

It’s never occurred to me not to be affirming of people and I’ve had an awful lot of gay friends over the years and so I’ve probably become an advocate and affirming of, of my friends by default almost. You know, it’s just, I didn’t think about it. But now, now I do speak out about it because
I’ve had to. But it really was just a matter of course I guess. I wasn’t really sure how to answer these questions cause I…it’s nothing intentional…it has become intentional…but it was nothing that originally happened as intentional because I, I actually don’t see the big deal, you know, because I mean people are people and I don’t understand how some people can put up these barriers to folks who are gay or lesbian or have other ways of dealing with their lives. But I certainly do and will affirm that and speak out where it’s needed because it’s a justice issue.

Four participants talked about the inextricable link and reciprocal relationship between their personal and professional lives that fostered an inclusive viewpoint. As stated by Rev. Lewis, “I’d say that they are kind of intertwined those two things. Probably the personal had some priority and then it just developed into how I thought I needed to be as a religious leader.” For three participants, another developmental component contributing to becoming an LGB advocate was learning about their denomination’s doctrine regarding LGB inclusion and feeling uncomfortable with it.

**General Social Advocacy**

In this domain three typical categories and three variant categories emerged. The typical categories were: (A) advocacy is the central focus of ministry, (B) behavioral manifestations of advocacy and (C) advocacy involves personal action. The three variant categories were: (D) advocacy is a less central focus of ministry, (E) advocacy is about promoting justice for people and (F) factors influencing advocacy.

Participants were asked questions about advocacy broadly to get a sense of how they defined it, past and present experiences with being in the role of advocate (outside
their LGB advocacy) and the centrality of advocacy work to their ministry. Typically, participants in this study viewed their advocacy work as a central or the central focus of their ministry, but three participants suggested that advocacy has been a less central focus. One of the participants who described advocacy as a lesser focus stated a desire to increase its centrality.

Participants in this study typically described engaging in a variety of advocacy activities for a number of different causes. These causes included: being involved in anti-war/pro-peace activities at times when the U.S. was involved in foreign conflicts and wars (e.g., Vietnam War in the 1960's, Nicaraguan conflict in the 1980's, Operation Iraqi Freedom in the 2000's), marching for civil rights and women's equality in the 1960's, environmental initiatives, homeless outreach (i.e., organizing soup kitchens, providing temporary shelter, performing funerals free of charge), initiatives geared toward elderly individuals (i.e., performing non-legally binding marriage ceremonies to protect from loss of pensions), engaging in awareness-raising activities geared toward combating poverty, recidivism and violence against women, engagement in programs for children with developmental disabilities, and engagement in interfaith ecumenical work geared toward building relationships between different religions.

Advocacy was typically defined as involving action. As described by Rev. Nelson, “for me it means a level of personal involvement beyond just writing a check.” As detailed further by Rev. Clark, “Advocacy is more than just having an affection towards a particular cause, but taking some kind of action that would have a benefit for that particular constituency.”
Five participants comprised the variant category that expanded on the “action” idea of advocacy by defining the action as “standing up for” “speaking up for” or “working towards” justice for people who face injustice. As described by Rev. Walker:

I think, for me advocacy means speaking for, speaking for people and with people when their voices can’t be heard. And so, because I’m a straight white woman, my voice is heard when, you know, the voice of black lesbians is not heard…and that’s not fair, and it’s not right, but that’s the reality we live with so I feel like it’s part of my responsibility to speak out for those people whose voices can’t be heard.

The final variant category emerged from five participants who spontaneously described factors that have impacted or influenced their advocacy. Rev. Smith, for example, stated that he advocates for a lot of things because, “I don’t know how to keep my mouth shut.” Three other participants described earlier life influences that had guided them toward taking on the role of advocate once in the ministry (e.g., seminary, prior careers, prior advocacy work). As described by one participant, “I was a social worker and I was a union organizer for years and years before I came back to ministry.” Another participant described a personal characteristic that influences her advocacy work, “it [advocacy] just was a very natural outgrowth in seminary, because there were people who were in need and I’m, you know, I’m one of those people who moves into a void. So, that’s what I did.”

Understanding, Feelings and Opinions Regarding Denominational Positions

In this domain, two typical and five variant categories emerged. Typical categories were: (A) denominational position on homosexuality is wrong or unjust and
Variant categories were: (C) denominational position states homosexuality is sinful or wrong, (D) denominational position states that sexual behavior is only permissible within the confines of heterosexual marriage, (E) denominational position is fueled by prejudice, (F) denominational position is not representative of the views of all or most within the denomination and (G) denominational position can lead to disciplinary action.

The two typical categories emerged from questions surrounding understanding of, feelings surrounding and opinions regarding each participant’s denominational stance pertaining to LGB inclusion. Nine participants stated a strong belief that their denomination’s position is “wrong” or “unjust.” Rev. Nelson called the policy of her denomination “a tragic error of selective biblical literacy.” She went on to say:

Well, you know, they drag out Leviticus and the errant passages from St. Paul when it suits them, but yet these are not people who have given up pork or wearing cotton-polyester blend clothing or support the stoning of people caught in adultery or witches or anything so, I mean, they single these lines out and say, ‘well, this is Biblical,’ you know, ‘it’s Biblical.’

Yet they don’t give equal weight to other lines that are equally ‘Biblical’ from those sections. For instance, the [denomination’s] position on women is now completely different than the [denomination’s] position on gay and lesbian people. St. Paul, it seemed to me, was equally vociferous in his prejudice against women. And yet, that one we’ve evolved past and moved past...and [yet] have not managed to move past the last major
prejudice, the one against gays and lesbians. So I just think there’s a hypocrisy and an inconsistency to the Biblical standards that are applied.

Regarding his denomination’s policy, Rev. Smith stated that it is “caving into ignorance” and is not “theologically, biblically or humanly justifiable.” Rev. Campbell discussed feeling saddened by the number of clergy friends who are forced to live closeted lives. Similarly, Rev. Roberts expressed frustration and discouragement over the loss of the gifts of people who are being rejected out of “prejudice” and “fear” at a time when her denomination cannot afford this loss. In preparing ministry candidates, Rev. Roberts stated that what she “struggled with was asking people to deny some part of their personhood in order to serve the church...I just didn’t think it led to healthy and whole clergy.”

Seven participants verbalized a sense of hope that change is happening or is becoming more likely in their denomination. One of these participants is actually a member of a denomination that has recently changed its policy to a more affirming one (i.e., allowing for LGB ordination and marital blessing ceremonies). This minister was still able to participate in this study because the new policy has not yet gone into effect. In that person’s words, “I’m very proud of our denomination for having started to make this transition. It will be very interesting to see how we live into it and it will take a decade to get there but I’m glad that we’ve taken this step.” Another participant, Rev. Clark, stated a belief that “recent rulings” in his denomination “have created a great deal of wiggle room and leeway in terms of ordaining [LGB] individuals at the [local governing body] levels...so, I think there actually is some opportunity for gay, lesbian,
bisexual and transgender folks to come into the church. Will that happen, I’m not sure it will happen, but there are some cracks in the polity.”

Participants also spoke about ways around the ordination restrictions (e.g., working through "loopholes" in the ways that policies are worded, "conscientiously objecting" to the use of questions that pertain to sexuality when screening ministry candidates). Rev. Lewis stated a belief that LGB ordination already exists to some degree in his denomination through a loophole in the policy that has been recently tested:

This is a new policy that’s just come out in the last couple of years where an individual can apply for ordination and do so on the basis of what they call ‘scruples,’ which is an old theological term which refers to the notion that somebody can basically be in essential agreement with our tradition and its documents and its theology and it’s polity but maintain ‘scruples’ or some disagreements in things that they believe to be non-essential. And if they can make their case for that, an individual [governing body] can have the freedom to determine whether they should move ahead with ordination in light of those scruples.

Rev. Roberts described her denomination's current position on LGB ordination as "essentially don't ask don't tell" and stated, "Do I think it will eventually change? Yes. Do I think we're getting closer? Yes. But God did not gift me with patience... so that's part of my frustration."

In addition to these typical themes, variant categories included the opinions that the denominational position is fueled by prejudice and that it is not representative of the views of all or most within the denomination (i.e., there are many clergy who support
change). The variant categories had more to do with participants’ conceptual understanding of their denominational positions (i.e., the position of the denomination is that homosexuality is sinful or wrong and the position of the denomination is that sexual behavior is only permissible within the confines of heterosexual marriage). A final variant category brought to light the issue of disciplinary action as a possible consequence for violating the policy.

**Conceptualization of Human Sexuality**

In this domain two general categories and three variant categories emerged. The general categories were: (A) theological grounding of LGB affirming stance and (B) belief that homosexuality is biologically determined and a natural aspect of human development. From the first of these general categories (i.e., theological grounding) emerged two typical and four variant subcategories. The typical subcategories were: (a) affirmative interpretation of Biblical passages and (b) God’s/Jesus’ love is for all people and/or welcoming those who are marginalized is biblically based. The variant subcategories were: (c) all people are created “good” and in God’s image, (d) homosexuality and same-sex sexual behavior not a “sin,” (e) author’s of bible did not have a complete understanding of the concept of homosexuality and (f) bible an evolving document and/or subject to interpretation. The three variant categories that emerged were: (C) Sexuality is a God-given gift, (D) some same-sex sexual behavior is determined by choice and (E) P’s knowledge of sexual orientation is incomplete.

When asked how participant’s ground their affirming viewpoint theologically, it was typical for participants to describe an affirming interpretation of biblical text—which
was commonly applied to the bible broadly and followed by reference to one or more specific biblical passages, as in the cases of Rev. Clark (speaking about Matthew 8:5-13):

If humans are created in the image and likeness of God and they are created good, then that’s where it begins. So, no qualifications...[ I] begin with the creation of humans and then work towards a New Testament understanding of Jesus’ self giving of others and his love for what were considered the outcasts of his time. There’s also one powerful passage in the New Testament that no one has ever referenced to my knowledge, that Jesus was confronted with what we might call a relationship between two men that was same sex love and that is the famous story where the Centurion has his servant who is sick and asks Jesus to heal the slave...and Jesus says nothing, heals and goes on his way. I’m assuming that if Jesus had a lot to say about this particular issue, he didn’t say it.

Rev. Campbell described her interpretation of another biblical story (Acts 8:26-40):

The apostle is walking along the road. He’s just been whipped out of one city and into another...and he comes across an Ethiopian eunuch who is very wealthy and is in a chariot and looking pretty good and the eunuch is reading the book of Isaiah and he says, ‘Do you know what they’re talking about?’ And the eunuch says, ‘well no, how am I supposed to know, nobody will teach me.’ So, he gets up in the chariot and he travels with the eunuch and they work together, they study together...they come to a pond and the eunuch says, ‘Hey, there’s water, why don’t you baptize me?’ Now, according to the Christian Church, ‘why don’t you baptize me’
is a terrible thing for that eunuch to say because the same part of
Deuteronomy that says that a man cannot lie with a man also says that a
man who has anything wrong with his penis cannot be part of a covenant.
A eunuch has something really wrong with his penis. So by baptizing the
eunuch, as far as I’m concerned, all of the restrictions come out. With
every reason in the world to say ‘no I can’t baptize you and here’s why,’
but instead, the eunuch was baptized and went on his way singing and all
of that stuff and to me that frees us from the need to follow the
prohibitions of that period of time.

Rev. Campbell went on to offer the following quip which placed her affirming
conceptualization within a broader biblical context, “That [the story of the Eunuch] is the
biggest place where I ground myself and then there’s this really small little part [of the
bible] that says ‘God is love.’ And love can’t always be defined as heterosexual
missionary position!” Other biblical passages that were referenced included: Genesis 1:1-

It was also typical for participants to espouse a belief that the love of God/Jesus is
for all people. As described by Rev. Thomas, “as a pastor, then, my acceptance and my
affirmation really for me is biblically based. When I think about, whom would Jesus
love? That includes everybody. There’s not anybody who isn’t in that category.” Four
participants who responded in this manner also suggested that welcoming those who are
marginalized is biblically based. Reflecting on the story previously recounted by Rev.
Campbell, Rev. Collins explained:
What we're learning now...more and more research is being done...is that the Eunuch was not just what we would call a castrated male in the queen’s court. The Eunuch was anybody who was a sexual minority in a strange way at that time. And what Isaiah is saying, they [sexual minorities] not only are brought inside, they have a special place. You must include those who are being marginalized and harmed and they are to be honored.

Rev. Walker offered a similar perspective, “I would say that the Biblical standpoint is welcoming those who are not usually welcome and so, I feel like that’s what we need to do as the church...and I think that’s in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, I think Jesus related to people in the margins and that’s what we need to do.”

In the first of the variant subcategories, five participants reflected on the notion that if all people are created in God’s image and God saw all that was created as good, then all people are good. Rev. Roberts reflected on this idea in the context of LGB exclusionary ordination policies:

I just don’t think that God creates people that are somehow intrinsically impaired from serving the church in any way. To me it would be no different than—which churches and groups have said for ages—that women or left-handed people or brown-eyed people couldn’t serve. To me God saw all that God had made and God said it was good. Therefore, for me, whether gays and lesbians are able to serve in the church is a non-starter as a theological issue.
Rev. Collins took this argument a step further in stating, “They [LGB persons] are created in God’s image and anything that we do to deny that and dehumanize somebody is sin.”

The second, third and fourth subcategories (i.e., homosexuality and same-sex sexual behavior not a “sin,” author’s of bible did not have a complete understanding of the concept of homosexuality, bible and evolving document and/or subject to interpretation) were highly interrelated. In other words, participants who talked about taking issue with the notion that homosexuality is a “sin” or is “wrong” did so either via explanations about the lack of knowledge pertaining to homosexuality held by the authors of the bible or by reflecting on the interpretive approach to the bible. Rev. Smith, for example, stated that he does not see homosexuality as a sin because:

I don’t think the Bible in any way shape or form has any understanding of the concept of homosexuality, so I think the Bible in terms of legal prohibition of homosexuality is irrelevant because it’s, it’s like the Bible making a ruling on nuclear physics...so anything in the Bible that is against homosexuality doesn’t understand homosexuality and therefore is irrelevant.

A similar understanding was expressed by Rev. Mitchell:

I have a couple of good rabbi friends that point out that the Hebrew Scriptures that specifically talk about a man lying with a man, that there was not, in the ancient Jewish world, there was not a concept of homosexuality. That what they were talking about was, you know, men in the normal course of living started doing these things that were not
affirming of life, not life-giving and so they put this abomination and this rule in their list of five hundred commandments, you know...that nobody follows (laughs)...[and] that’s become the important one!

Regarding approach to biblical interpretation, Rev. Clark stated, “[There’s] nothing I can read [in the bible] that says sexual orientation is wrong. There are injunctions in the Old Testament about sexual activity as there are in the New Testament, but I think the way those are read and interpreted could be interpreted very differently than what is normal.” Rev. Wilson stated, similarly that the bible is an “ancient witness to the truth as those folks saw it” and for her, “the scriptural piece was never an impediment to...the call to love and compassion and justice includes the inclusion of LGBT people.” Finally, Rev. Campbell stated a belief that “the Bible is a living document” and recalled that “there was a time when slavery was absolutely fine with the Bible. Slaves obey your masters. To continue to say that today would be reprehensible.”

As outlined in the introduction to this section, the other general category that emerged within this domain was a belief that homosexuality is a natural, biologically influenced aspect of human development. As summarized by Rev. Nelson, “I do understand it [homosexuality/bisexuality] to be a natural development of human sexuality.” Some variation on this belief was articulated by every single participant. Nine participants within this general category also stated a belief that human sexuality exists on a spectrum (3 participants) and/or may be impacted by socialization (6 participants). As described by Rev. Lewis, “I understand human sexuality first as a biologically based orientation which can vary from person to person along a continuum.” Rev. Smith
offered a similar perspective with the added notion of how proclivities might be influenced by nurturance:

Well, I think that it is definitely nature and nurture. I think that we all are, are born with proclivities, one way or another, but I think we all exist on a spectrum, you know, a sexual spectrum, and I think that people with a certain proclivity who are nurtured in a certain way are going to, you know, act upon that proclivity more or less depending on the way they are nurtured.

Rev. Collins echoed this theme and elaborated on the complexity of the concept of human sexuality in stating:

It's very complex but, I think it's just completely irrational in this day to say that it isn't biological. At the same time it's more than biological. There's a zillion other factors going on around it and the complexity, in particular when it's been so suppressed and so on... So that is, it clearly is biological but it's far more complex than that. It's not only biological.

Another point that was frequently made in describing the viewpoint that homosexuality a natural variation was to emphasize the idea that sexual orientation is not a "choice." As described by Rev. Johnson, "I believe God is the creator of all people... There are choices that we make because God gives us freedom. I just don't think that being gay or lesbian for most people is a choice. It's who they are. That's how God created them." Likewise, Rev. Campbell explained, "The folk I know who are gay didn't suddenly become non-heterosexual at a certain age. As they developed their sexuality, their sexuality developed in a certain way. So it's really hard for me to take that
and say that they made a choice because I just don’t think seven and eight year old girls and boys make a sexual choice.” Rev. Campbell also added this personal anecdote in describing her sense that homosexuality is a natural phenomenon:

I happen to be heterosexual. I have a husband. I’ve been married forty years. I adore my husband and I don’t know how you could beat me enough, torture me enough, or bribe me enough to make me not want to be close physically to him—to make me want to be close physically to a woman rather than to him. So if it’s pretty natural with me, why do we assume it would not be pretty natural with other people?

Like Rev. Collins, Rev. Thomas emphasized the complicated interplay between nature and nurture, saying:

I think orientation is something that we are...is part of how we are created, I don’t think it’s something that we can choose. I’m not sure if it changes over time, but I don’t think you can just label it once and say this is how somebody always is going to be because of the influence of socialization on our sexuality. So I think the way that people understand themselves changes perhaps as they/we understand ourselves differently over time and that goes for orientation and behavior and identity, our gender identity and our identity as human beings and as sexual persons.

Regarding the aforementioned variant categories, five participants referred to sexuality as a gift from God (e.g., something to be celebrated, enjoyed, not exploited). As described by Rev. Thomas, “I think sexuality is a gift from God and I wish we weren’t so afraid of it. I think if more people were having good sex instead of bad sex they wouldn’t
be so worried about other people’s sex. So I advocate for good sex.” Rev. Collins emphasized the connection between spirituality and sexuality, saying, “Human sexuality is what it means to be created in God’s image... to be what I call wholly/spirited, sexual beings...[T]hat’s one of the first things I wish we would get to understand more deeply in the church—that our sexuality is this enormous part of our identity and giftedness and you can’t be human without being sexual.”

The other two variant categories represented very small parts of the sample (two participants each). One of these categories captured an idea that some same-sex behavior is determined by choice. Rev. Lewis stated an understanding that sexual behavior itself can be a choice when it involves phases of experimentation which may or may not be consistent with biological orientation. Rev. Johnson talked about this same phenomenon as a choice that he believed could be considered sinful under certain circumstances, “For people who were created not sure or whatever which gender they want to be in a romantic relationship with, that’s how there were created. [But] I think it can be viewed as sin if one is heterosexual and just for the ‘oh, let’s just see what being homosexual is’ and, you know, goes against their nature.” The other category captured an idea that the participants’ knowledge of the sexual orientation is incomplete (i.e., that they still believe they have much to learn).

Costs Associated With Being LGB Affirming

In this domain, one general, one typical and one variant category emerged. Under the general category of (A) professional costs, one typical and two variant subcategories emerged: (a) viewpoint has created a rift with some parishioners and/or caused some people to leave/opt not to join the church, (b) has faced or is at risk for disciplinary action
by denomination, (c) congregation has faced negative consequences. Under the typical category of (B) personal costs, three variant categories emerged: (a) negative emotions, (b) advocacy work requires significant time and energy and (c) perceived negative impact on family. The variant category was (C) costs have been minimal.

As outlined above, participants generally spoke about costs to themselves as professionals. These costs included the typical belief that having an LGB affirming viewpoint had led to a rift with some parishioners and/or had caused some people to leave or opt not to join the church. As described broadly by Rev. Smith, "There have been people who might have turned against me because I wasn't adhering to their particular litmus." Rev. Lewis shared the following experience regarding the fallout of including an LGB-affirming message in a sermon:

It produced some push back. I had probably three or so people specifically come to me over the next week and express some dissatisfaction and even some degree of kind of warning that I was only going to upset old people and you know it made no sense to get into that kind of stuff and that wasn't my role and that kind of thing. So you know those kinds of personal encounters with people when you are in a church that is not real open-minded about those things begin to produce some polarity.

Likewise, Rev. Campbell stated that "there are some very conservative members of my congregation who are not as open with me since they found out that I'm affirming." In terms of membership loss, six participants discussed losing a few members or potential members who did not approve of their view and/or advocacy. All or nearly all of the six, however, discussed experiencing concurrent membership gain (detailed further in next
section). As described by Rev. Wilson, "There's been a handful of people over the nine years that have decided [the church] it's not a good fit for them. But I would say there's been four times as many people who have come and have said that this is the church I want to be a part of because of this."

Also under this general category related to professional costs emerged two variant subcategories related to disciplinary action and congregational jeopardy. Three participants described having disciplinary action taken against them by the denomination and another participant stated a belief that she is at risk for having her credentials suspended or revoked. Disciplinary action faced by the former included: suspension of credentials for two years after performing a same-sex marriage, having an application for licensure initially rejected and facing a more drawn out licensure process than is customary, and (after it was found out that participant had performed same-sex marriage ceremonies) being brought in front of a review board and having a letter of censure placed in the participant's file.

Regarding negative consequences faced by the congregation, one participant stated that the disciplinary action she faced had also stripped the congregation of the right to vote and hold elected offices within the denomination. Another participant described a situation in which an affiliated congregation with historically meaningful ties had severed the relationship over the knowledge that LGB individuals were actively involved in the participant's church.

In addition to professional costs, participants also typically spoke about costs to themselves personally. These costs included: negative emotions, the requirement of significant time and energy and the perception that their advocacy could have negative
consequences for family members. One participant described feeling "discomfort" and "shame" for not having said or done more (in terms of LGB advocacy) when he learned that a gay pastor colleague had committed suicide after a local TV/radio station threatened to "out" him. Another participant described negative emotions such as "impatience" "discouragement" and "frustration" over the slow speed of policy reform. Rev. Mitchell stated, "It kind of…it grieves my heart. It grieves my heart when gay people who are extremely gifted for ministry get shut out because of who they are…it becomes a crime of their being…I really get distressed with people who don’t get it."

Finally, four participants emphasized that costs, if present at all, had been minimal.

Gains Associated With Being LGB Affirming

In this domain two typical and four variant categories emerged. The two typical categories were: (A) expansion of opportunities for ministry and (B) developing new friendships/relationships. The four variant categories were as follows: (C) meaningful to help people who are hurt spiritually and/or feel disenfranchised, (D) communicates a message of unconditional acceptance to congregation, (E) witnessing change regarding attitudes toward LGB community and (F) personal integrity.

Regarding the expansion of opportunities for ministry, six participants discussed steep congregational growth—especially in terms of LGB members. As described by Rev. Walker:

The congregation that I serve has been welcoming to LGBT people since 1986 in a formal way, but was very quiet for many years…before we were sort of forced out of the closet so to speak, there was you know one or two gay people, but…once we took a stronger stand now there’s probably a
dozen people that are related to the congregation and that feels good. Some of those folks were people that grew up [denomination name] and just had felt the church because it was too negative for them and spiritually violent for them. And when we took a stronger stand some of those folks were able to come back to the church and say, oh, wow, there is a place for me here and at least I can trust this congregation. So that’s been very positive.

Rev. Nelson’s congregation also gained “a lot of wonderful and talented and terrific gay and lesbian people [who] have come into membership of the church because the church’s position is well known.” Rev. Nelson stated that his congregation had grown from 125 to 400 members in the two decades since they had become formally open and affirming. Likewise, in the three years that Rev. Thomas had been working at her “little country church” it had “doubled in size,” which she credited to the congregation being “very intentional about our mission and ministry and part of it is an intentional outreach to GLBT folks.”

A gain described by one participant that could be considered an expansion of opportunities for ministry is that she invites gay and lesbian members (who are also ministers from various other denominations) to preach in her church. Another participant described the expansion of his ministry to the national level:

It [advocacy] opened up enormous avenues of ministry across the denomination so that... people come who need pastoral care who can’t get it in their own congregation... because they can’t talk about who they are, or often, very often it’s parents, and grandparents and friends and siblings...
and other people of all ages and, anyway, I get emails, letters, calls, phone calls, and I still get them consistently from people, so it's...what is has added to my ministry is a kind of national ministry of presence and simply being available to so many people who are hurting so badly in the church over this.

As mentioned in the previous section, six participants made statements suggesting that the losses they encountered (in terms of people leaving the church) paled in comparison to the gains in terms of new members and access to people who truly needed their support.

Another gain that was typically described was the development of new friendships/relationships. Eight participants spoke about discovering new people with whom they had become very close (within the LGB community and within the clergy-ally community). Rev. Wilson, spoke of the positivity of being part of a loving community:

The gains, I guess, have just been getting to know and love some really wonderful people, some of whom happen to be LGBT. And being in a community where...I sometimes think, I wonder how it feels when people during the civil rights era had maybe these subcultures where being white or being black didn’t matter. It was just that you were all people together. Not that you could minimize or not notice the difference that color made to a person’s experience but that you had this ability to live in a community where...So, I always feel like when that happens I feel like, okay, this is the foretaste of heaven. You know, this is what it feels like
when we can transcend these divisions and these polarizations that occur in our world. When I think about it I think of this place where all of that has been transcended and we can simply see the humanity of each other and love it for what it is. So, there’s a tremendous amount of gain I guess you would say about kind of participating in that sort of beloved community.

Rev. Thomas stated that she has, “been happy to find people with whom to network who are moving forward in mission instead of being afraid.” Rev. Thomas also highlighted a way that the new relationship she has formed are impacting other relationships, “The people that I know and interact with, some of them are GLBT, and I really appreciate that diversity in my life...And especially for my children...I have two teenagers in my family and I really appreciate that they also get to see healthy and positive relationships with all different kinds of people.”

In the first of the variant categories, five participants discussed how meaningful it is to help people who are hurt spiritually and/or feeling disenfranchised. Rev. Walker stated, for example, “I feel so fortunate to have people trust me, for gay and lesbian people to trust me and the congregation...that we will stand with them. That just seems so important to me...to have created a home for people when they felt there wasn’t, there wasn’t a place for them.” Rev. Campbell described the “joy of seeing a grandmother, finally able to really say, you know, ‘I do love my [lesbian] granddaughter, I still have some reservations, but I love her.’ I mean, that’s pretty big stuff.”

A secondary gain of sorts described by four participants was that LGB affirming messages and advocacy communicated a larger message of unconditional acceptance to
the congregation. In the words of Rev. Wilson, "there's also a sense that if our church is open and welcoming of LGBT people, than it might also be a fit where, even if I'm not LGBT I might feel more safe because there's a sense of openness and lack of judgment that I think people really respond to." Rev. Campbell described the same concept in this way, "People know that if I will treat this particular issue with grace I may be willing to treat their issue with grace as well."

The remaining two variant categories pertained to the gains involved with being able to bear witness to changing attitudes toward the LGB community (e.g., watching attitudes within individuals and families in their congregation become more affirming) and feeling that their personal integrity was upheld. Regarding the latter, Rev. Johnson stated, "In terms of the gains, I can look at myself in the mirror in the morning. I, you know, I try to walk my talk and know people who are, you know, gay and lesbian and know that in my faith and as a preacher, as a pastor, I stand by them. I'm not... meeting a friend and saying, 'Oh, I support you' and then in the pulpit saying something else. You know, integrity, consistency is very important to me, theologically and in life." Likewise, Rev. Lewis described having personal integrity on this issue as empowering and "the kind of stuff that you live on when nobody's around and you live on for years to come."

**Manifestation of LGB Advocacy**

In this domain one general category, five typical categories and three variant categories emerged. The general category was: (A) has incorporated affirming messages into sermons. The five typical categories were: (B) has performed or participated in gay marriage/ordination as a pastor, (C) has engaged in political action, (D) has been involved with the work of affirming denominational organization(s), (E) has participated
in advocacy work at the congregational level and (F) works with individuals and families around LGB issues. The three variant categories were: (G) has participated in LGB community events, (H) visibility of LGB affirmative stance (e.g., language, symbols) and (I) advocacy is implicit.

Regarding specific behaviors and activities related to LGB advocacy, a general response was to talk about the incorporation of LGB-specific or generally affirming messages into sermons. In fact, all thirteen participants endorsed this form of advocacy to some extent. For eleven participants, LGB affirming messages within sermons were described as overt. As described by Rev. Thomas, for example, “Well, in the church, in the congregation, I preach about this [LGB inclusion]...and I’m not afraid to use the words gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, in prayers, in announcements and in sermons, and so it’s something that people have been educated about.” Likewise, Rev. Wilson stated that she has, “done entire sermons talking about this where it comes in if I’m using examples of, let’s say, hardships people might face, I would, I could use as an example, you know, the experience of oppression because of sexual orientation.”

The other two participants stated that they incorporate these messages into their sermons in less overt, even covert, ways. Rev. Smith stated that he has done this, “by incorporating the theme of understanding, acceptance, tolerance, [and] celebration of individuality” into his sermons, while not necessarily speaking directly about LGB inclusion. Likewise, Rev. Clark stated a belief that, “Anyone who has heard me preach more than five or six times gets a sense of where I’m coming from,” but as a minister to a very conservative congregation, Rev. Clark also stated, “I address many of my sermons towards issues of justice making and I’ve been real clear about a number of things, so
while I've tried to shy away from this particular issue, they know where I'm coming from. I guess we have one of those 'gentlemen's agreements.'"

Of the eleven participants who stated that they do incorporate affirming messages that are LGB-specific, two described being conscientious of not talking about the topic excessively. As described by Rev. Collins, "I do not want to ever harp on any one issue. But it's always about being faithful to Jesus—however it comes up—and so I guess there are those occasions that I can't not say something explicit about this, about [LGB] inclusion." This concept of not “harping on any one issue” was echoed by Rev. Nelson, who stated, “I talk about it [being an LGB advocate] from time to time from the pulpit—although I try not to talk about it too much because I want it to be a natural part of the church’s life and not something that I keep, you know, banging a hammer on over and over. That's a tactical decision on my part.”

As outlined above, in addition to the general finding several typical findings emerged regarding behavioral manifestations of LGB advocacy. It was typical for participant’s to describe having performed or participated in same-sex marriages ceremonies and/or ordaining LGB church officers. Nine participants stated that they had officiated at one or more same-sex marriage, blessing or union ceremonies—with one participant stating that he has officiated as many as ten unions in his church. Two participants discussed playing a role in ordaining or supporting LGB officers within in their churches. It was also typical for participants to describe engagement in political action including voting to change denominational policies, writing petitions, speaking out, demonstrating, attending rallies and marching in gay-pride parades. One participant
referred to his political advocacy activities as “getting in the way of the war on sexual minorities.”

Participants also typically discussed being involved with or holding leadership positions in affirming organizations within the denominational. As described by Rev. Collins,

“We’re working on what we’re calling a leadership summit of all of the five different groups working for inclusion in the church in our denomination. And so we’re gonna bring leadership people together...from each of these five groups and try to work at a more comprehensive and coordinated strategy for, both for leading the way forward as advocates in the church and to be a presence and a support for pastors and congregations [facing disciplinary actions].”

Rev. Clark discussed holding a position as “chair of the committee for gay and lesbian concerns which brought to the [regional denominational government] level issues of advocacy or of justice.” Seven participants in all spoke of current or past involvement in organized denominational efforts of this nature.

Additionally, participants typically discussed participating in advocacy work at the congregational level. Manifestations at this level included writing welcoming and affirming mission statements on websites and in church bulletins, educating potential new members about the affirming position of the pastor and congregation, holding discussion groups on the topic of LGB ordination, advertising church’s inclusive position in newspaper ads, and providing parishioners with literature that talks about being affirming. As described by Rev. Thomas, “I’m very clear in my new member class, this is
our mission statement, this is our welcome statement, it’s part of our ministry on purpose, we really do reach out to GLBT people, we advertise in their newspapers and we go to their events and we really do want them here and so you need to know that now before you join.”

Finally, participants typically spoke of their advocacy work at the individual and family levels. One participant described holding a special service for LGB parishioners and their allies when legislation passed banning gay marriage in the state. Other participants spoke of holding retreats for LGB families and working with grandparents of LGB grandchildren. Regarding work with grandparents, Rev. Campbell stated:

And I do quite a bit of work with these grandparents, helping them accept their grandchildren for who they are. You know, just things like an eighty-four year old wants great-grandchildren. A lesbian granddaughter may not want grandchildren. And so, the fact that the granddaughter is lesbian gets caught up with the lack of great-grandchildren and the whole world becomes awful because it’s not what the grandmother expected. And there’s an awful lot that can be done with that, but it can’t be done by protesting, it has to be done one by one. Listening patiently and helping a person discover who she really can be as the grandmother for a grandchild who is a little different from what she expected.

One participant spoke of wearing a rainbow cross during church services, “so that people know that I really am safe and I know it takes a long time sometimes for people to believe that because they might have heard that before and it wasn’t true.” Another participant spoke about advocating within his own family in support of his gay sons, “I
have been 100% affirming of their choices, of their struggles, of their dealing with who they are and where they're going, and I have shared my experiences with them and you know, so, I mean that's a pretty big job I think, to be the parent of three gay men. And, to help them deal with that and help them understand that and help them express that."

The first of the two variant categories pertained to participating in LGBT community events. Six participants spoke about participating in events such as gay pride events, singing in an LGBT choir, providing church space for PFLAG meetings, planning a weekend retreat for LGBT secondary school kids, engaging in an advocacy event for LGB clergy and participating in an interfaith service for the LGBT community and their families. The second variant category pertained to the notion held by four participants that their affirming stance is implicitly known. One participant described himself as operating "behind the scenes." Others talked about a perception that they send off signals of acceptance and openness that are perceived by the LGB community in their midst.

**Purposeful Abstentions from Advocacy**

In this domain, one typical category and three variant categories emerged. The typical category was: (A) abstains when senses message will not be well received or will result in discomfort/discord. Variant categories were: (B) exercises caution regarding talking about LGB issues excessively, (C) no instances in which holding back viewpoint is necessary and (D) abstention can be strategic.

Regarding experiences and situations in which clergy felt they could not or should not engage in LGB advocacy or talk about being LGB affirming, participant’s typically described abstaining if they sensed the message would not be well received or would result in discomfort or discord. Rev. Carter attributed this to an aspect of herself,
saying, “I don’t consider myself a very skillful arguer in the moment and so I think I’m afraid of getting myself caught up in... sort of over my head in terms of a debate level. I know what I believe and, you know, an hour later I can think of all the things I should have said.” She further explained, “In the moment I, I think I fear getting tongue-tied and looking foolish. And through, I mean, as I say that I, I guess I wish I were different in those moments.” Rev. Smith described as a “cop-out” his rationale (discomfort) for not advocating in certain circumstances.

Rev. Clark spoke of engaging in less direct advocacy than he would like to be doing in order to maintain congregational unity and financial health:

[It’s] a very fine dance, cause most of the congregations that I’ve served have been more conservative than I, and so I’m cognizant that as their spiritual leader I really can’t take them down a road that’s gonna get them completely lost or have them alienated, because I do transitional interim work... As their transitional temporary shepherd I just try to hold some things up into the light and say, can you see this? See this possibility, can you see what might be beneficial if you did this differently and here’s a whole community in your neighborhood who’s seeking a spiritual home, why don’t you open your doors... Perhaps I tend to be overly sensitive. Most of the congregations I’ve served are in transition where they’ve lost members, financially just hanging on and one or two more conflicts really can set them right over the edge. So I’ve held some of my viewpoints on a number of things because I don’t think I’d be able to lead them effectively if they weren’t listening to me.
Rev. Lewis stated a related concern that has led him to abstain from advocating within his church as much as he would like to:

> When I look back over my own progress toward greater tolerance and inclusion I realize that my development came in stages and that I was only able to learn what I was ready to learn. With that principle in mind, I sometimes feel like I would like to advocate more for LGB concerns in the context of my church but don't believe many are ready to hear and learn. I do see progress in many, but I also sense an un-teachable attitude that reacts negatively.

A couple of participants described holding back from advocating and discussing their work as an advocate with certain people (e.g., parishioners who disagree strongly, people who will want to engage in open, public debates, certain family members).

Regarding broaching the topic with her father (also a member of the clergy), Rev. Walker stated, “It’s not easy and I, and sometimes I just decide that I’m not even going to talk about it with him because it’s just... we don’t fight about it, we don’t argue about it, he just doesn’t say anything. And I think it has taken me awhile to sort of pick up on that, that, oh, he’s not responding to me. I’m just talking into the air.”

In addition to this typical category of abstaining to avoid futility, discomfort or discord, three variant categories also emerged. First, three participants discussed exercising caution with regards to talking about LGB issues excessively (e.g., allowing it to come up in a “natural” or “organic” way rather than being something that is “hammered away at”). Rev. Nelson stated he is cautious not to kick the topic “up one street and down the other” because he does not want to appear too defensive. Second, five
participants talked about abstention being strategic. Two of the five talked about working behind the scenes in certain situations. Rev. Thomas stated, for example:

I don’t go to the microphone anymore at [regional] assemblies, or at least I try not to be first, and I try to go to the microphone about different issues because I feel like I have reached a point that when I stand up to the mic people automatically tune me out because they think they know what I’m going to say. And so I prefer to train other people on what to say and let a new voice be heard so it’s not just my agenda. So there are times that I do hold back when I feel like I might get somewhere by holding back.’”

Rev. Walker also discussed having a strategy behind her decision to hold back her viewpoint under the following circumstances:

I would say when I’m in an ecumenical situation with pastors I don’t know, I don’t immediately, you know, show all my cards. If I’m in a situation with—we have a number of people who come through our congregation and who are immigrants and it’s certainly not the first thing I talk about with them. But on the other hand we try to be hospitable to everyone and what I’ve experienced is that people see that they have been welcomed from Ghana or Congo or Afghanistan or you know wherever and when they experience the welcome of the congregation and they get to know folks that are gay and lesbian and they don’t even know that they’re gay and lesbian, just you know, are cared for by them, then they say, ‘oh, okay, well maybe this isn’t such a big deal.’
Rev. Campbell talked about holding back at first to be able to reflect fully on the situation, “There are situations in which I wait and watch to see what will be effective...I am not in your face about things, so, I’m more likely to listen and then confront at a later time when I really know where you are and who you are.” Rev. Campbell emphasized, however, that she does have her limits, “I don’t allow any kind of real misbehavior around me. You know, bad jokes, comments of value or lack of value, none of that goes on.”

The final variant category resulted from statements made by five participants suggesting that there are no instances in which holding back an affirming viewpoint is necessary. Rev. Mitchell stated that she sometimes feels she has to hold back on broadcasting her pro-choice view, but, “with the [issues related to the] gay community, no. I mean I just really, I just really believe you defend other human beings if that becomes necessary. So I probably, I don’t think I ever hold back on that one.”

Beliefs Concerning Spiritual Needs of LGB Parishioners

In this domain one typical and one variant category emerged. The typical category—(A) LGB parishioners have unique spiritual needs—produced three variant subcategories: (a) unique needs resulting from culturally reinforced negation, (b) unique needs for acceptance and (c) unique needs for healing and self-rebuilding. The variant category was (B) LGB parishioners do not have unique spiritual needs.

Typically, participants stated a belief that LGB parishioners do have unique spiritual needs. Six participants described LGB parishioners as having unique spiritual needs resulting from culturally reinforced negation. As described by Rev. Walker, “Wow, yeah, I guess in some ways it’s yes because probably they’ve experienced a lot of, well, I
call it spiritual violence of you know sort of negating who they are as people so I think there’s a lot that needs to be done to build people back up after that kind of thing.” Rev. Campbell expanded on this notion further:

I think in the current culture there probably are [unique needs] because the current cultural regularly, in very subtle ways, reinforces the fact that they’re not good. And so, since spirituality has to do with being right with God, if you start in a hole you gotta crawl out of the hole before you can begin to climb to heaven. And I may not believe that they’re in a hole, and other theological people may not believe that they’re in a hole, but they may have been told they’re in the hole from the time they were very young children. So, there, there are specific needs I think. And probably the biggest need that is overlooked is just really listening, just really hearing what a person says and not immediately jumping to any conclusion because each person’s story really is totally unique and our sexual story especially is very unique. But if I immediately assume that because you have some things that make you belong to group A, B, and C so you obviously have also to be F,X, and G, then you stop being unique. And I stop really hearing you.

Participants spoke of the historical oppression faced by the LGB community both by American culture and by Christian culture and the sense that a large proportion of society continues to view them as second-class citizens with regards to certain civil rights (e.g., marriage). Regarding the oppression from Christian culture in particular, Rev. Thomas stated:
I also think a lot of GLBT people have been de-churched, or disenfranchised from churches because they either heard that they were an abomination or that this was wrong or that they had to change their ways or go to hell or they've never heard anything. They've never heard their names named or their category spoken of positively and so they have been de-churched and sent way. And so I think that when someone is returning to a faith community or has questions about God or just wants to know something new, it's hard to reestablish that trust. It's hard for them to believe that I might actually mean it when I talk about things that way. So I have...I'm grateful for my opportunities outside of worship that allow me to be out about that. Like when I do ceremonies, I make a whole lot of new friends because they're like, 'Wow you're a real pastor and you think it's okay for this to be happening?' And so I make new inroads there and have lots of facebook friends and lots of new conversations from people who have just not even bothered to think about God for decades because of their experience in the church before...[during which] they had to choose between who they are as a Christian and who they are as a gay person and I just don't think you have to choose.

Four participants described LGB parishioners as having unique spiritual needs around the issue of acceptance. As describe by Rev. Carter, "[Needs are] unique in the same way that anyone who struggles for acceptance might be different from someone whose demographics make them more easily accepted. So I don't think they're unique because of their sexuality but because of what it means to have been told in some fashion..."
by someone that, you know, God doesn’t love you because of what you are.” As discussed by Rev. Nelson, “I think that they, in terms of finding a church, need to find a place where they feel safe and accepted... fully accepted for who they are and they’re not singled out or treated any differently than anybody else in the church... they can just be who they are here in this church... a member, officer or volunteer, not a gay member/officer/volunteer.”

Three participants described LGB parishioners as having unique needs for healing and self-building. Rev. Carter stated that a person who is told that God doesn’t love them “might have a need for additional healing compared to someone who’s been given a more positive message from the start.” Rev. Mitchell discussed the potential for self-questioning and even self-hate that can come from existing in a context that is highly rejecting. Rev. Walker stated that when people have been negated for who they are, “There’s a lot that needs to be done to build people back up after that kind of thing.”

In addition to the typically stated belief that LGB parishioners have unique spiritual needs, a variant number of participants (four) stated a belief that spiritual needs are not unique. Three of these participants had also stated that unique spiritual needs do exist. In others words, most of these participants presented a counter argument to a prior or latter assertion that LGB parishioners do have unique spiritual needs (i.e., on the one hand, yes, on the other hand, no). As described by Rev. Lewis:

I think that there is a unique place for applying the kinds of theological things we’ve been talking about to bring insight to both LGBT people and to those who would be their friends and supporters. And there is also I think a place and need for some opportunities for some special forms of
fellowship and support and encouragement. But I think there is also some
danger in becoming so focused that it begins to perpetuate their
separateness. For me the ultimate, the ideal would be to get to a place
where we are all together...not that we play down differences but that
people don’t have to be pulling off separately in order to get the support
they need.

The one participant who did not entertain this dialectic (i.e., on the one hand needs are
unique, on the other they are not) seemed to take a more culture-blind approach to the
question, stating, "I would disagree with the idea that gay and lesbian people have
uniquely, unique spiritual needs based on their sexuality. I think that’s part of the
problem here, you know, that somehow your sexuality makes you more unique than your
hair color or your, whatever, and I don’t really feel that. So I would hope that my
parishioners would not expect me to treat them differently for any reason including their
sexuality."

Handling Expressions of LGB Bias

In this domain four typical and two variant categories emerged. The typical
categories were: (A) avoid conversation, (B) engage in compassionate conversations, (C)
directly addresses LGB bias and (D) no dealings with superiors who are biased. The two
variant categories were: (D) respectfully disagrees and (E) personalize/humanize the
issue.

Typically, when asked how they have handled expressions of LGB bias,
participants reported that they have: avoided the conversation, directly addressed the bias
(i.e., head-on), and/or engaged the people expressing bias through the vehicle of
compassionate conversations (i.e., geared toward educating them). Although the latter two categories seem to be a direct contradiction to the first, all three of these categories emerged on a typical basis. This is an interesting discrepancy and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Regarding the first of these categories, it was typical for participants to report that they engage, to varying degrees, in avoidance strategies when it comes to conversations in which biased sentiments about the LGB community are being or are likely to be expressed. Rev. Smith reported that he exercises this avoidance by ignoring parishioners who disagree with him as a means of keeping the peace. Rev. Thomas stated that she sometimes ignores clergy who are expressing bias, but will say something “if it’s in a large group and other people are listening who might learn something.”

Two participants discussed avoiding getting into conversations with certain friends and family members who are more “conservative” or “fundamentalist.” As described by Rev. Mitchell, “My sister, who has become part of this homophobic stuff, she and I cannot discuss it. It’s very divisive. She just, I mean, my children are usually appalled if we get into it at all because she calls me names and it’s put a real wedge in our relationship. Regarding non-specific social situations in which someone is “just being an idiot” in terms of LGB bias, Rev. Johnson stated he is apt to let it go, “I mean if the person continues to insist and keeps harping on it, I may finally say something, but, you know, I’m not a real confrontational person myself. I will state my opinion when it, when it’s called for, but I don’t see the need to pick a fight in every single situation.”

It was also typical for participants to state that they handle LGB bias by engaging in compassionate conversation. In the words of Rev. Collins, “I try to stay in a loving
dialogue and do a lot of listening and receive a lot of accusation." Nine participants
described these compassionate conversations as being between the participant and his or
her parishioners, but three participants spoke of extending this compassionate
conversation method to biased colleagues. For six of these participants, the defining
component of a compassionate conversation was the act of listening. As described by
Rev. Walker, (one of the participants who discussed extending the compassionate
conversation approach to colleagues as well as parishioners):

It’s, it’s very difficult to talk with people that are so sure of their position.
Now, of course, I’m sure of my position too, but I feel like one of the
things, one of ways that I approach it is to try to listen rather than speak so
much. Sort of listen to them, and listen for where their pain is coming
from. Because I, in my experience, the reason people are usually so angry
and upset and sure about how sinful it is to be gay is because they’ve had
some painful experience in their own life. And around either sexuality in
some way—whether around same-sex or not—I think that people are quite
wounded sexually so what I try to do rather than sort of convince people is
to listen from where they are and to be a compassionate pastor so that they
can see that... so that they can experience some pastoral care themselves
and see that somebody who is affirming to gay people can be loving and
not angry.

Rev. Carter discussed a similar approach of listening as a way of tapping into the pain
that can be connected to bias—this time as it pertains to compassionately dialoging with a
parishioner:
I remember one time, the first time I preached on it [LGB inclusion], there was a woman who walked out saying she was never coming back again, which turned out not to be true, but I went to visit her and it turned out that she had a daughter who was a lesbian and from whom she was estranged and, you know, the whole subject was just fraught with emotional pain for her and she never changed her view and I’m not sure she ever reconciled with her daughter which I thought was very sad. But we were able to talk it through and I think she was able to feel compassion from me in spite of our difference of opinion so that she did not in fact leave the church at that point.

Rev. Campbell provided another example of placing emphasis on listening carefully to parishioners:

I do an awful lot of listening. And then work with the things that I have heard. I guess the best way to do it is to give you an example. I have a woman in her late eighties whose father was gay, her very beloved granddaughter is gay and I wouldn’t be surprised if she herself was more toward the middle or gay end of the continuum than the strictly heterosexual end of the continuum. And she really has had trouble adjusting to the daughter being gay. So, I started by listening a lot and hearing the fears and the worries and... little by little helping her see that her granddaughter is actually happy, and I also worked theologically, you know, this whole idea of, ‘my granddaughter is going to hell,’—and this woman really believed that—I was able to, to do some good biblical work
to help her understand that, yeah, you know, a God who’s going to send someone to eternal damnation for something that’s none of my business doesn’t make sense to me. And so, you know, each case has to be taken totally individually because prejudice really is far more individual than we realize.

In addition to listening, participants described being compassionate through gently asking questions about biased beliefs and where they come from, offering readings and scholarly articles about the Bible and the historical context of its contents, expressing unconditional love despite differences of opinions, and using “I” speech so as not to be accusatory or put people on the defensive.

As outlined above, it was also typical for participants to state that they handle expressions of LGB bias by addressing the people espousing the views directly. Overall, participants were more likely to be directly confrontational with colleagues (i.e., other members of the clergy) than with parishioners. As described by Rev. Clark:

Oh, I don’t have any compunction with going after the jugular of fellow members [of the clergy]. They should know better. Yeah I, well I can think of a quite recent experience about two months ago in a meeting, there were a number of us around the table for lunch and we all know where each other comes from on these particular issues and one more conservative retired pastor started saying some rather outrageous things and I called him on it, wouldn’t let him...and you know it’s like telling a bad racist joke or sexist joke in front of people, I won’t stand for that.
Rev. Campbell discussed the difference between confronting biased colleagues and biased parishioners.

I think a clergy person...you don’t have to hold back with a clergy person. With a parishioner it may be necessary because they have not had the opportunity of experience or education. It may be necessary to hold back a little bit and so, to do education rather than confrontation. But if a clergy member behaves badly, I think it’s necessary to immediately let that person know, ‘not around me. I don’t agree with you. If you want to fight I’ll fight, but at the very least you will behave decently around me.’

Rev. Lewis elaborated on why it might be that pastors have a harder time confronting parishioners in comparison to colleagues:

For a lot of clergy that is kind of a tendency...to want to be liked and so therefore you don’t challenge people when they are being obnoxious because you’ve developed a friendship with them and the life of the church. Then, when they say things that are wrong or hurtful you know you have...that relationship that you have with them gets challenged and partly threatened when you call them on their stuff so to speak, [but] I’ve come to the point where I’ve gotten better and bolder in calling them on it.

Other examples given of confronting LGB bias directly were: walking out of a worship service where homophobic messages were being delivered and interrupting a presentation with homophobic content.

The third typical category emerged from responses related to a lack of experience confronting biased superiors. Participants were asked to reflect on their dealing with LGB
bias perpetrated by colleagues, parishioners and superiors. A typical number of participants (eight) discussed not having had any conflict with superiors because their superiors tended to be affirming, too. As summarized by Rev. Clark, “I don’t think I’ve ever had that difficulty to my knowledge...every superior I’ve ever had has had the same opinion. So, I’ve been fortunate in that regard.”

Comprising the first of the variant categories, five participants mentioned instances when they agreed to disagree with someone who expressed bias against the LGB community. Three of the five talked about using the tactic of agreeing to disagree with a member of the clergy and two of the five talked about using this tactic with parishioners. Regarding encounters with clergy, Rev. Collins provided the following example of coming to an impasse with another pastor:

I had one pastor with very little experience in a very bizarre situation who needed to talk to me, so we had a long conversation in which he wanted to be sure he told me that God would hold me accountable because I had blessed two women out of the kingdom of God and I will be condemned for that. [Interviewer: What did you do with the first pastor? Agree to disagree?] We just, that’s in effect what we’ve done. We didn’t come to any conclusion or anything and he will, on another occasion he will say the same thing, and I will say the same thing.

Another participant, Rev. Thomas, contrasted an experience in which she maintained dialogue with one pastor with another wherein she felt she had to agree to disagree:

So there have been a couple clergy gatherings that I’ve been to where other people vehemently disagreed with me and they knew exactly why I
was wrong and that sort of thing. And it really depended...there were two different ones that I can think of, in one case, we were able to find a common goal, that the church not divide, so how can I from my perspective and how could he from his perspective remain faithful to our own beliefs and what was important to us and yet be faithful pastors and not divide this church. That was a great conversation because I felt like he listened to me and he respected me. There was another one where the person just sort of folded his arms and sat there and said well it’s just wrong. You know, and there wasn’t any more information to go on. He just knew it was wrong and he wasn’t willing to think about anything else except that it was wrong. And so I didn’t feel respected, I didn’t feel heard and I didn’t feel like I needed to pursue that conversation because it wasn’t gonna go anywhere.

Regarding respectfully disagreeing with parishioners, Rev. Nelson gave the following example:

Well, I had a woman when I first came here who was the clerk of our [church governing committee] which is the highest lay position in the [denomination’s name] church, and after I was here about a year...she elected to step down. And she told me that one of the reasons was that she was disappointed that I did not work to undo the [affirming] status of the church. And I went over to see her at her home and sat in her kitchen and she—this is an African American woman who had been actively involved in the Civil Rights movement in the South, in Alabama, as a matter of fact,
Birmingham and Montgomery. Knew Dr. King, all of that stuff—and, you know, we were discussing it and I told her that I was very sorry that she was disappointed in me and very sorry that she was sort of easing her way out of the church life. And she made a comment, ‘Well, those of us who believe in the Bible…’, and I said, ‘Wait just a minute.’ I said, ‘You cannot claim sole ownership of the Bible in this dispute. We believe in the Bible too. We have a different understanding of the Bible on this subject. But don’t tell me that you believe in the Bible and I don’t.’ So we left it agreeing to disagree. And this is one of the families that left the church.

The other variant category that emerged had to do with the tactic of personalizing or humanizing the debate. Participant’s spoke of keeping things “personal and relational” and working through “exposure to real people”—whether through personal stories or through actual contact. Rev. Mitchell talked about trying to lessen the homophobia of superiors in her denomination by bringing LGB members of her congregation to regional meetings where these superiors would be present. In her words, “I think you just, you have to know real people. Things in theory are a whole different ball game than when you know real people.”

Likewise, Rev. Walker stated, “Yeah, I mean I think, I think my approach is usually to say, this has been our experience, this has been my experience in the congregation, I have experienced the love of God and the love of Jesus through these people, and I would hope that you would be able to experience that, too.” She then went on to talk about how she appeals to the compassion of clergy by reminding them of the effects they could be having on gay and lesbian youth in their congregations, “The other,
the other way that I often approach it is to say I know you think you haven’t met any gay people but I bet there are some gay folks in your congregation and there probably are some gay teenagers in your congregation and think about the kind of preaching that you are doing, do you really want to condemn those children?"

**Impact of LGB Affirming Stance**

In this domain, one general category, one typical category and two variant categories emerged. Within the general category—(A) perception that stance has had an impact—there were two typical and three variant subcategories. The typical subcategories were: (a) on congregational stance and/or commitment to advocacy and (b) on congregational growth. The variant subcategories under the general category were: (c) on individuals, (d) on denomination and (e) on the larger Christian context. Within the typical category—(B) perception that stance has had little/no impact—there were two variant subcategories: (a) on denomination and (b) on larger Christian context. The two variant categories for this domain were: (C) impact of stance exists in context of a larger movement and (D) desired impact.

Participants both generally stated a belief that their affirming stance is having an impact and typically stated a belief that their stance is having little or no impact. At first blush, these findings seem to be contradictory. The reason for this is that participants often perceived their stance as impacting some spheres (e.g., changing opinions at the individual level, shaping congregational stance, influencing congregational growth) while not others (e.g., shaping denominational stance, shaping the larger Christian context). In other words, there was overlap between the 12 participants in the general category and the seven participants in the typical category because data from both sets of interviews
could often be coded in both places (i.e., perception that stance has had an impact and perception that stance has had little/no impact). We will begin by looking more closely at the areas of perceived impact.

Within the general category of participants who perceived their stance as having some form of an impact, this impact was typically reported in the areas of the congregation’s commitment to advocacy and/or congregational growth. In terms of congregational commitment, participants described a sense that their congregations are becoming more and more inclusive and making LGB advocacy a more intentional mission. As described by Rev. Carter, “In my congregation, I would say over the twenty years we’ve been there, the movement has been significantly toward affirming and acceptance. Some of that undoubtedly is simply the passage of time and that the world is changing... But I think some of it is a combination of my influence of what has been said from the pulpit and what kind of attitude has been promoted.”

Rev. Wilson was told by one lesbian who is a well-known LGB advocate within her denomination that her church is “the most gay-friendly church in the entire country.” About that recognition Rev. Wilson stated:

So I think, I feel like our role has been a little bit of this sort of light on the hill, sort of city on the hill I guess you would say. We tend to get a lot of visitors coming through our church and I think sometimes people think of us as the gay church and they’re expecting something pretty crazy and then they realize we’re just this really ordinary, but wonderful, I hope, group of people who really love each other. And I think a lot of times people pick up on that spirit and we’ve had a couple of our gay and
lesbian families in our church who have gone out of their way to extend hospitality to people in the sense that, you know, visitors actually. I mean I get a lot of emails and phone calls from people saying, hey I'm a [denomination name] and I'll be coming to your area for five days, does somebody have a place that they can put me up? And we have one long-time gay couple who very frequently host people and I know for a lot of those people that might be the very first time they met a gay person, much less stayed at their house. Much less experienced their hospitality and their graciousness. So I feel like it's been a real witness.

Similarly, Rev. Roberts mentioned that her church is becoming known throughout her city among young same-sex couples with children. She stated that with one exception, all the children in the church nursery right now are the children of same-sex couples.

Regarding the change she has seen within the congregation, “This church has been worried about its survival for ten years and it has been so paralyzed by that fear that it has been unable to act. They did that [lesbian woman's] ordination process so well. We learned so much about each other that they engaged in a strategic planning process, we educated the congregation about it and we're moving forward and for the first time since I've been here I had a board meeting last night where our budget is fully pledged.”

Pertaining specifically to congregational growth, seven participants described experiencing steady and considerable growth since becoming welcoming and affirming. As described by Rev. Mitchell, becoming more intentional about their advocacy has “really helped to open up this little church that probably didn’t think very much about who they were before as an open church and...[now] people want to come [here], where
the Christian church is really the Christian church at its best.” Rev. Thomas stated that her congregation has grown from 35 to 90 members and that ten percent of current members are LGBT individuals who have joined in recent years.

Rev. Johnson noted an impact on his congregation in the other direction. He stated that being welcoming and affirming may actually have kept his church on the smaller side, “So, you know, being a church that’s open and listening to diverse opinions and trying to be upfront about that means to a certain extent that you’re not going to be a huge church. I think it means that there are a lot of people who just want to be told what to believe and they just want to believe it and they want it to be firm and black and white and it takes a certain, I believe, faith of maturity to exist in a church like ours. Which is perhaps one of the reasons we’ve been always kind of small (laughs). But, you know we don’t have an awful lot of games being played in the congregation either. It’s a very healthy place to be.”

A variant number of participants also stated that they believe their stance is having an impact at the individual level, the denominational level and the larger context of Christianity (national level). Pertaining to impact on individuals, four out of the six participants in this subcategory discussed positively impacting people who had been frustrated or hurt by the church’s exclusionary policies in the past. As described by Rev. Walker, “When we took a stronger stand some of those folks [people who had been disenfranchised] were able to come back to the church and say, ‘oh, wow, there is a place for me here and at least I can trust this congregation.’” One participant spoke of the impact she believes she is having in terms of changing hearts and minds on the inclusion issue, and the other participant spoke of both fostering change and positively impacting
people who had been hurt by the church in the past. Regarding changing hearts and minds, Rev. Nelson provided the following story:

I have just one dramatic story. I have an older woman in the church who was raised in an extremely hostile environment as a young girl in Jamaica. They literally used to beat gay people up and throw stones at them after school and there was just vicious persecution. And she came to this church, I mean, not throwing rocks at anybody but with having a pretty strong homophobic view. And as she sat in the church and looked around, it dawned on her that this person was gay and this person was lesbian and saw them woven into the fabric of the church...she had a complete transformation in her thinking and is now one of the strongest advocates for our position in the church. And to just see that kind of transformation based on experience and seeing, you know, love triumph over hatred makes it all worthwhile.

Regarding impact at the denominational level, five participants stated that they believe the work they are doing (i.e., through individual advocacy work and/or involvement with LGB affirming groups within the denomination) is fostering a new dialogue and movement toward reforming exclusionary policies in the denomination. As stated by Rev. Collins:

We’ve come a long way and God has done amazing things. We have now found a consensus and a clarity for a vision and a mission here and a way of welcome and hospitality that I said fifteen years ago that I didn’t expect to see in my ministry lifetime. And more is happening all the time and
even, even our denominational leaders have said to me that it's a matter of
time.

On the subject of the larger context of Christianity (national level), four participants
stated a belief that, however small, every little bit of advocacy that they and/or their
churches engage in helps. As described by Rev. Nelson, "I mean I think every, you know,
everybody that comes to a different understanding... I think every time that happens, you
know, it sort of chips away at the wall. And for me the understanding of Christianity is
breaking down the dividing walls that separate us one from another. So I do believe that’s
happening and I do believe, as frustrating as it is, it's only a matter of time before the
[denominational] position changes. And when that changes I think that will have an
impact on, you know, the worldwide Christian movement."

Within the typical category of participants who perceived their stance as having
little or no impact, two variant subcategories emerged. As stated previously, these variant
subcategories were: perception of little/no impact at the denominational level and
perception of little/no impact on the larger context of Christianity (national level). Of the
former, Rev. Clark stated that his opinion may be "cynical," but, "I wouldn't presume I
have any kind of influence... on the [denomination name]." Rev. Campbell stated that she
is probably having "no impact at all" on her denomination, which she thinks is "awful."
Regarding the latter subcategory, Rev. Walker stated that it's "a pretty big stretch" to
think that her stance is having an impact on the larger context of Christianity because her
denomination is such a small one. Rev. Roberts chuckled and stated that she doesn’t think
the larger context of Christianity even knows what she is doing.
In addition to these general and typical categories (and their constituent subcategories), two variant categories emerged. The first captured the idea espoused by two participants that the impact of their affirming stance exists in the context of a larger movement. As described by Rev. Johnson, “I’m just one voice amongst many just trying to articulate a different way of looking at things...it’s the same thing, you know, think globally, act locally...think ecclesiastically and act congregationally I guess.” Rev. Carter offered a similar remark, “I think in the really meaningful stuff, I’m just one of many, many, many, many people that’s just sort of part of something bigger than any individual that’s gradually making change.”

The second variant category spoke to the desire described by three participants that they have had or could have a certain kind of impact. Rev. Smith stated, for example, “I would like to think that the people with whom I come in contact and who pick up on the fact, or are told flagrantly the fact that I’m pro-gay would have a different opinion of the church in general, say you know, they let him in, I guess they’re not totally conservative.” Rev. Thomas stated, “I hope that I am doing a small part to redeem God for GLBT people so that they could trust God again and so that they could perhaps have a relationship with God again. I think the church is the primary place that we have relationship with God, and so to take that away from people is a sin. So, I hope that that’s one of the impacts that I have.” In addition, Rev. Thomas stated that she is also hoping that “with some gentleness and persistence that I am opening up hearts and minds and the church toward GLBT people.” Finally, Rev. Clark stated, “I wish I could find some way that I could be a political advocate and maybe that’s what my calling might be, but you know I don’t know what that is yet.”
Perceived Factors Contributing to LGB Bias in Christianity and Society

In this domain one general, one typical and two variant categories emerged. The general category was: (A) role of political, ideological and historical perspectives. The typical category was: (B) Fear of sexuality or issues not understood. The two variant categories were: (C) interpretation of bible in intolerant or judgmental ways and (D) heterosexism may be related to other forms of prejudice.

When participants were asked to reflect on the factors that they perceived as contributing to LGB bias being part of the fabric of Christianity in American society, they generally discussed the role of political, ideological and historical forces. Regarding the role of history, Rev. Clark stated that it is “deeply laden in our Puritanical roots” for anything related to human sexuality to be “taboo.” Likewise Rev. Campbell suggested that even a “very liberal person may still be quite caught up in outmoded sexual mores...[because] we’re carefully taught from one generation to the other, and it is a whole lot easier to be afraid of something than it is to understand it.” Rev. Collins offered the explanation:

We simply haven’t had the history to learn our way into new things and then you add to that sort of an ethos of what is generally conservative political culture, you know, on the one hand, and as a matter of fact, another huge issue that needs so much more exploration is sort of liberal education which tends to relativize everything...almost everything has worked against healthy, honest, serious sexual understandings and explorations in that way. What it means to be created in God’s image and what to do with sex and sexual relationships and so on. So we’re only
beginning to explore that in good, new, healthy ways and I think it’ll be another couple of generations before we get pretty far with that so that’ll take some of the onus and angst off of homosexuality.

A few participants spoke more forcefully about their opinions. Rev. Mitchell stated for instance:

I have a real opinion about this. I think it’s a loud voice from a small number of people and I think it really got in, somehow got the attention of a certain political party who thought it could be used to their advantage and they took advantage of the Christian community on this subject. This and the abortion question. I just really think it was an agenda pushed by people in the political right because they knew it would get attention. I think, frankly, Karl Rove and his cronies saw that as something that would work. I don’t believe they even believe it. I don’t believe George Bush believed it for Pete’s sake, but I think they saw it would work politically. And they were right.

Rev. Wilson offered a similar reflection:

I’ve done quite a bit of reading on this. My sense is that a lot of the real divisive, polarized sort of stuff started happening in the 1980s with the rise of the moral majority and the religious right. I think it was initially focused on abortion. But homosexuality became, you know, a key piece of that sort of...a key fear and a key problem and I think, you know, we’ve just grown more and more, the political and religious climate has just gotten more and more polarized since that time...and you know I think the
[denomination name] is very much affected by that kind of polarization that has occurred in our society.

Rev. Thomas expanded the responsibility to the media as well:

Well, I think that a lot of preachers who are very public preachers, like TV evangelists and people in mega churches and domes and things like that tend to be Biblical literalists and for some reason this has become a hot topic. And also, because of the way that politics and religion have been woven together in the last couple of decades—I think illegally but, you know, there's always ways around those sorts of things—I think that this has...because this has become a political hot topic and that the religious right has been so influential in American politics in the last couple decades, I think that has really brought it to the forefront.

Typically, participants also discussed the role that fear plays—fear of sexuality and fear of the things a person does not understand. Rev. Campbell stated, “Well, Christianity, if you think about it, has been afraid of sex since Adam and Eve.” Rev. Roberts spoke of a cultural fear of difference, “We're just coming out of a long era of pre-adolescent leadership in terms of the debate about who's right, who's wrong, who's in, who's out, is not limited to GLBT, it's a broad based cultural discussion because people are afraid and our leadership, our national leadership, church and otherwise, has responded to that fear with tempting answers of 'clarity.'” Rev. Wilson talked about the way fears get projected onto an “other”:

There's so much fear around...sometimes I can't believe it. Sometimes—it's just so not the world I live in—but, every once in awhile when I'm in
more conservative areas I just can’t believe the fear and projection… the fear that exists and the way people project all this stuff onto gay and lesbian people or gay and lesbian advocates, I’m like who are those people? I don’t know who those people are.

Rev. Mitchell provided an observation about how fear is utilized as a means of control:

I don’t know what the fear is with homosexuality in all honesty but I think it’s that it has to do with people feeling superior in some way. The fear factor in this country, you know, we’re afraid of everything, right now it’s the flu. The more people are fearful, the more easily managed they become. Somehow if we become afraid of gay people, you know, we’re more easily managed. Something I heard at a meeting last week was one of the preacher’s had said—he was talking about this [LGB inclusion] issue, in effect, the issues that divide us in the denomination—he said that we quote the scripture, ‘perfect love casts out fear.’ He said, ‘I’m afraid we’re living in a time where the converse is true.’ Fear casts out the perfect love. So we become afraid of each other.

Two participants talked about fear on a personal level. Rev. Nelson stated, for example, that he believes LGB inclusion is so divisive because it “strikes close to the fear of men.” Rev. Collins suggested that, “There are deep scars and fears and threats in our psyches that we haven’t begun to tap yet. I think we have to if we’re going to get anywhere.”

Regarding the first of the two variant categories, six participants spoke about how and why the bible gets interpreted in intolerant or judgmental ways. Rev. Lewis stated that a literalistic interpretation of scripture, “has tended probably to shape people’s
thinking in ways that are probably more judgmental about homosexuality because of the relatively few but nevertheless seemingly specific statements in the bible that seem to condemn it...and when one has kind of a proof-text and literalistic type of a hermeneutic...that sets the stage for the kind of bigotry that has existed within the church towards gays and lesbians.” Rev. Clark stated that this sort of interpretation occurs because:

"We have become more literal minded, not just in terms of our Bible but in all different avenues of life even market economy, we’ve become more literal. So when someone says, ‘It says in the Bible...’ therefore it must be true, or it must be literal, people turn on that. I think we’ve also become in the past eight years anti-scientific and science is revealing a great deal to us about human sexuality and orientation, but the general public, populace has become anti-scientific, anti-intellectual. So, I think all these things combined, you know, just is a big stew, just waiting to be opened up and hate and intolerance spewed out.

Regarding how the Bible gets read, Rev. Thomas stated:

I think we have stopped reading the Bible as a whole thing and we just read the parts that we already know or the parts that we’re hearing other people talk about...[And so people who aren’t part of a faith community on a regular basis get their religion in bits and pieces from the media and from the culture and that’s what they’re getting cause that’s what’s in media and culture. And so I think people who are very ill-informed and uninformed and misinformed are shaping that based on this information
That is only pieces here and there about who God is and about what it means to be sexual. And so they're not getting a whole picture, they're getting a mosaic, bits and pieces of other people's pictures.

The second variant category had to do with the relationship of heterosexism to other forms of prejudice. Five participants shared thoughts on this—with emphasis on the link between heterosexism and sexism. As described by Rev. Walker, “I think Christianity is a patriarchal religion so I think when women challenge the patriarchy with feminist theology and then all these various liberation theologies that are challenging the patriarchy, and then lesbian and gay folks come along...that’s a different kind of challenge to the patriarchy.” Rev. Walker went on to discuss how, specifically, she sees homosexuality challenging the patriarchy:

It’s challenging gender roles that have been, that, that we think are, you know, ‘in the Bible.’ I would challenge us to look at the Bible again more closely, but I think it’s all part of the patriarchal religion and it’s a challenge to that. You know, two women together saying we don’t need men, that’s a huge challenge to the patriarchy. Or two men who want to, you know, who are acting ‘feminine’ and they’re not acting the way, the way that ‘masculine men should act,’ and it all just accepts the construct that we’ve got, and I think that, that it’s really hard for people.

Rev. Collins reflected on the link with the historical oppression of women as well, “Marriage has been primarily about property and procreation, particularly in our sexuality. And so, women had no standing and the only reason you had sex was to make babies. So we have a terrible, long history. So, given that kind of...that way of view
that's been so much a part of the church...homosexuality is just an 'impossible abomination'. Rev. Nelson heard a speaker once reflect on heterosexism as the "last prejudice" and thought, "well it's not the last...but this is the one, you know, that we're struggling through in our time."

**Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale**

As discussed in Chapter 3, in addition to the interview process, participants were asked to complete and return the *Attitudes Toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale – Short Form* (ATLG-S; Herek, 1998). This 10-item measure assesses the attitudes of heterosexual adults towards lesbians and gay men. This measure was utilized only as a means to triangulate the qualitative data (as is recommended for CQR studies by Hill et al, 2005). According to Herek (1998) scoring for the 9-point response scale provides a range from 10 (extremely positive attitudes) to 90 (extremely negative attitudes).

Scores on this measure ranged from 10 to 26 (mean = 14.23, SD = 5.2), suggesting that a positive to extremely positive attitude toward gays and lesbians was espoused by all participants. Item analysis revealed one meaningful discrepancy, however. While individual scores for each item generally varied from 1.1 to 1.6 (on a scale of 1-9, with 1 representing an extremely positive attitude and 9 representing an extremely negative attitude), the mean score on one item was 2.5. This item (ATLG-S #8) assesses to what degree participants agreed that male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men. This elevation is slight but noteworthy. Implications for this study will be discussed in Chapter V.
Chapter V: Discussion

In this study, we set out to explore the experiences of LGB-affirming Christian clergy who work within denominations that hold exclusionary policies limiting lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals from full participation in the life of the church. It has been over 35 years since the American Psychological Association called upon researchers and practitioners to de-stigmatize homosexuality through research and practice. With few exceptions (e.g., United Church of Christ, Metropolitan Community Church, Episcopal Church), Christian religious institutions have played a powerful role in maintaining that stigma through heterosexist rhetoric and exclusionary policies. For change to happen and be effective, it must come from within. LGB affirming, heterosexual Christian clergy are arguably the most critical of the agents of change in this regard.

Conducting the interviews that yielded these findings was an extraordinary experience. It was truly inspiring to speak with these women and men who are spearheading change within their congregations and denominations related to LGB inclusion. The passion and compassion expressed by several clergy members in this study was quite powerful. Others spoke of the same vision, but with slightly less conviction and direction of purpose. In other words, in speaking with clergy, there seemed to be a fairly clear delineation between those clergy who were actively creating change and those who were hoping and waiting for change. What follows is an overview of specific findings, followed by a general summary and conclusions section, a description of the limitations and, lastly, implications for research and practice.
Overview of Findings

**Agents of change and their actions.** In terms of positioning themselves as allies, clergy spoke of having an open, inclusive and accepting stance toward all people and using the power of the pulpit to spread affirming messages. This statement was made very broadly by a few (e.g., open to all people) and narrowed and expressed with greater specificity to the LGB community by most (e.g., open and affirming of LGB parishioners in particular). This difference is subtle but important—the former reflects a culture-blind/culture-tolerant approach whereas the latter suggests a culture-witnessing/culture-celebrating stance. On both the issue of same-sex marriage and LGB ordination, clergy were united in their belief that barring LGB individuals from sacred rituals and religious occupations is an injustice and promotes a second-class citizenry in the church and larger society. Clergy also identified positive involvement with the LGB community and advocating at the denominational level to be key components of what it means to be LGB affirming.

All clergy described behaviors in which they engage to demonstrate their status as allies from the individual to the denominational level. Most participants, for example, had officiated at same-sex union ceremonies or LGB ordinations. Cadge and Wildeman (2008) found that a large proportion (80%) of their sample that had entered into congregational dialogue on the topic of homosexuality had also brought it up in sermons (p. 592). In the current study, all participants reported incorporating implicitly or explicitly affirming messages into sermons (with some also incorporating LGB specific affirming messages into spoken prayers).
Clergy described engagement in political action including voting to change denominational policies, writing petitions, speaking out, demonstrating, attending rallies and marching in gay-pride parades. They discussed participating in advocacy work at the congregational level such as writing welcoming and affirming mission statements, using inclusive language, educating potential new members about the affirming position of the pastor and congregation, holding discussion groups on the topic of LGB ordination, advertising the church’s inclusive position in newspaper ads, and providing parishioners with affirming literature. Regarding perception of their impact, results were mixed and dependent on the sphere of influence (i.e., clergy generally saw their affirming positions as having an impact in shaping their congregation’s stance and promoting congregational growth, but, typically, saw their stance as having less of an impact on the denomination or the larger Christian context).

Clergy represented in this study exist on a spectrum from what Cadge and Wildeman (2008) described as quiet advocates (claiming a personal pro-LGB inclusion stance that they gradually and subtly expressed to their congregants) to outward advocates (claiming a strong, overt and frequently expressed pro-LGB inclusion stance). Most participants (10 out of 13) would be considered outward advocates by Cadge and Wildeman’s standards. In their responses, they spoke with certainty and determination about the necessity of their mission to promote the well-being of LGB parishioners by fostering congregational and institutional changes toward inclusion, they provided explicit and detailed examples of how their advocacy manifests behaviorally and their answers included a nuanced understanding of the historical, cultural and political forces that have served to maintain heterosexism in religion and society.
The three participants who would be considered further toward the quiet advocate position on the Cadge and Wildeman (2008) spectrum displayed higher degrees of ambivalence regarding how, when and with whom they felt able to speak about their affirming views. These participants also described fewer and less public instances of LGB advocacy, gave interviews that were, on average, 15-30 minutes shorter, and scored the highest scores (20, 21 and 26) of all the participants on the ATLG-S. While still well within the range of “positive views toward gays and lesbians,” these numbers are between one and two standard deviations above the group mean indicating a greater degree of ambivalence regarding homosexuality than was typical of the rest of the sample (i.e., the group mean falls from 14.23 to 11.8 when these three data-points are removed).

This finding is compelling for two reasons. First, it suggests that a degree of bias, however slight, may be impacting how affirming some participants allow themselves to be or perceive they can be. Second, it implies that the sample is slightly less homogeneous in terms of degree of affirmation and extent of advocacy than might have been expected from individuals who all self-identified as LGB affirming based on the same criteria. This is one possible explanation for the presence of the large number of variant categories that emerged from the analysis.

As noted in Chapter IV, one item on the ATLG-S seemed to be slightly more problematic than most. While individual scores for each item generally varied from 1.1 to 1.6 (on a scale of 1-9, with 1 representing an extremely positive attitude and 9 representing an extremely negative attitude), the mean score on this item was 2.5. This item (ATLG-S #8) assesses to what degree participants agree that male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men. The higher mean score on this item suggests a
less positive attitude toward this question. This is in line with Herek’s (2000) finding that the heterosexual attitudes toward lesbians and gay men differ in intensity but not valance (i.e., where hostility is exhibited, it is greater when it comes to gay men in comparison to lesbians). In this sample, slightly less positivity was endorsed toward gay men than toward lesbians as a result of the elevations on this item.

Finally, LGB affirming female clergy outnumbered LGB affirming male clergy in this study (with women representing 56% of the sample and men representing 44%). This is noteworthy because, according to Lummis (2006), women comprise less than one-sixth of mainline Protestant clergy (p. 1). Why the overrepresentation of women in this study? As it turns out, female clergy are far more likely to be involved in advocacy efforts than their male counterparts. Female clergy have been especially involved in the promotion of groups that have been historically disadvantaged on the basis of race, sexual orientation, class and gender (Lummis, 2006; Olson, Crawford & Deckman, 2005). All female clergy participants would be considered “outward advocates.” By contrast, the three “quiet advocates” were male participants. This finding suggests that female clergy are more able and willing than their male counterparts to speak out on the issue of LGB inclusion. This likely has to do with the overlap of sexism and heterosexism and the lived experience of gender discrimination; the issues facing LGB individuals may resonate more deeply or more directly with women in a male dominated profession.

Developing and sustaining an affirming identity. Regarding development of an affirming identity, contributing experiences were far from formulaic. While it was typical for clergy to discuss messages that they had received from the culture and significant people in their lives while growing up, these messages were highly variable (i.e., tolerant
messages, intolerant messages, mixed), and some clergy reported the total absence of messages during their formative years. All clergy did, however, describe their affirming identity as likely growing out of a critical experience revolving something to do with the LGB community (e.g., close relationships with LGB individuals, close relationships with allies, educational experiences regarding homosexuality). Critical experiences mostly had to do with exposure to the pain caused by homophobia in society—either through direct contact, stories or education. Some critical experiences overlapped with the close interpersonal relationships category in-so-far as a few participants had the experience of having close friends, colleagues, family members and even significant others come out to them. Bogman (2009) found that relationships with LGB people, mentors and allies are central to the process of becoming a Christian ally. The current study underscores the importance of these components. These studies together support Allport’s (1954) intergroup contact theory that suggests prejudice can be reduced by interpersonal contact.

Also in line with Bogman (2009), exposure to other issues of diversity and oppression in the current study was perceived as having had an impact on the genesis of an LGB-affirming identity. Bogman found that Christians can be “moved toward growth as Christian allies of LGB people through direct and indirect experiences of discrimination and oppression.” (p. 515). Bogman also suggested that integration of one’s Christian identity and identity as an ally is a process that can involve conflict among identities, confusion, dissonance, questioning, exploration, redefinition of self and, ultimately, honoring of all aspects of identity. In the current study, some clergy spoke of their LGB-affirming identity as a “journey” that bore considerable resemblance to Bogman’s description of the process toward integration.
All clergy described having engaged to varying degrees in advocacy work beyond their LGB advocacy and commonly viewed advocacy as a central focus of their ministry. This finding suggests that the type of clergyperson who becomes an LGB advocate may be one who feels called to advocacy in general. Perhaps LGB advocacy, for such individuals, comes to be how that impetus gets lived out as a result of critical life experiences and/or relationships with LGB individuals. It is also possible that personality characteristics play a role (e.g., one participant spoke of being the type of person who moves in to fill a void and another spoke of having difficulty keeping his mouth shut).

Regarding factors that have sustained their LGB affirming stance despite the risks described in the literature as being highly prohibitive (i.e., dividing the congregation and putting career in jeopardy; Olson & Cadge, 2002), many clergy in this study spoke of experiencing significant and unexpected gains as a result of their LGB advocacy work. Far from dividing the congregation, there was a sense that having an LGB affirming stance had expanded opportunities for ministry by substantially increasing congregant numbers and by sending a message of unconditional acceptance to all—including those with other oppressed identities. Clergy found profound meaning in the ability to help people who had been spiritually wounded and oppressed and in bearing witness to changing attitudes toward the LGB community. There was a collective sense that these aforementioned gains outweighed the perceived costs—especially among the majority of participants who would be considered outward advocates in this sample (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008).

**Perceptions related to sexual orientation and inclusion.** To contextually ground the data from this sample, it is important to have a sense of how the participants
personally and theologically conceptualize sexual orientation, their perceptions of the spiritual needs that exist within the LGB community and their thoughts on how homosexuality/bisexuality has become such a divisive topic for Christians today. With regards to theology, clergy described approaching the debate from a number of different angles. Typically, this included reference to interpreting the bible through an affirming lens that takes into consideration the historical context surrounding the era in which it was written. In Cadge and Wildeman (2008) study, the same biblical approach was utilized by clergy advocates.

Clergy were also likely to reference one or more specific biblical passages. One passage that was cited repeatedly was the creation story. Clergy reflected on the logic that if all people are created in God's image and God saw all that was created as good, then all people must be good. Clergy who voiced concern regarding the popular notion that something in the bible alludes to homosexuality being "sinful" did so either via explanations about the lack of knowledge pertaining to homosexuality held by the authors of the bible or by reflecting on the interpretive approach to the bible.

Regarding personal conceptualization of sexual orientation, the primary and overarching finding was that clergy in this study viewed homosexuality as a natural, biologically influenced aspect of human development. This was stated in some capacity by every participant, making it one of the most robust findings to emerge from this study. That said; recall that a few participants struggled to some degree with this notion as it applies to gay men on the ATLG-S. These findings are incongruent and warrant further investigation. One possible explanation for this is that the wording of this particular ATLG-S question was problematic in some way. One participant wrote in the margin
next to the question, for example, "natural for some but not all men," indicating that this participant interpreted the statement as suggesting that male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in all men.

Regarding spiritual needs unique to LGB parishioners, it was typical for participants to state a belief that such needs do exist. These needs were perceived as resulting from culturally reinforced negation (i.e., historical oppression promulgated by both American and Christian culture) and being rooted in a desire for acceptance and healing (spiritual and emotional). As described in chapter IV, a few participants who stated a belief that unique needs do exist also stated that unique spiritual needs do not exist—presenting a counter argument to their position. There was one participant who rejected the idea that spiritual needs are unique and stated a belief that viewing them as such is part of the problem (i.e., a culture-blind approach).

The question that qualitatively aroused the most strongly-worded and emotional responses from participants pertained to how bias against the LGB community has become part of the fabric of Christianity in the United States. Clergy discussed the role of political, ideological and historical factors and the role of fear (i.e., fear of sexuality and fear of things a person does not understand). This echoes Cadge and Wildeman's (2008) finding that fear was reported by clergy to be the primary source of conflict in the debate over homosexuality within their congregations—"fear of sexuality, of gay and lesbian people, of misinterpreting scripture and of the unknown." (p. 593) Clergy in the current study also placed responsibility on the predominant Christian culture's literalistic approach to the biblical interpretation and offered a connection between heterosexism
Managing an affirming identity in a non-affirming denomination. In describing their denominational policies and the personal feelings and opinions these policies evoke, clergy typically voiced a strong opinion that their denomination's position is unjust (e.g., "a tragic error of selective biblical literacy," "not theologically, biblically or humanly justifiable") and spoke of feeling hopeful that policy changes were in the works. It was speculated that the policies fail to represent the views of all or most clergy within the denomination. Whether true or not, holding these beliefs—that one is working on the side of justice, that one is part of a movement already well underway, that one is among like-minded individuals—may serve to ameliorate some of the anxiety inherent in being an affirming person in a non-affirming context.

But what happens to LGB affirming clergy when directly confronted with bias against the LGB community? When working for a non-affirming denomination, it would stand to reason that such an occurrence would not be uncommon. Three tactics for dealing with this occurrence were described: confronting the bias directly, engaging in a compassionate dialogue and avoiding the conversation. All of these categories were able to emerge on a typical basis (despite being at least partially contradictory) because a single participant could theoretically have endorsed all three tactics as each could pertain to different circumstances (e.g., utilizing different tactics with parishioners than with other members of the clergy).

Regarding confrontation, participants were much more likely to report directly confronting colleagues than parishioners. Colleagues that were confronted included other
clergy and superiors, but, typically, participants stated that a need to confront a superior had not arisen because the majority of superiors were like-minded on the issue of LGB inclusion. Some clergy reported opting for an "agree to disagree" tactic in the event that an impasse was reached.

Compassionate conversations were, by and large, the preferred modality for dealing with parishioners who expressed bias. This method was occasionally used with other clergy as well. For more than half the clergy who endorsed engaging in compassionate conversations, a strong emphasis was placed on the act of listening (e.g., listening for the pain or fear that is associated with the bias). Others capitalized on the principles of Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory by humanizing or personalizing the issue through exposure to real LGB people and/or their stories.

Avoiding the conversation altogether was described as a tactic utilized with some parishioners, family members and acquaintances with whom the issue would likely become too contentious. Along these lines, clergy were also asked to speak about purposeful abstentions from advocacy. Participants typically described abstaining if they sensed the message would not be received or would result in discomfort or discord. Abstention was also likely if participants believed that it could be strategically beneficial in forwarding their LGB affirming mission in some way. Examples of the latter included exercising caution regarding talking about LGB issues excessively, making tactical decisions based on timing of an advocacy intervention, and removing oneself so that new advocates could take on more responsibility. In all, five clergy boldly stated that there are no circumstances in which they hold back their affirming viewpoint.
What is the cost of being an LGB affirming clergyperson in a non-affirming denomination? Costs and potential costs were viewed as being both personal and professional in nature. Professional costs that were cited included damaged relationships with some parishioners that caused them to become distant or to leave the church, being targeted by the denomination for disciplinary action, and the congregation facing negative consequences. Regarding damaged relationships with parishioners, clergy tended to focus on the departure of people who had expressed clear opposition to their viewpoint as a loss, but to not reflect on the more subtle estrangements of parishioners who might be struggling with the issue but keeping their thoughts to themselves as a loss. In other words, perhaps some parishioners withdrew on some level while not leaving the church completely. It seems that the breakdown in communication with these parishioners might be a cost of which clergy are not aware.

Personal costs included feeling negative emotions (e.g., discomfort, impatience, discouragement, frustration), spending significant amounts of time and energy on advocacy efforts, and worrying about the potential impact that their work as an advocate could have on family members. Costs were frequently downplayed and four participants even stated that costs, if present at all, had been minimal.

The ten clergy who endorsed the most favorable views towards gays and lesbians (as evidenced by scores between 10 and 16 on the ATLG-S) also provided the most pronounced examples of advocacy behaviors, described having the sharpest increases in reported congregational growth and provided the most meaningful examples of direct involvement with the LGB community. In other words, clergy who espoused and exemplified the most positive attitudes toward the LGB community and took the greatest
chances also described reaping the greatest benefits from their actions. At least three of
these clergy also endured significant hardship in terms of facing sanctions and being
penalized by their denominations.

Yet, if anything, this appears only to have catalyzed and refocused their efforts in
terms of fostering systemic change beyond the congregational level. It is worth
mentioning that none of these highly vocal, visible advocates lost their jobs or were
stripped of their credentials permanently. Likewise, none of the participants spoke of this
issue dividing their congregations—rather, many spoke of significant congregational
growth. These findings suggest that the common reasons given for holding back from
becoming overtly affirming (dividing the congregation and jeopardizing careers; Olson &
Cadge, 2002) may be less of a threat, at least within mainline Protestantism, than is
feared.

Summary and Conclusions

This study illustrated the presence of a subset of Christian clergy who are allies of
the LGB community and invested in creating changes in their churches, denominations
and communities toward the end of making them more affirming and inclusive. As
leaders within a faith community that has historically set up barriers to the LGB
community, these men and women are in a unique position to create change from within
that may have far-reaching implications. The findings expand on previous studies that
have documented the presence (Jones & Cox, 2009; Olson & Cadge, 2002; Thumma &
Gray, 2005) and some of the behavioral patterns (Cadge & Wildeman, 2008) of LGB
affirming Christian clergy by providing a more detailed exploration of the factors that
fostered the development of their worldviews, the behavioral manifestation of their
advocacy, the conditions that have sustained their efforts, and the practices they have implemented in order to manage their potentially conflicting roles as clergy and allies.

Limitations

This study has the limitations inherent in qualitative research (e.g., small sample-size, limited generalizability, limited scope of inquiry; Ponterotto, 2005). The findings of this study are specific to a narrow subset of Christian clergy (i.e., mainline Protestant) and ability to extrapolate the findings to clerical leaders of other religious faiths or even other denominational families (e.g., Evangelical, Catholic) within the Christian faith is minimal. The sample size, while robust for the methodology, limits generalizability even within mainline Protestantism.

Another limitation of this study is the focus on issues related to the LGB community exclusively (as opposed to LGBTQII). The study was limited to affirming clergy’s handling of LGB inclusion/exclusion because oppressive religious policies have focused almost exclusively on homosexual behavior, rather than on sexuality and gender as identities. The lack of clear denominational language pertaining to the inclusion/exclusion of gender divergent persons provides a major contrast to the clear, specific messages that pertain to homosexuality. Extrapolation of the religious inclusion/exclusion issues facing the larger community of sexual minorities should be considered tenuous at best.

That clergy did not speak about their own sexuality and experiences with internalized homophobia is also a limitation. While all participants identified as heterosexual, personal accounts of learning about the existence of homosexuality and how this was processed in terms of their own identity as a sexual being from a
developmental perspective was not described. Future studies might consider asking about this directly (e.g., how did the journey toward becoming an ally play out in terms of understanding yourself and your own sexuality).

Regarding other methodological limitations, providing participants with a copy of the research protocol prior to interview paved the way for a richer data collection (i.e., because participant’s had time to reflect on the questions), but this CQR practice also runs the risk of biasing participant responses (Stahl, Hill, Jacobs, Kleinman, Isenberg & Stern, 2009). Another bias to consider is that of self-selection (i.e., results may not be representative of the LGB affirming clergy who chose not to participate). Various factors related to personality and world-view may have impacted some participants to participate over others. Also, because a snowball sampling technique was utilized, many people who might have opted to be interviewed may not have been aware of the study at all.

Finally, it is possible that this study reflects to some degree the biases and expectations of the research team. The research team was vigilant throughout the analysis to keep biases in check through discussions and careful attention to the consensual process of interpretation. The presence of an auditor greatly assisted in the reduction of the bias that can result from group-think, but results should be interpreted in light of the bias/expectations discussion detailed in Chapter III nonetheless.

Implications for Research and Practice

Prior research has illustrated that having an affirming faith experience can positively impact the mental health of LGB individuals who hold religious convictions (Lease, Horne & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Rodrigues & Oullette, 2000; Thumma & Gray, 2005) and that negative interactions can contribute to poor mental health outcomes
(Allen & Oleson, 1999; Lease et al., 2005; Nicholson & Long 1990; Rodriguez & Oullette 2000; Ross and Rosser, 1996). It has also been suggested that affirming faith experiences facilitated by clergy are likely to have a more significant impact than those facilitated by non-clergy (Heerman, Wiggins & Rutter, 2007). The current study illustrates that LGB affirming clergy perceive themselves as having a positive impact on the LGB Christian community through affirmation and advocacy efforts.

In psychotherapeutic terms, when long-standing suffering is emotionally processed and a catharsis is experienced by the client within the context of the therapeutic relationship, it is a phenomenon referred to as a “corrective emotional experience” (Alexander, 1946). Clergy who affirm and seek to provide healing for people who have been negated and oppressed by intolerant religious messages and practices are providing a spiritual version of this process: a corrective spiritual experience. This study provides information about this corrective process from the vantage point of religious leaders. Future inquiry could explore the phenomenon of the corrective spiritual experience from the perspective of the LGB parishioner. More specifically, future studies might explore how LGB parishioners experience the affirmation and advocacy efforts of their ministers and/or what impact it has had on their daily lives, identity integration and/or spirituality?

Equally worthy of investigation is the experience of lesbian, gay and bisexual clergy who work within denominations where they are technically prohibited. Several clergy who contributed to this study made reference to LGB clergy friends who are able to work within denominations with exclusionary policies through loopholes in policies, by keeping their sexual orientation a secret, or by coming out after ordination and working within a highly progressive regional jurisdiction. During the recruitment for this
study, two mainline Protestant ministers who identified themselves as gay expressed interest in being interviewed. As this was a study of straight clergy allies, they could not be included, but the experience of LGB clergy warrants its own investigation. Also, as was mentioned previously in this chapter, LGB affirming female clergy outnumbered LGB affirming male clergy in this study. It was speculated that this was because female clergy have been especially involved in the promotion of groups that have been historically disadvantaged on the basis of race, sexual orientation, class and gender (Lummis, 2006; Olson, Crawford & Deckman, 2005). A future study might focus more specifically on the experiences of LGB affirming female clergy vis-à-vis the connection between sexism and heterosexism in the Christian faith.

Regarding practice, the nexus of religion and psychology is an area rich with potential harmonies and conflicts. As described by Fischer and DeBord (2007), there is a perceived conflict in the field of counseling psychology between affirming both sexual diversity and affirming the religious diversity of all groups—even those who denote homosexuality. Ethical and training guidelines do not clearly indicate how to address this conflict and, perhaps because it is so socially and politically divisive, research has been extraordinarily limited. One example cited by Fischer and DeBord is the situation that arises when a trainee states that he or she cannot work with LGB individuals because he or she holds the religious conviction that homosexuality is a sin (p. 321). This is a thorny training issue that requires scholarly and clinical attention. This study was conducted in part to gather a new perspective on this conflict from a subset of the religious sphere that is deeply committed to the LGB community—despite indoctrinated messages that might have influenced them otherwise.
A major theme that emerged from this study was the importance of contact with the LGB community. This concept dates back to Allport's (1954) intergroup contact theory and has been most recently explored in the context of Christian ally development by Bogman (2009). The power of this intervention in terms of helping trainees think through the instilled prejudices held regarding the LGB community should not be underestimated. Another lesson gleaned from this study is the notion of staying in a compassionate dialogue with people who may disagree with the positions of LGB affirming practitioners and researchers. As described by Rev. Roberts, "My ongoing message is, stay in the relationship. You get to disagree, but you stay in the relationship."

Finally, mental health providers are likely to encounter lesbian, gay and bisexual clients who are struggling with issues of identity and belonging—especially if they have been raised within a religious tradition that is unsupportive or even hostile. Some LGB clients may come to therapy with the hope of reconciling their sexual orientation with their religious identity. This study can be used as a tool and an example to demonstrate that there are members of the clergy who believe that LGB and religious identities need not be mutually exclusive. The clergy interviewed for this study exhibited a nuanced, progressive and informed understanding of human sexuality and its juxtaposition with Christian faith and doctrine. Bringing these affirming positions to the attention of Christian clients who are struggling with concerns regarding faith and sexuality may foster an additional perspective and provide a new source of support.
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Presbyterian Church, USA, (1980) Minutes of the 120th General Assembly [recognized as an authoritative interpretation of the Presbyterian Church, USA Constitution in 1993], p. 213.


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Appendix A
Dear Friend,

I am writing to invite you to be part of a study that I am undertaking to examine the experiences of church leaders who consider themselves to be supporters of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) community.

The aim of this study is to explore the thoughts, feelings, influences, motives and actions of LGB-affirming religious leaders, specifically those of Christian clergy within denominations that—though the denomination may be deeply divided on the issues—have formally adopted policies which may be perceived by society as exclusionary pertaining to LGB ordination, membership/leadership within the church, and/or marriage. In other words, this is a study of the clergy whose views may be in tension with the official positions of their governing bodies regarding LGB inclusion as well as an exploration of the methods they employ to foster change from within.

Eligibility for this study includes self-identification as an LGB-affirming, heterosexual, ordained member of the clergy currently serving a congregation within a denomination with at least one policy that limits LGB involvement in the life of the church (i.e., membership, marriage and/or ordination exclusions). Clergy who are LGB-affirming are defined for the purpose of this study as those who (1) openly welcome LGB individuals into their congregations, (2) disagree with denominational rulings that restrict gays and lesbians from marrying and being ordained, (3) address the religious and spiritual needs unique to the LGB community, and (4) engage in social advocacy activities that are geared toward reducing bias against the LGB community.

This study entails completing two brief surveys (requiring less than 5 minutes) and engaging in a 45-60 minute interview (with questions provided ahead of time). Information regarding the safeguards that will be enacted to protect your confidentiality, in addition to further details about this study, can be found in the more extensive “letter of solicitation” attached to this e-mail.

If you are willing to participate in this study or have questions about it, please contact me via e-mail deweyjuil@shu.edu or by telephone at 917-971-5263. If you are unable to participate but know of others who might be eligible, kindly consider forwarding this e-mail to them.

Thank you very much for your time.

Jane Dewey, M.A.
Counseling Psychology Ph.D. Program
Seton Hall University
Appendix B
Dear Participant,

I am a Counseling Psychology doctoral student in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

For my dissertation, I am conducting a qualitative research study exploring the thoughts, feelings, influences, motives and actions of LGB-affirming religious leaders, specifically those of Christian clergy within denominations that—though the denomination may be deeply divided on the issues—have formally adopted policies which may be perceived by society as exclusionary pertaining to LGB ordination, membership/leadership within the church, and/or marriage. In other words, this is a study of the clergy whose views may be in tension with the official positions of their governing bodies regarding LGB inclusion as well as an exploration of the methods they employ to foster change from within.

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Participation in the study entails engaging in a telephone interview that should last approximately 45-60 minutes and completing two short surveys (a demographic questionnaire and the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men - Short Form). These forms will take less than 5 minutes to complete. Several safeguards will be taken to protect your identity. Although the interview will be audio-taped to ensure accuracy of the content, your name will not be used during the interview. The interview tape will be transcribed, and any identifying information will be deleted at that time. The audiotape will be kept in a secure location, and only the primary investigator of the project will have access to the tape. The audiotape will be destroyed after data analysis is completed. Furthermore, the transcripts will be stored electronically on a USB memory key and locked in a secure physical site to which only the primary researcher will have access.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You have the right to not answer every question or to discontinue your participation at any time. You have the right to withdraw your interview even after it has taken place; we will respectfully destroy your audiotape and transcript and we will not include anything that you have said in the analysis. Should you decide not to participate, this will have no effect on your current status or future relations with Seton Hall University or the Department of Professional

Formal Letter of Solicitation

Dear Participant,

I am a Counseling Psychology doctoral student in the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy in the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

For my dissertation, I am conducting a qualitative research study exploring the thoughts, feelings, influences, motives and actions of LGB-affirming religious leaders, specifically those of Christian clergy within denominations that—though the denomination may be deeply divided on the issues—have formally adopted policies which may be perceived by society as exclusionary pertaining to LGB ordination, membership/leadership within the church, and/or marriage. In other words, this is a study of the clergy whose views may be in tension with the official positions of their governing bodies regarding LGB inclusion as well as an exploration of the methods they employ to foster change from within.

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Psychology and Family Therapy. Participation is not expected to cause any harm outside of what is normally experienced in everyday life.

I believe that a study of this nature might inspire members of the clergy who are quietly LGB-friendly to be more affirming in their words and actions. More importantly, this study may introduce some members of the LGB community—who may be grappling with religious faith conflict—to the notion that there are members of the clergy who believe that LGB and religious identities need not be mutually exclusive.

If you agree to participate, a packet including the surveys, this letter and an informed consent document will be mailed to you along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Your consent to participate is indicated by signing the informed consent document and returning it in the self-addressed, stamped envelope that will be enclosed in the mailing. Please also complete and return the two questionnaires included in the mailing. Thank you very much for the gift of your time and for your willingness to share your experience.

Sincerely,

J. Jane H. Dewey, MA
Doctoral Student
PPFT, Counseling Psychology
Seton Hall University

Lewis Z. Schlosser, Ph.D., ABPP
Associate Professor
PPFT, Counseling Psychology
Seton Hall University
Demographic Information

1. Please indicate your age: __________
2. Please indicate your highest educational degree: ____________________________
3. Please identify your racial identity: ________________________
4. Please identify your ethnic identity: ________________________
5. Please identify your sexual orientation: ________________________
6. Please identify your gender: ________________________
7. Please circle your current relationship status:
   Married    Single    Divorced    Separated    Partnered
   Widowed
8. Please indicate the religious affiliation of your upbringing: ________________________
9. Please indicate the Christian denomination of your ordination: ________________________
10. Please indicate your age at ordination: ________________________
11. How many years have you been serving your current congregations? __________
12. To your knowledge, are there gay, lesbian or bisexual? (circle your answer)
    YES          NO
    If YES, approximately how many parishioners identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual? ______
Interview Questions

1. What does it mean to be LGB-affirming in your way of thinking?

2. How did you come to be LGB-affirming in both your personal life and your life as a religious leader? (Probes: What life experiences contributed to your perspective? What messages—whether negative or positive— did you get from your parents and other significant people in your life pertaining to the LGB community?)

3. In what other social advocacy activities have you been engaged? (Probe: On a scale of 1-10, how central is advocacy to your work as a minister/pastor/priest? What does the word advocacy mean to you?)

4. What is your understanding of your denomination’s current position pertaining to homosexuality, and how do you feel about that position? (Probes: What is your personal position on gay and lesbian marriage? How would you feel if you were called upon to perform a gay or lesbian marriage ceremony? What is your personal position on gay and lesbian ordination? To what extent do you advocate for gay marriage and/or gay ordination?)

5. What is the theological grounding of your viewpoint?

6. What have been the costs/gains for you as a result of being LGB-affirming?

7. In what specific ways have you been an LGB advocate? (Probes: Within the church? Within the larger community? To your knowledge, are there lesbian, gay or bisexual individuals within your church? How do LGB parishioners know that you are available to help with their unique spiritual needs? How have you incorporated this message into your sermons or homilies? In what situations do you tend to hold back?)

8. How do you negotiate situations in which you are confronted with bias against gay people from fellow members of clergy? (Probes: Give an example of a situation that you have faced. How have you challenged your less gay-friendly or even anti-gay colleagues?)
9. How have you approached dealing with superiors who disagree with your position?

10. How have you dealt with parishioners who have expressed disagreement with your viewpoint?

11. What impact do you believe your stance is having on your congregation? (Probes: Your denomination? The larger context of Christianity? American Society?)

12. What impact might this stance have on the larger context of Christianity in the U.S. (Probe: How is it that bias against the LGB community has become part of the fabric of Christianity in this country?)

13. Is there anything I have not asked about that you had hoped to discuss regarding this issue? Any concluding thoughts?
Appendix E
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men – Short Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Lesbians just can’t fit into our society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. State laws against private sexual behavior between consenting adult women should be abolished.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Female homosexuality is a sin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Female homosexuality in itself is no problem unless society makes it a problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Lesbians are sick.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I think male homosexuals are disgusting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Male homosexuality is a perversion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Male homosexuality is a natural expression of sexuality in men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Sex between two men is just plain wrong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Male homosexuality is merely a different kind of lifestyle that should not be condemned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree  2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F
Informed Consent

Researcher’s Affiliation
The researcher is a graduate student in the department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy within the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University. She has completed requisite coursework for a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology and is currently working on her dissertation.

Purpose and Duration of Study
This research study will explore the experiences, beliefs, actions and role-management strategies of Christian clergy who identify as allies of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) community (i.e., LGB-affirming clergy) and are ordained and working for a Christian denomination with at least one policy that limits LGB involvement in the life of the church (i.e., membership, marriage and/or ordination exclusions). Participants will spend approximately 60 minutes of their time for the purpose of this study.

Procedures
The researcher will interview the participants over the telephone, tape-record and transcribe the interview for analysis. Participation consists of engaging in a 45-60 minute audio-taped interview and returning a basic demographic questionnaire and short survey questionnaire called the Attitudes Toward Gay Men and Lesbians Inventory - short form (ATGL-S).

Survey Instruments
Instruments to be utilized are a demographic questionnaire, a survey questionnaire called the Attitudes toward Lesbians and Gay Men Scale (Short Form), and the oral interview questionnaire.

Voluntary Nature of Participation
Participation in this project is completely voluntary. Participants will not suffer any negative consequences if they decide not to participate. Participants have the right to not answer every question or to withdraw their participation at any time. A decision not to participate or a withdrawal of consent during or after the interview process will have no effect on the participant’s current status or future relations with Seton Hall University, the College of Education and Human Services or the Department of Professional Psychology and Family Therapy.

Anonymity
Several safeguards will be taken to protect the identity of participants. Although the interview will be audio-taped to ensure accuracy of content, names will not be recorded or spoken on the tape. Also, no formal names of people or places will be used in the transcript.

Confidentiality
This study guarantees confidentiality. The results from this study may be published in a professional journal or in a government grant application, but participants will not be identified. Name and identifying information will not be asked at anytime during the interview. If names are spoken at any time, special care will be taken to de-identify the transcript. Additionally, the transcript will be stored electronically only on a USB memory key and locked in a secure physical site to which only the primary investigator will have access.

Extent of Confidentiality
Under no circumstances will identifying information be released to anyone.
Risks or Discomforts
Participation is not expected to cause any harm or discomfort outside of what is normally encountered in daily life.

Direct Benefits
No direct benefits are anticipated. Potential indirect benefits include: (1) being able to share one’s voice and the potential of that voice impacting other quietly LGB-friendly clergy who might be inspired to be more openly LGB-affirming and (2) being able to send a message to LGB Christians that there are members of the clergy who advocate for them and belief that an LGB and Christian identity can both be celebrated and need not be mutually exclusive.

Remuneration
Subjects to this study will not receive any form of remuneration.

Contact Information
The primary researcher for this study is J. Jane H. Dewey (917-971-5263; deweyjul@shu.edu). The researcher’s advisor is Dr. Lewis Z. Schlosser (973-275-2503; schlosle@shu.edu). The institutional Review Board (IRB) believes that the procedures of this study adequately safeguard the privacy, welfare, civil liberties and rights of the participants. The Chairperson of the IRB may be reached at 973-313-6314.

Audio Tapes
The interview will be audio-taped to ensure accuracy of the content, but participants will be identified only by a code number to protect anonymity. The audiotapes will be kept in a secure location to which only the primary researcher will have access. The audiotapes will be destroyed after data analysis is complete. Should a participant wish to withdraw an interview after completion, the audiotape and transcript will not be included in the study. Permission to be recorded must be granted by the subject in writing prior to the interview.

Informed Consent
By signing and dating this form as indicated below, you are consenting to participate in this research study and to having your interview audio-taped.

Signature ___________________________ Date ________

*Participants are to be given a copy of the signed and dated informed consent prior to the start of research.