

# EDIFICATION

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OF CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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# EDIFICATION

THE TRANSDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN PSYCHOLOGY

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## EDIFICATION

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### Manuscript Submission

Edification encourages scholars from all disciplines to submit research papers relevant to Christian Psychology. Manuscripts should use Microsoft Word software and should follow the current style guidelines of the American Psychological Association. Papers should be submitted as an attachment to an email addressed to the current Executive Editor at paul-watson@utc.edu. In the accompanying email, the author should guarantee that the attached manuscript has not been previously published and that it is not under concurrent review by another journal.

# Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies

Mark A. Yarhouse

Regent University

*In this article, the author discusses his experiences as an evangelical Christian in gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) studies. The article opens with a discussion of modes of relating religion and science: critical-evaluative, constructive, and dialogical. Applications are then made to discussions of Christianity and GLB studies in psychology. Following examples of scholarship and experiences in each of these modes of relating, the author discusses several challenges faced by evangelical Christian working in GLB studies, as well as lessons learned.*

When I was asked to reflect on what it is like to work as an evangelical Christian in gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) studies, I was reminded of the idiom, “It’s like placing a round peg in a square hole.”<sup>1</sup> This phrase brings to mind images of something that just does not fit, does not belong. Readers may be aware that the phrase “fitting a round peg into a square hole” dates to 1800 and the use of trunnels or “tree nails” which were used to build bridges and frame houses and were widely used in shipbuilding (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/trunnels>). A trunnel is a wooden peg which was cut square and pounded into a round hole. Today the phrase refers to being a *fish out of water* – being in a situation in which one feels *out of place*.

So is an evangelical Christian in GLB studies a *fish out of water*, which is the current association, or does the arrangement in some way reflect the original meaning of the word? Perhaps the fit is difficult at times, but the difficult fit is a genuine reflection of the nature of the materials that suits a specific purpose that would not be gained through other means.

In any case, I do believe that conservative or evangelical Christians ought to be involved in GLB studies. My rationale takes me back to what it means to be a Christian in the field of psychology. The approach to integration that initially started me on this path was one of the first and most influential articles on integration I read in graduate school. It was Alvin Plantinga’s inaugural address in 1983 as the John A. O’Brien Professor of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame titled “Advice to Christian Philosophers.” In that address, Plantinga (1984) shared that Christian philosophers have an obligation to the Christian community to be the philosophers of the Christian community. In our minds as young graduate students we were substituting the field of *philosophy* with that of *psychology*:

Christian [psychologists] ... are the [psychologists] of the Christian community; and it is part of their task as Christian [psychologists] to serve the Christian community. But the Christian community has its own questions, its own concerns, its own topics for investigation, its own agenda and its own research programs. (Plantinga, p. 6)

What struck me most about Plantinga’s call was the idea that Christians in the field of psychology have their own questions to ask, their own topics to address. We cannot expect non-Christian psychologists<sup>2</sup> to ask about or care about the questions, topics, and research agendas that Christians care about. So we have to be in the field doing the work. In my view, Christians may not be focusing on GLB issues, but there will certainly be benefits to focusing on the issues that face Christians who are sorting out questions pertaining to their sexual identity.

This raises the question of how Christians ought to be relating their faith to the field of psychology. If there are questions that are important to address for the Christian in GLB studies, how ought the Christian approach the field to address those questions?

## Modes of Relating Religion and Science

In his analysis of the relationship between religion and science, Jones (1994) gave examples of three constructive modes of relating religion and psychology: the *critical-evaluative*, *constructive*, and *dialogical modes*.<sup>3</sup> The critical-evaluative mode of functioning exists when “social scientific theories and paradigms are examined and evaluated by the individual scientist for their fit with his or her religious presuppositions” (p. 194). For example, Van Leeuwen (2002) critiqued some aspects of evolutionary psychology and its claims regarding human sexuality and sexual behavior. She

recognized the potential value in the paradigm, but raised concerns about the absolute reductionism found in evolutionary psychology.

The *constructive* mode of relating science and religion occurs when religious presuppositions are brought to science in ways that influence or even transform a field because of new ideas and interpretations of data (Jones, 1994). Jones notes that traditional religious systems have yet to offer any “major productive scientific paradigms” (p. 194) within psychology; however, a number of less ambitious yet certainly constructive advances have been made in conceptual and empirical studies of human sexuality. Examples of a constructive mode are premised upon different assumptions about the nature of reality. It is possible that religiously-informed scientific scholarship may lead to empirically fruitful approaches to nagging problems in the field.

The third form of interaction between science and religion is what Jones (1994) refers to as the *dialogical* mode, which is essentially religion and science in dialogue with one another. Neither religion nor science should simply dictate terms to the other. Jones reminds us that it is not his intention to simply privilege religion over science; rather, his concern is to see both religion and science as different yet complementary approaches to human experience. From this perspective, while religion may influence the scientific enterprise, so too advances in science influence religion. In the study of human sexuality a dialogical approach to religion and science involves recognizing an ongoing dialogue between these two different but complementary and overlapping approaches to understanding human experience. The dialogue also leads to empirically-verifiable hypotheses, so that findings from science inform religious thought (and vice versa) on a variety of topics in human sexuality.

My focus in the early stages of my career was the critical-evaluative mode of relating. The book I co-authored with Stanton, Jones entitled *Homosexuality: The use of scientific research in the church's moral debate*, is an example of this (Jones & Yarhouse, 2000). We examined the nature of the argument that was advanced in many mainline Christian denominational sexuality study groups. Specifically, we looked at the misuse of science in the four areas of (a) prevalence estimates, (b) etiology of homosexuality, (c) status as a psychopathology (including mental health correlates), and (d) change of sexual orientation. The arguments cited in these four areas were intended to move Christians in mainline denominations away from their historical teaching on human sexuality generally and homosexuality specifically. What we found as we examined first the documents and then the science was that the argument was based upon a misuse of science. We also closed this book with a broad framework for a Chris-

tian theology of human sexuality.

Much of this critique was really an outworking of my earlier relationship with Stan and the work we had begun when I was a student and research assistant for him at Wheaton College. The first significant, independent professional step I took actually brought me into the *dialogical* mode with some members of the GLB community in psychology. It goes back a few years to when I was attending the American Psychological Association's (APA) annual meeting in Boston. I had the opportunity to sit in on a session by Ariel Shidlo and Michael Schroeder, two gay researchers who had recently completed a study of “consumers” of sexual reorientation therapy. Shidlo and Schroeder were suggesting that such therapy is harmful to unsuspecting and vulnerable clients. That session was moderated by Douglas Haldeman, a past president of the APA division interested in GLB issues in psychology. Later that day, I ran into Doug Haldeman and felt a strong sense that I should approach him about a dialogue on clinical services for people who are sorting out sexual identity issues in light of their religious beliefs and values. Although he seemed skeptical at first, he indicated he was open to exploring the possibility of dialogue.

It took a full year to not only propose a balanced symposium with two GLB psychologists and two conservative Christian mental health professionals, but also to set the stage for a respectful dialogue. We agreed to several principles that would allow us to model mutual respect to an audience that might be anticipating a fight reminiscent of an episode of *Jerry Springer*. In any case, we were able to successfully hold the symposium (Yarhouse, 2000) and model the very respect we all committed ourselves to in advance. Details of the symposium were actually covered in a news article in which this desire for respect and professionalism was noted (<http://www.narth.com/docs/commonground.html>; for the interested reader, an update on the dialogue was published approximately five years after the initial symposium; see Brooke, 2005).

The success of that exchange led to several other similar symposia at APA. For example, a couple of years later I chaired a symposium on clinical services for adolescents sorting out sexual identity questions (Yarhouse, 2004), as well as a symposium on the meaning of marriage to various religions around the world and to various groups within the GLB community (Yarhouse, 2005). This came from an understanding that there was much more diversity within the GLB community on the subject of same-sex marriage that is commonly believed. The most recent dialogue (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2007) was over a newly-proposed Sexual Identity Therapy Framework (<http://sit-framework.com/>) as a middle ground therapy option

between the two often-polarized positions of sexual reorientation therapy and gay affirmative (or gay integrative) therapy.

Each of these symposia took the same form with representative voices on both “sides” looking for areas of common ground and doing so in the spirit of mutuality and respect. Many of these exchanges were later published in peer-reviewed journals (e.g., Haldeman, 2002; Shidlo & Shroeder, 2002; Throckmorton, 2002; Yarhouse & Burkett, 2002; Yarhouse & Nowacki-Butzen, 2007; Yarhouse & Tan, 2006). The work on Sexual Identity Therapy (e.g., Throckmorton & Yarhouse, 2006; Yarhouse, 2008) was cited favorably in the recent Report of the APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (2009) as one of several models (see also, Beckstead & Israel, 2007; Glassgold, 2008; Haldeman, 2004) for working with sexual minorities who are distressed due to the conflict they experience between their religious identity and sexual identity.

Although I continue to participate in these dialogues, I have also begun to shift into a *constructive* mode of relating Christianity and GLB studies. This was an intentional step beyond the change of sexual orientation debate. Based upon my clinical experience in this area, I began to examine the construct of sexual identity or the act of labeling oneself as gay (as well as other identity labels including straight, bi, bi-curious, lesbian, queer, questioning, curious, other, and so on). My work in this area began with a critique (Yarhouse, 2001) of the existing theories and models of sexual identity development (e.g., Cass, 1979; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Troiden, 1979), as well as how they were being presented in the literature (e.g., McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Reynolds & Hanjorgiris, 2000). This led to the question: *What about those who experience same-sex attraction but do not identify themselves as “gay”?*

It became clear to me that the act of labeling involves attributions about what sexual attractions *mean* to people. On the one hand, sexual identity is merely the act of labeling oneself. This act of labeling is both public (how others view the person) and private (how the person views him or herself). But the decision to form one’s identity with reference to attractions and to experience these as central to who one is *as a person* may be influenced by several factors, including one’s *biological sex* (whether a person was born male or female), *gender identity* (how masculine or feminine a person feels), *attractions* (the amount and intensity of same- and/or opposite-sex attractions), *intentions* (what a person intends to do with the attractions he or she has), *behaviors* (what a person actually does with the attractions he or she has), and *valuative frameworks* (personal and/or religious beliefs and values and

formed judgments about sexuality and sexual expression) (Yarhouse, 2001). There may be many factors that contribute to the act of labeling, and people can reflect on what is “trump” for them with respect to their decision to label themselves one way or another.

If attractions do not necessarily signal an identity, it became clear that there was an important distinction to be made between sexual attractions, a homosexual orientation, and a gay identity (Yarhouse, 2005). This “three-tier distinction” moves from descriptive to prescriptive, by which I mean that talking about same-sex attractions is a descriptive account of a person’s experiences: “I experience sexual attraction to the same sex.” Personal identity is still subject to further reflection. Similarly, a homosexual orientation reflects a person’s account of the degree and persistence of same-sex attractions. If a person has a sufficient amount of attraction toward the same sex, and if that attraction is experienced as enduring, a person might say: “I have a homosexual orientation.” Of course, a person could describe him or herself as homosexual: “I am a homosexual,” which suggests more qualities we associate with identity rather than mere description. In any case, the final tier in the three-tier distinction is a gay identity. A gay identity reflects a modern sociocultural movement that has formed an identity around experiences of same-sex attraction. It is not merely a synonym for attractions to the same sex, although some people might talk about it that way. Rather, “I am gay” is a self-defining attribution that reflects this sociocultural movement.

The focus of my research, then, has been sexual identity rather than orientation as such. From my perspective, a focus on orientation can mistakenly assume that the traditional Christian sexual ethic in some way hinges on the causes of homosexuality and whether a homosexual orientation can change. Sexual identity, in contrast, focuses the discussion on an endpoint by bringing to the foreground patterns of behavior and an identity that reflects that over time. Many of the people I work with are conservative Christians, and from that perspective, some might argue that identity speaks to what we treasure, and of whose kingdom we are a part. Dallas Willard (1998) is relevant here as he makes a distinction between what it is people have a say over: “We were made to ‘have dominion’ within appropriate domains of reality... Our ‘kingdom’ is simply the range of our effective will. Whatever we genuinely have say over is in our kingdom” (p. 21).

It may be helpful, then, to distinguish between what is in a person’s effective will. The experience of same-sex attraction is not in a person’s effective will, at least not in the same way as behavior and identity is. Most people I have met who are sorting out sexual identity questions *find themselves* attracted to the same

sex; they did not choose to experience same-sex attractions. What they are choosing is whether or not to integrate their experiences of attractions into a gay identity.

This led to an initial theoretical contribution (Yarhouse, 2001) in which I suggested a five-stage model of sexual identity development that considered the role of personal and religious moral evaluative frameworks on sexual identity development: *identity confusion*, *identity attribution*, *identity foreclosure versus expanded identity*, *identity reappraisal*, and *identity synthesis*. This was followed by a series of empirical studies (Yarhouse, Tan & Pawlowski, 2005; Yarhouse & Tan, 2004) comparing Christian sexual minorities in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) with Christian sexual minorities in Exodus International. The former identified as gay and Christian, while the later did not identify (or *dis-identified*) with a gay identity, often precisely because of a central religious identity. Several additional studies (e.g., Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano & Tan, 2005; Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean & Brooke, 2009) have expanded my own thoughts on sexual identity development and the role of attributions in making meaning out of experiences of same-sex attraction.

Throughout this time, Regent University supported the establishment of the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity (ISSI; [www.sexualidentityinstitute.org](http://www.sexualidentityinstitute.org)) with a focus on conducting research, providing clinical services/consultations, and training students in the area of sexual identity theory and practice. Our most recent contributions include the proposal (with co-author Warren Throckmorton) of the Sexual Identity Therapy Framework (<http://sitframework.com/>) to assist clinicians in providing ethical practice in this area and to organize that work into the four main areas of assessment, advanced informed consent, psychotherapy, and synthesis. The purpose of therapy provided under this framework is to achieve congruence, so that person is able to live in a way that is consistent with their beliefs and values. This is not specifically a model for Christian counseling; rather, it is intended as a model that the mainstream mental health community could recognize as a viable alternative to the two current and more polarized approaches (gay affirmative and reorientation approaches) (see APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation, 2009).

In addition to the Sexual Identity Therapy Framework, we have also been conducting research on sexual minorities in heterosexual marriages (Yarhouse, Pawlowski & Tan, 2004; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006; Yarhouse, Gow & Davis, 2009), efforts to change sexual orientation through involvement in religious ministries (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007), and clarifying what makes church-based ministries exemplary in their ministry to

sexual minorities (Yarhouse & Carr, 2007). Some of the most current work is in collaboration with more moderate voices within the GLB community to identify areas of agreement in providing services within a diverse cultural context (e.g., Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2007).

There have been a number of projects, then, that reflect an attempt to contribute constructively to the professional discussions centering on sexual identity. Throughout these efforts to engage the material in GLB studies as a conservative Christian, there have been several challenges faced and lessons learned. We turn now to these challenges, and I will discuss them in the form of certainties.<sup>4</sup>

### **Challenges That Take the Form of Certainties**

*First Certainty: I know what you believe because I know others who claim to be Christians*

This is a certainty that has come from colleagues in GLB studies. Some I have interacted with have either met other conservative Christians or have in their minds images of conservative Christians that make dialogue especially difficult. (The reverse is also true: that Christians often have in their minds what it means to be gay and subsequently the associations they have also make dialogue difficult.) This often pressures Christians to move away from their own convictions to demonstrate that they are different from others who their GLB colleagues have come across, but I see this as a failure of nerve and intellectually dishonest if one is actually hoping to be in any kind of *meaningful* dialogue. After all, the very nature of diversity is to have differences of convictions.<sup>5</sup>

What would be helpful to cultivate is what Richard Mouw (1992) describes as *convicted civility*. This is the idea that Christians hold and express their convictions, but do so in the spirit of respect and humility. This does not resolve substantive differences, but it does go a long way in facilitating reasoned analysis, identifying areas of common concern (e.g., safety, bullying, HIV/AIDS), and so on, and modeling for others how to be in real and meaningful relationship with those with whom we disagree.

*Second Certainty: I know what you believe because I know your institutional affiliation*

This certainty is related to the first, because when you conduct research out of the context of a private religious institution, many people make assumptions about what they think you believe. They do this prior to reading your research, and this leads to avoidable conflict if people on both sides would take time to engage the literature first.

This certainty also comes from the Christian community because conservative Christians often assume



that they know what someone working at a private Christian institution believes by virtue of their institutional affiliation. This can come up, for example, in requests to serve as expert witness on cases of same-sex parenting, adoption, and so on, when one side requests strong pronouncements that may or may not be found in the existing data. The assumption of institutional affiliation can sometimes take the form, “We all know what the data says about \_\_\_\_; would you please state that for the record.” The difficulty lies, however, in the complexity of the data and how it is interpreted.

*Third Certainty: I know who a person “really is” because I know that the person experiences same-sex attraction*

The third certainty can come from both the GLB community and from the conservative Christian community. The form it takes in the GLB community is the assumption that same-sex attraction necessarily signals a gay identity. This assumption comes from collapsing the three constructs of attraction, orientation, and identity and treating them as synonymous. This is perhaps why the very existence of those who are no longer identifying as gay is subject to so much scrutiny and intolerance – any same-sex attraction signals an invariant orientation that is the defining and central aspect of who someone is *as a person*. They *are* gay.

I do not experience this certainty as much among conservative Christians, although a variation on this is that Christians often suggest easy answers to people for whom this is their struggle. In some ways this is a struggle for a Christian “just like any other struggle,” but in many ways it is quite unique, and to suggest otherwise reflects a deep misunderstanding and unwillingness to sit with another person’s experience.

*Fourth Certainty: I know you can be healed because with God “all things are possible.”*

This final certainty comes from the Christian community. Christians ought to affirm God’s sovereignty and omnipotence and God’s desire to bring about healing for people who are suffering. At the same time, Christians would do well to be consistent in how they talk about healing and apply these Scriptural references consistently to a range of real-life experiences. For example, Christians also affirm that God can bring about healing from cancer, diabetes, depression, and other enduring or chronic health concerns. But when direct healing does not appear to occur, the Christian community does what it can to be a supportive presence in the life of the person they prayed for.

Some Christians seem to hold to a different standard or expectation when it comes to same-sex attractions. They seem unwilling to come alongside a person who may have prayed for healing, but for whom healing has been marginal at best. Their emphasis on

healing as a quick and decisive outcome can reflect an unwillingness to affirm realistic, biblical hope grounded in a vision for God’s purposes that may be beyond these particular circumstances. This certainty carries with it assumption about a theodicy of sexual identity or how a person experiences pain and suffering in the context of our shared fallenness and with respect to sexual identity questions and concerns.

We have been discussing several challenges that have come up and take the form of certainties. These certainties can come from the GLB community, the Christian community, or both. We now turn to a discussion of what has been learned in having participated in GLB studies.

## **Lessons Learned in GLB Studies**

### *Be cautious about ringing endorsements*

One of the things I tell my students is that if you are studying or making presentations on sexual identity issues for any amount of time and you receive too many pats on the back, you are probably not accurately conveying what we know (and do not know) about the topic. The research in this area is complicated, and it is a (tempting) mistake to “preach to the choir” about what we all agree on. This is a complex and growing area of research, and those who offer strong proclamations are often the least informed or are only conveying a truncated view of the research.

### *Demonstrate “convicted civility”*

As I suggested above, the many professional meetings over the years have given me opportunities to demonstrate *convicted civility*. Christians ought to have convictions, but too often we lead with our convictions, and we “shout down” others and become the caricature that others have of conservative Christians. On the other extreme are those who lead with civility so much so that it is difficult to know what their convictions are, unless we count as a conviction the act of civility itself. We need both today – convictions *and* civility.

### *Take a broader view of the GLB community*

As I mentioned earlier, not everyone in the GLB community is an activist, and there are a range of voices within the GLB community. There may be value in interacting and collaborating with moderate voices. In psychology, the best way I have seen to do this is around the data. Research is the common language of psychologists in our day, and it can be helpful to use this as a basis for dialogue. Remember that many people in mainstream GLB circles have had poor or negative experiences with conservative Christians, and they often themselves talk about “us/them” which is a natural outgrowth of identifying as a sexual minority

and finding a sense of safety within one's "in group" (for a discussion of how some within the GLB community perceive conservative Christians, see Marin, 2009). Christians often do the same thing. The language of "culture wars"<sup>6</sup> has not helped. It has pitted Christians against members of the GLB community and has sometimes kept both conservative Christians and members of the mainstream GLB community from thinking creatively about areas of mutual agreement and the potential for collaboration.

#### *Recognize the people represented in the debate*

This was a lesson learned early on, but one that is repeated time and time again at conferences, workshops, churches, and on my research team. It is tempting to keep a personal distance from any topic of research. Some of that may be necessary to conduct research dispassionately, so as not to operate with larger than normal blind spots and biases that are inherent to any worldview assumptions. However, the work that we do affects the lives of real people who are struggling to make sense of how to live faithfully before God as followers of Christ. It is important to keep in mind the very people whose lives are touched by the debates and discussions that center on sexual identity.

#### *Learn from fellow believers*

Throughout this entire time of conducting research and providing clinical services, I have been deeply moved by the challenges facing fellow believers who are sorting out sexual identity conflicts. They are often doubly isolated. They are isolated within the GLB community by virtue of the conservative Christian convictions, and they are isolated within the Christian community by virtue of their same-sex attractions. The struggles most of us face today are really not addressed by the local church. Pride, greed, envy, sloth – these are not the focal point of many messages today. When the local church focuses narrowly or exclusively on homosexuality, it erodes the credibility of the church to speak to a range of issues inside the church and outside the church. The people I know who feel they contend with same-sex attractions are acutely sensitive to what can become hypocrisy from the local church on matters of sin. Although some of these brothers and sisters who struggle with sexual identity and live faithfully before God do give up on the church, many stay and will in time offer the church in the West a real vision for what it means to "count the cost" of discipleship if we would be open to what they have to say.

#### **Conclusion**

In this article I discussed some of my experiences as an evangelical Christian in GLB studies. After a

discussion of various modes of relating religion and science – critical-evaluative, constructive, and dialogical – several examples of scholarship were shared as examples of each mode of relating, followed by a discussion of certainties, challenges, and lessons learned. Perhaps others will feel called to this area of research and scholarship, or feel called to other work in areas that are often not associated with evangelical Christianity. Can a round peg fit into a square hole? Not only is it possible, but sometimes it is useful, as with the original meaning of the phrase. Perhaps there is some value in feeling out of place – in reflecting upon how it can enhance various areas of scholarship. Maybe there is something to be gained when we look at our subject matter from a Christian perspective and attempt to make contributions that reflect a Christian worldview.

#### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The question has also been asked whether, mathematically, a square peg fits better into a round hole or a round peg into a square hole. As it turns out you can calculate the ratio of the area of the square and of a circle and the area of a circle and area of a square and convert that into a percentage: there is a better fit (meaning less wasted space) when a round peg is fitted into a square hole (using about 78.54% of the space compared to 63.66% of the space when a square peg is fitted into a round hole). See <http://www.nzmaths.co.nz/PS/L6/Measurement/SquarePegs.aspx> for a full explanation and computation.

<sup>2</sup>By saying "non-Christian psychologists," I do not mean to suggest that there are no Christians within the GLB community, but I have come across few self-identifying conservative or evangelical Christians in GLB studies in the major mental health organizations.

<sup>3</sup>This section is adapted from Mark A. Yarhouse, "Constructive relationships between religion and the scientific study of sexuality," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 24 (1), 29-35.

<sup>4</sup>The language of "certainties" is from Melissa Elliot Griffith, "Opening therapy to conversations with a personal God" in F. Walsh (Ed.), *Spiritual resources in family therapy* (pp. 209-222), New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>5</sup>I am often struck by the attempts in our field to have what are called "difficult dialogues." What I find is that these are almost always dialogues made "difficult" by the subject matter (e.g., a discussion of clinical services for sexual minorities) but not by the discussants (e.g., having people who have different views talk about their differences as well as areas of common ground).

<sup>6</sup>Ironically, at the time I original wrote these words, I had just completed a chapter I was asked to write for a book that reflects these themes of "battle" and "war." I took issue with the way the discussion was framed, but

for my part wrote about how someone might feel embattled in discussions centering on sexuality in mental health organizations.

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# Commentaries on Mark A. Yarhouse's "Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies"

*Each issue of Edification begins with a discussion article followed by open peer commentaries that examine the arguments of that paper. The goal is to promote edifying dialogues on issues of interest to the Christian psychological community. The commentaries below respond to Mark A. Yarhouse's "Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies." Dr. Yarhouse reacts to these commentaries in the next article.*

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## Turning Towards the *Imago Dei*

Andrew Comiskey  
*Desert Stream Ministries*

I benefited from this paper, as I have other works of Yarhouse. His perspective is objective, kind, and truthful.

As one who has faced same-sex attraction to varying degrees all my adult life, and by God's grace, stand as a man established in his genuine orientation toward the opposite-sex, I appreciate the modulation of his voice.

I have spent my adult life seeking to make the body of Christ a safe and dynamic place for those struggling with their sexuality. My approach is transformational, founded on the belief that Christian conversion itself is a converting influence upon one's identity, relationships, desires—his/her orientation in general.

What seems obvious to me is a conflict to many. So the civil tone of Yarhouse's voice, drawing upon Mouw's (1992) convicted civility, gave hope to me that the endless string of conflicts I face can be worked out respectfully.

And yet truthfully, I liked the way Yarhouse challenged us to not "move away from our own convictions to demonstrate to the GLB community that we are different" from tiresome fundamentalists. That is the "truth" I hear most from progressive evangelicals "dialoging" with the GLB community: Say nothing about what you actually believe for fear of being offensive. The mantra: Keep the dialogue going at all cost, even if it costs you the truth. So no real engaging occurs. Yarhouse gives a way forward.

I liked his 3-tier approach to the topic of identity: how to distinguish between attraction, orientation, and identity. Really helpful. That is a huge deal today for Christians trying to make sense of their attractions while genuinely wanting Jesus and a life founded on Him. That means that one can decide to dismantle a social construct—"the gay self"—which in and of itself

reduces the strength of gay desires. At the same time, one can and must work out the reality of attraction. How liberating to distinguish one strand from the three and work that out without the weight of socio-political baggage.

That is the kingdom—described by Dallas Willard (1998) as the domain of one's effective will. We cannot choose our feelings, but we can our allegiance to Christ and His say in our fundamental identity.

That is where I wonder if Yarhouse does not take "reorientation" far enough. He seems to want to blaze a path between gay affirming and reorientation approaches, and I think I understand his reasoning. Some people struggle with same-sex attraction for years. Like myself! (This stuff runs deep and requires a lot of grace and a lot of community support.)

I asked myself: Is Yarhouse's middle-way a kind of atonement on behalf of Christians who historically have promised too much and delivered too little for those with same-sex attraction (stoic evangelicals who dispense thin propositional answers, or wild Pentecostals who cast out homosexuality)? His way seems wise on one hand, and yet shackled by the limits of a purely psychological perspective.

At core I think the issue is more theological than psychological. A biblical anthropology does not give us the freedom to define ourselves as anything less than bearers of God's image, which at core involves the duality of male and female. That meant for me that I had to line up with God's orientation for my humanity; in spite of same-sex attraction, I had to own the Kingdom reality that I was a gift to others, including women. An essential part of my discipleship involved making peace with men as brothers, and with women as "others," those with whom I was called to work out my salvation in a mature, godly way.

I see this as both a positional reality: I am a part of God's fallen heterosexual creation, whether I like it or feel it, and a goal: as a member of that fallen creation, I have a long way to go, one unique to me with same-sex

attraction.

But the goal is not unique: inspired heterosexuality is the relational goal for all Christians, regardless of one's starting point, or marital status.

Here, in regards to those with same-sex attraction, I agree with Yarhouse's caution toward triumphalism: yes fallen, yes slow, yes in desperate need of grace and one's fellows to do it with any kind of integrity, but absolutely God's will according to His word.

So I ask: In supporting those laying aside a "gay identity," what does Yarhouse urge we take up? We need clarity here. I contend that nothing less than the truth of the *imago dei* will do.

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## Building a Bridge across the Divide

Jeffery S. Eckert  
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In the article *Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies*, Mark Yarhouse chronicles his ideological journey through the complex world of gay, lesbian and bisexual (GLB) studies as an evangelical Christian. Yarhouse approaches the topic with both thoughtfulness and integrity, leaving the reader with a clear sense that he has wrestled with how to respond to both the Christian and secular world of GLB studies in a manner that attempts to understand both perspectives. The image of the round peg in a square hole was utilized effectively to illustrate both the challenges and rewards of being a Christian engaging in the study of sexual identity.

In light of these challenges, Yarhouse raises a number of important points regarding the barriers that keep evangelical Christians from coming to an educated understanding of sexual orientation. In this conversation, he looks at some of the stereotypes that GLB schol-

ars and the GLB community have towards evangelical Christians and vice versa. Many of these stereotypes have stifled productive conversation between the two groups. Yarhouse provides a sense of hope for change with his story of a journey into conversation and collaboration with GLB scholars.

In talking about being an evangelical engaged in a challenging dialogue, Yarhouse provides a thorough definition of orientation, along with laying out distinctions between attraction, orientation, and identity. These distinctions would indicate that there is much more to coming to an understanding of GLB issues than simply measuring sexual attraction. It might have been beneficial, as Yarhouse was defining these terms, that he provide a clearer definition of what attraction means, as it encompasses emotional, romantic, and sexual attractions. At the same time, he illustrates a multifaceted definition of sexual orientation, and explains the difficulty of coming to a clear understanding of who people are as sexual beings.

In addressing this complexity, he illustrates the way that many Christians have oversimplified an understanding of orientation and identity. Many Christians have been raised to believe that sexual orientation is a volitional choice and is isolated to the gender that each person chooses to be with in a sexual relationship. Yarhouse discusses the concept of effective will, which is best defined as each person's volitional choice in a given situation. He argues, "The experience of same-sex attraction is not in a person's effective will, at least not in the same way as behavior and identity is... What they are choosing is whether or not to integrate their experiences of attractions into a gay identity." This challenges the commonly held conservative notion that those who experience same-sex attraction make a choice to be attracted to the same sex. It would seem that this type of thinking is a part of what keeps conversation from occurring between evangelicals and the GLB community.

As Yarhouse is discussing ongoing conversation with the GLB community, he makes a statement that some might find to be without clear basis. He states that, "Most people I have met who are sorting out sexual identity questions find themselves attracted to the same sex; they did not choose to experience same-sex attraction." While this statement is part of making an argument for same sex attraction not being a volitional act, the qualifier "most" might cause many to take issue, as it indicates that there are indeed those who choose to experience same-sex attraction. In some ways, this causes his argument against volitional choice in attraction to lose some of its strength.

Throughout the article, Yarhouse is making an implicit argument for the importance of evangelicals who are committed to exploring GLB studies as a way

of building connections between the evangelical and GLB communities. While he provides a clear rationale explaining the need for conversation, he spends little time examining the relational aspects that must build a foundation for this conversation. Much focus is spent on the theoretical underpinnings of an understanding of sexual identity, but little time is spent on the personal aspects of facilitating these relationships between two groups of people wherein there exists a great deal of historical tension. It seems as if the bulk of the article focuses on definitional and pragmatic issues, while engaging with a topic that is very relational.

At the same time, Yarhouse's ability to develop connections with GLB researchers as an evangelical conservative seems unprecedented. In trying to converse with a community that has experienced a great deal of pain inflicted by the ignorance of the conservative Christian world, Yarhouse has utilized solid empirical research. He has also used a number of avenues of ongoing study to begin to build bridges and promote conversations that have previously not occurred. For example, Yarhouse has broken ground in finding ways to discuss with secular GLB researchers the idea that there are clients who may, because of their personal values or religious worldviews, not want to embrace a gay identity despite predominant same-sex attraction. Once again, it might have been appropriate to share some of these stories of relationship in illustrating the unique manner in which he has developed these connections over time.

A number of appropriate challenges for the evangelical community complete the article. The concept of "convicted civility" as coined by Richard Mouw (1992), in his book *Uncommon Decency*, is a good challenge for those trying to participate in discussions of orientation and identity. Too often, Christians find themselves in angry, volatile debate, which shuts down communication rather than encouraging ongoing dialogue. To communicate with a combination of gentleness and humility broadens the discussion instead of widening the void that exists between evangelicals and the GLB community. At the same time, it might have been helpful for Yarhouse to highlight more of the positive discussion and movement that is already occurring in the church in this dialogue. Some churches have developed ministries to address the needs of those dealing with same sex attraction and are more open to considering the complexities of this discussion. In comparison to the unspoken attitudes and overall atmosphere in the church that many of us grew up with regarding the GLB community, the church has come a long way – not far enough, but a long way.

While Yarhouse has overcome innumerable barriers in the academic community around GLB issues, there is much work to do to promote the ongoing re-

lationship that will be necessary to bring this conversation into the forefront of the evangelical church. Despite the aforementioned movement that is occurring, there are still too many church settings with a "love the sinner, hate the sin" perspective that are only fulfilling the second half of this statement with a thinly veiled disdain for GLB individuals. With a history of anger, judgment, and bitterness towards GLB individuals, people in evangelical churches have often not exhibited love and kindness in keeping with the teachings of Christ. Yarhouse's work gives hope for the spread of this conversation and the ensuing relationships, but much work must be done to take this collaboration and increase in understanding from academia into the sanctuaries of the evangelical church.

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## Pegs, Holes, and Trees: A Response to Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies

Phil Henry

*Palm Beach Atlantic University*

I suppose that this will tell you more than you want to know about my thinking, but reading *Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies* moved me first to think about trees. Specifically, to musings on how trees grow. To me, the evangelical world or church needs to be a living, growing organism. Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a "grain of mustard seed that grows into a tree" (Matthew 13, 31-32). So, how does a tree grow?

*Growth occurs when there is an interactive process with the environment that is beneficial for both. The tree takes and gives to the environment and both benefit from the interaction: Science and religion interact best when both benefit from the interaction.*

Yarhouse, beginning his argument concerning Christian "psychology," quotes Plantinga (1984): "Christian [psychologists] serve the Christian community, with its own questions, concerns, etc." I agree

with this in part. But I would go further. The issues of the “Christian community” are not merely their own, but also the needs of the community at large. These, I would argue, are in fact the needs of the Christian community. This may seem circuitous, so let me state this more simply. I do not think that the Christian community can be separated from the needs of the community and remain vital. Further, while we would like to see ourselves in the evangelical community as being different from the culture, I am afraid that this is just not true. Every week, I hear from those struggling with unwanted same sex attraction and problems relating to homosexuality, both within and outside of the church. Both see little hope of finding help within the church context. This I believe is wrong. Possibly correct, but still very wrong.

In developing the *Handbook of Therapy for Unwanted Same Sex Attraction* (Hamilton & Henry, 2009), the goal was to give hope to those who desired change while interacting on a more clinically organic level with those who had serious questions about the possibility for change in this area. For me, this is not completely an academic exercise. Perhaps the focus of this work is not issues, as Yarhouse seems to suggest, but people. Some of these people are within the church and some are outside the church. Their commonality is that they desire change. Here, I believe the Christian psychologist should be the servant of those seeking to change, and offer a way for this to happen.

*Growth occurs for the tree when it interacts with the environment, keeping its permeable and impermeable nature intact: There is a place for the critical-evaluative mode.*

Yarhouse cites Jones' (1994) analysis of the relationship between religion and science: the critical-evaluative, constructive, and dialogical constructive modes. These can be used to understand this process. The critical-evaluative mode assumes the impermeable “judging stance.” Yarhouse sees this in his early work (Jones & Yarhouse, 2000). I agree, but it seems that he has moved beyond this stage, which is fine for his stage of development in this area. I will get to that later. While Yarhouse has moved on, I believe that this kind of critique continues to be necessary and holds a vital function. There are some who will not or cannot understand the arguments inherent in a discussion.

At times, a long drawn out discussion, no matter the level of esoteric significance, is impractical at best and possibly dangerous. The less informed parent who warns often is better than the hesitant, lenient parent who does not want to offend and so stands waiting to gather all of the information and for just the right time to intervene. When the person is about to step in front of a car, having them consider if they would like to be road-kill might not be the best discussion. Using

informative revealed wisdom to evaluate the current “fad or flavor of the month” of human theorizing and research is a vital part of a healthy functioning, growing evangelical organism. There is a role for the critical-evaluative mode with Christian psychology.

*Growth occurs when something new is created in the interaction: Asserting that change is possible is a cornerstone.*

Using Jones' constructive model (Jones & Yarhouse, 2000), Yarhouse asserts that the constructive mode occurs when religion offers science a new paradigm. This, I believe, is a valuable service that Christian psychology can offer. Using the tree analogy, this is observed when the roots or limbs of the religious tree push into the sky or soil creating new paradigms while interacting dynamically with the environment. Yarhouse's work with Throckmorton (Throckmorton & Yarhouse, 2002) and others (e.g., Yarhouse & Burkett, 2002; Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005; Yarhouse & Tan, 2004; Yarhouse, Tan, & Pawlowski, 2005) illustrates this point.

A perfect example of this is the question, “*What about those who experience same sex attraction, but do not label themselves as gay?*” What is important here is the creation of a new paradigm from which to understand and be understood. In this case, biology, gender identity, attractions, intentions, behaviors, and values frameworks all play a role in the labeling process. Attraction, then, may not signal identity (Yarhouse, 2005), and this distinction is significant in understanding how the self-identity develops. The ability to infuse the discussion with new paradigms is helpful in leading both the religious and scientific community from stalemated dogmatism on both sides to helpful understanding.

But, beyond the five models suggested for understanding sexual identity development (Yarhouse, 2001), there is the reality for me that people can and do change. This may be a key difference between us: the belief that one of the God-given abilities we humans possess is the ability to change. Brain plasticity studies increasingly point to change to shape what and how humans think and choose their destiny. I guess you could call this an existential, biologically based free will. Rollo May (2007) and Victor Frankl (2006) also talked about this choosing. Much of the existentialists' writings was a response to the reductionistic determinism of the behavioral and psychoanalytic community.

I would go so far as to posit that if clients leave therapy without this sense of choice and freedom firmly placed in their hands, then the therapy has been a failure, no matter what other good has taken place. I know of no instance where I, as a psychologist, therapist, or minister, would inform the client that she/he cannot change. Inform about the statistics in general, yes; but to personally discourage change, no. Here is



why. If you are familiar at all with motivational interviewing, you know that in order for change to have a chance, it is helpful to identify the stages of motivation in the individual and address the applicable barriers. This is, of course, important in dealing with resistant populations, e.g., addicted populations. The stages of change (Miller & Rollnick, 2002) in motivational interviewing are as follows:

1. Pre-contemplation
2. Contemplation
3. Preparation
4. Action
5. Maintenance

When a client is in the pre-contemplation stage (someone who does not want to change or perhaps just has not considered change), one of the barriers that must be overcome is the barrier of self-efficacy. Simply stated, the question is, "Do I believe that I have the capacity for change? Can I change if I try?" This is a real question for addicted clients and others who have failed to change in the past (DiClemente, 2003).

If the Christian psychologist/counselor presents as neutral on this issue with the client struggling with same sex attraction, he has essentially destroyed one of the building blocks necessary for change and has become an agent, not merely an observer. With some reservations, I agree with Nicolosi's (2009) comment on this: a neutral stance on this issue at this point is not appropriate because the client has already chosen to change and may be in fact at the action step of change when they arrive in therapy.

*Growth occurs when individual parts of the tree do their job. Some are barriers, some are connectors: Christian psychologists may differ as others do in the body of Christ, finding their place as they are gifted and led.*

The third form of interaction between science and religion is what Jones (1994) refers to as the dialogue mode. This is the stage at which I believe Yarhouse has now arrived.

What you have in the *Round Peg, Square Hole* article, developmentally, is the story of Dr. Mark Yarhouse's journey from one constructive mode to another. This journey is based on his interaction with other psychologists and professionals, combined with his wisdom and experience gained through study and maturity and rounded out by a gift set that tolerates growth and ambiguity. In short, he has become a connector. The scriptures teach us that "blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the sons of God." Yarhouse is a wonderfully gifted individual who is, I believe, doing what he was created to do.

Having said that, I think it would be wrong to generalize Yarhouse's experience beyond his life. To put it another way, the certainty of generalizability is low-

ered as you move away from the sampled population. While his concluding stance may be fine for professional Christians in a university context, it may not be good for the average church youth leader, the evangelical parent, or the Christian politician. The barriers on the tree bark protect the tree from bacteria, fungus, disease, and insects. I, for one, am grateful for some of the "narrow minded people" who for generations have not been willing to even discuss the rightness or wrongness of issues. Rather, simply believing the truth, they sought only to protect it and to spread it.

*Growth occurs best under the right conditions, water, sun and soil are essential: Trust, love and honesty are essential ingredients.*

The section entitled *Challenges That Take the Form of Certainties* seems like it could be called Counseling 101 for Academicians. Often in therapy, the therapist has to overcome an obstacle based on prejudice. The client may feel, "I do not like you because you're a man or a woman or too young or too old." Or the counselor may say, "I know this client because I know other women or men like this or other people with this diagnosis." Good therapists know that this is the "stuff" of therapy. The certainties listed by Yarhouse are for the most part prejudices which are just the preamble to the real discussion (Ivy, Ivy, & Zalaquett, 2009) or barriers to overcome in really listening and connecting (MacCluskie, 2009).

First certainty: I know what you believe because I know others who claim to be Christians.

Second certainty: I know what you believe because I know your institutional affiliation.

Third certainty: I know who a person "really is" because I know that the person experiences same sex attractions.

Fourth certainty: I know you can be healed because with God "all things are possible."

I alluded to motivational interviewing or motivational enhancement therapy earlier. If you understand motivational interviewing, you know that moving the discussion along is dependent on you being present and active at the "point of motivation" where the person currently resides. Most of these arguments listed as certainties are found in the pre-contemplation stage. (DiClemente, 2003). They are barriers that have to be dealt with before real change can happen. And they are preambles to real relationships and connection.

Trust is an essential part of this. Real life is much more complex than the models we can devise, and certainties on both sides should be addressed with one word -- honesty. Honesty brings individuality and connection, it underscores our lack of understanding of what God is up to in the world, and it highlights the commonality that we all share as humans.

Finally, I do believe, along with Yarhouse, that the

battle or war motif is perhaps not the best one. I think it is fine in some situations, but it is not the one for me. Oh, it is not that I do not like it; I do. I am at heart a scrappy kid from Philadelphia who loves to mix it up. The only problem here is that I hear God calling me to be a lover, to care, to cry with, to reach out, to connect, to love. Same sex attraction is inexplicably tied with abuse, whether it be external abuse, overt abuse, internal abuse, or neglectful abuse. For those abused and for those who love those who have suffered so much, the war/battle imagery is too close to home.

Those who study homosexuality, those who call themselves “gay,” those who identify positively with same sex attractions, or those who struggle with unwanted same sex attraction are our friends, colleagues, students, children, and fellow travelers here on this planet at this time; and God has given us the chance to connect with them, representing the way that He cares. We must not lose or waste this chance.

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## Sexual Diversity: A Challenge for Counselors

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We in psychology owe a great deal of gratitude to our Christian brother, Mark Yarhouse, for making homosexuality the prime focus of his professional life. In response to this excellent summary of his research, I have several confessions to make:

- I have slept better at night knowing Yarhouse was alive and active, but have been derelict in reading his studies since I retired.
- During these 14 years of less active professional life, I have not been entirely asleep, however – Now and then, I taught a seminar on “Clinical Issues in Sexual Diversity,” and I edited two books in the field (*Pastoral Care*

*and Counseling in Sexual Diversity* and *Staying the Course: Support for the Church's Position on Homosexuality*, see Malony 2001 and 2003, respectively).

- These publications reveal the double-vocation I have led throughout my career – clinical psychologist and ordained United Methodist minister. I have remained active in the life of my church – both at a pastoral and at a denominational level.

Thus, my comments on Yarhouse's article will be grounded in these confessions. In regard to homosexuality, my prime foci have been on counselor functioning and theological reflection.

With these background issues understood, I would like to reflect on Yarhouse's statement on page 8: "Although I continue to participate in these dialogues, I have also begun to shift into a *constructive* mode of relating Christianity and GLB studies." I appreciate Yarhouse's efforts to further clarify sexuality-in-general because I am convinced that all "sexuality" (interest, orientation, expression) develops over time – it is part of the socialization process. For a number of my retirement years, I have played chess with a 93-year-old transsexual person. She (he?) makes this distinction: "Gender is between the legs, sex is between the ears." I think this statement is absolutely correct. Sexuality is learned. It is a mental process just as much as a physical one. In one of my books I blandly called homosexuality a "habit problem." But so is heterosexuality, bi-sexuality, etc., etc. The word "problem" is only appropriate when used within a cultural context.

Having made this comment about the construction of our understanding of sexuality within a learning context, I should like to organize the rest of my comments under two headings: *Mind the Gap* and *Mind the Store*. Both focus on the work of the counselor who tries to help persons with sexual issues of whatever kind. I originally divined these categories from reading Randy Sorenson's (2004) provocative book on the integration of psychology and theology from a psychoanalytic perspective entitled *Minding spirituality*. While my comments could be said to be a reaction to Yarhouse's specific line of research (like the preacher who "took a text and departed from it"), they are meant to be comments on his discussion of "reparative" or "sexual identity therapy" from a Christian point of view.

### **Mind the Gap**

*Mind the Gap!* Anyone who has been to London knows this is a constant message over the loudspeaker in the subway. Mind the gap; don't forget the space between the platform and the subway car lest you fall into it. Counselors should heed the warning, also. Mind the gap between Yarhouse's research and the teachings of

the Bible.

In a lecture-series at Fuller Seminary, where I taught for many years, Al Dueck, a Mennonite social psychologist, who later became my colleague, referred to the question asked by the 2nd century theologian Tertullian: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" This is a classic *Mind the Gap* question. Athens represents psychological research (modern science) and Jerusalem represents faith in the resurrected Jesus (i.e., Christianity). Tertullian's answer would be NOTHING – were he to advise today's counselors in the same way he advised believers who faced Greek philosophy in his day. But Tertullian's answer will not suffice for trained Christian counselors as they apply their knowledge of Yarhouse's research to what happens in a session where "there is nothing but space between you and another person" (the situation noted by Erik Berne, the founder of Transactional Analysis). Counselors should aspire to creatively justify their clinical behavior as representative of the way they integrate faith and science at the same time that they mind the gap between the two.

My advice would be *Mind the Gap*. In other words, never forget that science and religion; psychology and theology; the reports of Yarhouse's research and Christian convictions are two different things. Both are important; but both are qualitatively distinct.

The theologian Karl Barth made this distinction when he compared phenomena and epiphenomena (essential reality and apparent reality). For Barth, the question would be "Who are human beings?" Barth contended that humans are who God has declared them to be by his mighty act in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is their absolute, essential, basic reality. This is phenomena – the really real. Social/Behavior science (i.e., psychological research) is epiphenomena - apparent, culturally determined, changing truth).

Barth's modern and Tertullian's historical answers may seem radical for those who would like to integrate their psychology and their theology, but Christian counselors should never forget that they are the contemporary embodiment of this ancient, perennial issue of faith and reason.

An example or two may help. For over 20 years, I undertook the psychological evaluation of ministerial candidates for the United Methodist Church (UMC). Throughout that period (and to the present time), the stated rules of the UMC are "practicing homosexuals will not be ordained." Again and again, I would encounter persons whose evaluation indicated they were homosexuals. I would advise them of the rules of the church, but also indicated church committees, not I, would be making the final decision to approve them or not. One such case comes to mind: a man was described in one of his recommendations as an "outstand-

ing out-gay.” I called attention to this statement in the interview. His response amazed me. “Yes,” he said, “I am gay, but I am also a Christian and I will not violate the rule of the church if I am ordained.” In other words, he committed himself to not “practice” homosexuality. I recommended him for ordination. To me, this illustrates an integration of my church faith and my awareness of a social reality in which persons exercise some control over the expression of their sexuality.

In terms of social comment, my appreciation for the lesbian Roman Catholic Eve Tushnet is another example of the integration of faith and science that acknowledges the *gap* between the two. She is functioning as practicing Catholic and celibate gay advocate who writes for church publications. *The New York Times* (June 5, 2010, p. A14) quotes her in a manner I find quite appealing: “I really think the most important thing is: I really like being gay and I really like being Catholic. If nobody ever calls me self-hating again, it will be too soon. Nothing is quite as great as getting up in the morning, listening to the Pet Shop Boys and going to church.”

A third example can be seen in a recent debate I had with my wife over the vote to legalize same-gender marriage in California. My reasoning was thus: There is no question, but that the teaching of the scriptures solidly implies that homosexuality is the not the ideal will of God. At the same time, I think marriage functions to strengthen the integrity of society. I decided to vote in favor of same-gender marriage. My wife’s reasoning was the opposite. She felt the biblical teachings were culturally determined, but that marriage between opposite genders was an historic tradition that should be honored by society. She approved non-promiscuous relationships and felt civil unions met the need of homosexuals for intimacy. Therefore she decided to vote against same-gender marriage.

These examples illustrate that Minding the Gap usually ends in some form of “compromise.” We Christian counselors label this “integration.” No doubt, the decisions in these examples will be questioned by some, but they illustrate the muddy waters that counselors and Christians get into when they attempt to consciously “Mind the Gap” in a creative manner. *Muddling the gap* should be avoided.

I turn now to the second option, *Mind the Store*.

### **Mind the Store**

*Mind the Store* might be misconstrued as a variation of *Mind the Gap*. The *Store* in this case is that set of skills and presumptions that counselors bring to their work. These are like goods-on-the-shelves that store-keepers rely upon to meet the needs of their customers. I would suggest two components to be used in Minding the Store as counselors interact with homosexual per-

sons. The first pertains to “homosexual *persons*.” The second pertains to “homosexual’s *God*.”

First, counselors should never forget that homosexuals are *persons*. I remember Karl Menninger’s insistence that diagnoses provided by psychiatrists at Topeka State Hospital never identify patients as simply “schizophrenics” He wanted these individuals described as persons who evidenced schizophrenic reactions to life. As an actor I heard expressed it, “Nobody is just an alcoholic.” Nobody is just a homosexual. Each individual is a *person* who deserves to be understood as such – even if the focus of their problem is their sexuality.

Unfortunately, counselors who work in the area of sexual diversity tend, far too often, to typify their clients as if they were little more than their diagnostic category (i.e., homosexual). In their efforts to be “counselors,” not “social workers,” they hasten far too quickly to offer some form of help without perceiving the *person* in their diagnosis of *homosexual*. All good counseling is a two-fold process of listening/helping, understanding/advising. Mind the store by not neglecting either process.

Only if homosexuals experience themselves as persons will they trust counselors to truly help them.

Here is where counselors can put their secular social/psychological training to work. Self-identified homosexuals often portray themselves as “hard wired,” but their self-identity results from unique life experiences along a variety of continua. Taking a good “social history” can determine where homosexuals place themselves along such dimensions as

- heterosexual-bisexual-homosexual self-identity
- frequency of past homosexual experience
- frequency and intensity of homosexual urges
- amount of mental preoccupation with homosexual issues
- past (and present) sexual abuse
- interest in participation in ‘out gay’ actions and/or events
- family support or antipathy
- religious involvement and support (or lack of it)
- spiritual/religious practice
- educational and/or vocational accomplishments
- social/recreational activities (amount, kind, associates)

Assessing such dimensions as these will assure that counselors experience persons as “more than just homosexuals.”

This leads me to my second component of Minding the Store, the homosexual’s *God*. If homosexuals are complex persons, homosexual’s God is very simple. His first, and only, name is “Grace.” A friend of mind, Mark Trotter, wrote a book with a profound title –

*Grace all the way home.* Homosexuals, and all other \_\_\_\_\_sexuals for that matter, can trust the Christian God to be “grace all the way home (to the end of their days).”

Some time ago, the American Psychological Association's Ethics Panel, of which I was a member at the time, adopted a two-step model of professional ethics. One step was a set of ideals. For example, “psychologist put the welfare of the client above all else.” These were called “Aspirations.” The second step was a set of prohibitions. For example, “psychologists do not go to sleep in the counseling session.” These were called “Sanctions.” Every psychologist I have known affirmed these Aspirations, but knew they never fully fulfilled them. Every psychologist I have known took seriously the Sanctions and sought to never let their behavior deteriorate to their level.

Thinking about Christian homosexuals might follow a similar model. The biblical model (i.e. God's ideal will) does not affirm homosexuality. Yet, for many, if not most overt homosexuals, the impulse is experienced as part of what is unchangeable. Efforts to transform the condition do succeed, but not often. As Yarhouse stated, “with God, all things are possible” - but they are rarely probable. Interestingly enough, this is the case with many of the bad habits with which other Christians struggle. St. Paul had his “thorn in the flesh.” The goal under a stepwise model of Aspirations and Sanctions might be to achieve as much as one can along the effort toward complete transformation out of homosexuality, but at some point accept one's efforts and get on with living the Christian life in other ways of love and service. God will be lovingly gracious, accepting, and understanding along the way. He will be “grace all the way home” and so should we.

As far as the church is concerned, no denomination I know asks new members if they are homosexuals or not. They only ask, “Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?” A “yes” answer to that question is the only requirement. If homosexuals are not acceptable to join the church, none of us (counselors included) are. Re-read John 3:16.

John Wesley, the 18th century founder of the Methodist movement, would heartily agree with *grace* as God's name in his explication of the doctrine of *perfection*. Wesley contended that God's will for all Christians was to attempt to become perfect before they died. But Wesley never claimed perfection for himself, nor did he ever single any one out as an example. I mispoke. He claimed that one woman reached perfection – six weeks before she died! But only one. Homosexuals, and all the rest of us, could take heart.

Counselors who Mind the Store should never forget God's name is *Grace* (all the way home)!

## Note

<sup>1</sup>Of course, the word “practicing” needs to be defined. The presumption of the denomination when this ruling was adopted was that “practicing” meant outlandish promiscuity. There are other interpretations of the word that would not be so extreme. Personally, in my evaluation I would not want to recommend “practicing heterosexuals” for ordination.

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## As the Years Go On: A Response to Round Peg, Square Hole

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In many ways I can relate to Dr. Yarhouse's experience of being *a round peg in a square hole*, or *a fish out of water*. Just as he has been asked what it was like being an evangelical Christian involved in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) studies, I have been asked what it was like being a heterosexual woman writing and presenting in that same discipline. Several people have questioned my motives (e.g., “Why do you want to write about THOSE people?”) or even my sexual orientation (e.g., “And when are you going to *come out*?”). [I suspect that Dr. Yarhouse has been asked similar questions over the years.] Fortunately, now that allies are welcomed by the LGB communities, I am rarely asked those questions, but possibly Dr. Yarhouse still gets similar inquiries since very few individuals of his religious persuasion

give the same focus to their studies as he does.

### **First Meeting**

I first became acquainted with the work of Dr. Yarhouse several years ago when I heard him participate on a panel with three other individuals at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association. He and another psychologist were evangelical Christians and the other two spoke from a gay-affirmative perspective. [This symposium was mentioned in his article.] This was the first time I had heard an evangelical Christian talking from a position that was informed by psychological science and the ethics of the profession, rather from one justified by isolated Biblical quotations, prejudice, blatant misinformation, or scare tactics. Another “first” for me was to hear two gay psychologists and two conservative Christian psychologists rationally, respectfully, and intelligently discussing their differences in terms of how to professionally and ethically provide clinical services to same-sex attracted (SSA) individuals within the framework of the clients’ religious values and beliefs.

### **Dr. Yarhouse’s Work**

In his writings, Dr. Yarhouse demonstrates that he is acquainted with the literature in LGB studies and with the intense conflict and suffering of conservative Christians who are attracted to their own biological sex. He further acknowledges that, in order to resolve tension and alleviate distress, they often have sought “cures” for their shame and perceived flawed selves in ways that have only increased their struggle and are rarely helpful (APA, 2009). Even though feelings and attractions may not change, Dr. Yarhouse has compassionately proposed an integrative counseling stance that can allow individuals to live with their same sex attractions without shame, but within the context of their faith as they understand it. Accordingly, he has provided what he refers to in his paper as “a middle ground therapy option between the two often-polarized positions of sexual reorientation therapy and gay affirmative (or gay integrative) therapy.” I so much appreciate the fact that he and Dr. Lee Beckstead, a moderate voice on the “other side,” had a respectful and collegial dialogue about Sexual Identity Therapy at a recent convention of the American Psychological Association.

I also commend Dr. Yarhouse for attempting to remove psychopathology and condemnation from same sex attractions and for acknowledging that these attractions are “not in a person’s effective will.” I only hope that other evangelical Christians will follow his lead and make clear to struggling individuals that, while the attractions might continue for a lifetime, they are not inherently sinful nor do they in any way diminish the essential goodness of the human being. In this same

light, Beckstead and Israel (2007) refer to the dualities of either “ex-gay” or “out-gay” outcome and ask ethical clinicians to respect all sexual, affectional, spiritual, and value orientations” (p. 226). As Dr. Yarhouse contends, the choice is not whether the attractions exist, but what meanings individuals make of these feelings and whether they choose to integrate them into a socio-cultural “gay identity”—in other words, how they refer to themselves and how they choose to act (or not act) on the attractions.

### **Dr. Yarhouse Challenges**

Dr. Yarhouse has shown that he is not afraid to challenge both members of the LGB community as well as other evangelical Christians to move beyond their stereotypes and to listen respectfully to one another. He contends that the recent “culture wars” have pitted LGB individuals and conservative Christians against each other, and he urges his fellow Christians to demonstrate “convicted civility” in their dialogue with same-sex attracted individuals and their supporters. Dr. Yarhouse himself has done this and has “gone out on a limb” in support of those “doubly isolated” individuals who are both same-sex attracted and conservative Christian in their convictions. In doing so, he has earned the respect of a number of fellow psychologists for adhering to the ethical standards of his profession, for his efforts at collaborating with colleagues of diverse convictions, and for insisting that the research data in LGB studies speak for themselves.

On the other hand, I sense that Dr. Yarhouse has “taken some heat” from his fellow Christians. In his paper, Dr. Yarhouse lists four “challenges that take the form of certainties” and suggests that other believers have typecast his beliefs by presuming that all evangelical Christians are unified in their thinking about SSA individuals. He further infers that erroneous conjectures have been made about his views given his institutional affiliation, and he has been asked to assume positions that are not supported by scientific findings. Just as some members of the LGB community have pigeonholed evangelical Christians, Dr. Yarhouse asks conservative Christians to be civil and not to be the “caricatures” that others make of them. In other words, he asks conservative Christians to act like Christians.

### **When the Rubber Hits the Road**

While I appreciate the distinction that Dr. Yarhouse makes between having same-sex attractions and assuming a gay identity, my experience tells me that even the most committed SSA Christians have struggles and challenges “when the rubber hits the road.” For example, after acknowledging same-sex attractions and finding a community that supports their efforts to live congruently with them, SSA individuals initially feel

“hope and relief from working within their values and being provided with cognitive and behavioral strategies to reduce acting on same-sex attractions and disassociate from an LGBT identity” (Beckstead & Israel, 2007, p. 229). Over the long haul, however, people must find ways in which to integrate various identities without shame or self-loathing, and to reframe them in a positive light. This clearly is not easy to do for an entire lifetime, given the amount of negative messages from family, politicians, churches, the media, and from society in general.

Within a conservative Christian framework, the only options available to same-sex attracted individuals are to live a life of celibacy (or chastity), in which all sexual contact is prohibited; or to marry a person of the other biological sex. Either choice is problematic for many, and the common thinking among professionals is that only within the context of a supportive community will either long-term celibacy or heterosexual marriage be realistic or possible for most people. These communities must be able to continually validate the goodness of the SSA individual while, at the same time, provide an atmosphere where “we are all in this together.” Only in such an environment can people be totally honest about their attractions, as well as to have the freedom to acknowledge openly their (maybe frequent) “slips” from desired behavior.

How many individuals can find this kind of support over a lifetime and in all geographical locales and life circumstances? Certainly they are available in Salt Lake City or in Utah where there is a high concentration of Latter Day Saints (LDS or “Mormons”) and where Evergreen International groups are available, or near Regent University in Virginia where Sexual Identity Therapy (SIT) groups are offered. In most locales, however, support that respects and validates their same-sex attractions as well as understands their occasional relapses is unavailable for most individuals. While groups under the Exodus International umbrella exist in many parts of the United States, most of these are not ongoing, or worse, some impart messages of sin, shame, and the continual need for repentance that can be emotionally demoralizing to those living with same-sex attractions.

Jetten, Haslam, Iyer, and Haslam (2010) discuss identity loss, particularly the lack of belonging that results from leaving groups that provided stability, security, reassurance, and social support. Identity loss, for example, can occur if an individual decides to discontinue identification as gay or lesbian and begins to associate with a conservative religious community. For the more fortunate, this might mean participation in a support group or being involved with a community of similarly struggling individuals. For a time this might prove helpful and satisfying, but group memberships

are continually changing. Members move away, graduate (if the group exists in a university community), discontinue participation in the group, or (if the group is organized through a particular church), the minister leaves and a less supportive pastor arrives. These kinds of situations leave SSA people again alone and struggling without belonging, encouragement, and reassurance.

### **Living with Uncertainty**

As mentioned previously, there are two options for conservative Christians living with same-sex attractions: heterosexual marriage or celibacy. For those married to the other biological sex, spouses must be willing to support these individuals despite situations that may be uncomfortable, unpleasant, or even painful. These may include relapses that possibly occur from time to time and maybe even repeatedly, or living with a spouse who may not be able to sustain an acceptable level of sexual attraction, interest, or functioning.

People run out of patience—particularly if they expect an outcome to be permanent, such as having a SSA spouse becoming *totally* comfortable in a heterosexual marriage, or believing that the same-sex attractions eventually will cease to exist. Research shows that some of the most stressful life situations occur when a problem or difficulty is unending or is of uncertain duration (Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson, 2006; Jetten et al., 2010; Schlossberg, 1981), and this certainly could apply to a marriage in which one spouse is SSA. The faith of both parties has to be extraordinary high in order to trust that the SSA spouse will never act on his or her inclinations. Living a lifetime with a same-sex attraction is an ongoing stressor and one filled with uncertainty. My clinical experience tells me that few individuals, whether a same-sex attracted person or the spouse, can manage the persistent anxiety or have a robust enough spiritual life and support network to live comfortably and with reassurance that the “worst” is behind them.

Living with a same-sex attraction or being the spouse of such a person possibly parallels that of bisexuality where there usually is no end point in development or fixed outcome (Griffin, 2009) or fixed outcome, but rather a complex and open-ended process (Fox, p. 33, 1996). Both spouses in a mixed orientation marriage frequently experience isolation and lack an identified supportive community composed of persons living with similar stressors (Fox, 1996; Griffin, 2009). For this reason, Amity Pierce Buxton (1991) founded the Straight Spouse Network (SSN), a loose association that offers peer support for spouses of SSA individuals or couples in mixed orientation marriages. The various entries on the website of the SSN ([www.straightspouse.org](http://www.straightspouse.org)) chronicle the pain, struggles and uncertainty of

living with a same-sex attracted spouse. Unfortunately, on-going support groups for heterosexual spouses are not available in the vast majority towns and cities in the United States.

On the other hand, if conservative Christian SSA individuals are to live a lifetime in the celibate state with no sexual contact, they must be able to give more weight to their religious values than to the expression of their sexuality. Even the mystics and saints, such as St. John of the Cross (2003) and St. Teresa of Avila (2008), who devoted their lives to prayer and a relationship with Christ, wrote about the many times that their faith was challenged and when the mercy of God seemed inaccessible. Studies of Roman Catholic priests, who also dedicate their lives to Christ and for whom celibacy is mandatory, indicate that relapses are common and that continual celibacy is only possible for a few. For example Sipe (2003), a former priest and psychotherapist to clergy, considered reports from 2,776 priests, and determined that about 10% were able to be celibate “beyond the point of expectable reversal” (p. 50). Another 40% of priests practiced celibacy, “but their practice is not established enough to mark it as either consolidated or achieved” (p. 50). In another work, Sipe and his colleagues noted: “The ideal of mandatory celibacy has not been realized for a significant number of Catholic clerics throughout history” (Doyle, Sipe, & Wall, 2006 p. 63). Sipe (2003, p. 297) further comments: “*Lonely* is one of the most frequent replies when one asks a celibate how he feels.” Along these same lines, the two phase study conducted by Dr. Yarhouse and his colleague (Jones & Yarhouse, 2007) found that about 20% of their subjects indicated that they were experiencing “chastity” at the time of data collection, which presumably meant that these individuals were not engaging in any sexual activities. Some of these individuals were lost to follow-up studies and others had been participants for only six or seven years, so whether these people were able to resist acting on sexual inclinations for a lifetime is unknown

### Stigma and Affirmation

I truly appreciate Dr. Yarhouse’s compassion for same-sex attracted individuals and for his thoughtful and reasoned efforts to provide a Christian response to their struggles while endorsing the treatment recommendations of the Report of American Psychological Association Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (APA, 2009). As mentioned earlier, however, my clinical experience leads me to question whether the two choices available to conservative Christian SSA individuals are possible for more than a minority of even the most religiously dedicated. Although Dr. Yarhouse advocates affirmation and support for such people, societal stigma confronts them

each and every day of their lives and coping strategies must continually be enacted. Because of the energy and vigilance required, these strategies can “significantly disrupt the lives of stigmatized individuals, limit their behavioral options, reduce opportunities for social support, heighten psychological distress, and increase their risk for physical illness” (Herek, 2007, p. 910). Likewise, Fingerhut, Peplau, and Gable (2010) discuss the mental health concerns and depression of individuals with a lower level of gay identity and a high level of perceived stigma. While the authors are not specifically referring to SSA individuals who chose to dis-identity with a gay identity, these people certainly could be said to have a “lower level of gay identity” (or presumably none at all). Accordingly, if they are in situations where their same-sex attractions are stigmatized and condemned as sinful (rather than being acknowledged and affirmed) and their sincere efforts to live either celibate lives or within a monogamous heterosexual marriage are not supported, they could very well be candidates for distress and depression.

While admittedly beyond the scope of Dr. Yarhouse’s paper, I sincerely hope that Christian churches (my Catholic community included) someday will allow SSA adherents to live faithfully and inclusively and without the continual stigma, struggle, and isolation discussed in this response. Readings are available that describe the historical context of Christianity’s position regarding same-sex attractions (Boswell, 1980), as well as others that provide Biblical and spiritual integration for Christians and those of other faith persuasions (Helminiak, 1994; McNeill, 1993 1995; O’Neill & Ritter, 1992; Spong, 1992). Dr. Yarhouse has made positive, ethical, and professional strides in this direction. I wholeheartedly encourage the dialogue to continue.

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### The Merits of a Round Peg in a Square Hole

Gary H. Strauss

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I grew up as the son of a carpenter. Needless to say, there were many opportunities to learn much about carpentry and to develop at least sufficient wood-working skills to be able to manage a variety of my own home projects over the years. One of the skills I learned was the use of dowels to join pieces of wood in a sound and strong manner. However, I have never had the occasion to use either a round peg in a square hole or a square peg in a round hole. Nevertheless, my experience is sufficient to reflect a bit on the merits of one over the other.

Dowels or pegs are typically made of a hard grained and non-brittle wood, essentially for the purpose of creating a strong joint by contributing thereto the strength of the type of wood from which the peg is made. A dry joint (one in which glue is not used) requires that the peg be slightly larger than the hole so that it will remain tight and not allow the joint to work loose. The metaphor of the round or square peg being used in a hole of the opposite type at this point in this consideration bears close examination. When a square peg is driven into a round hole, the sharp corner edges of the peg, the peg being slightly larger than the hole, will tend to cut into the fibers of the wood in which the round hole is located. The joint will likely be strong, but there is that degree of damage done to the integrity of the wood in which the hole is located. Since dry wood has no feelings, there is not much reason for concern providing the wood itself is reasonably strong and not unduly weakened by the cutting of the fibers.

In contrast, a round peg driven into a square hole, particularly when the peg is slightly larger than the

hole, will tend to stretch rather than cut the fibers of the wood in which the hole is located. The joint will be strong and the integrity of the wood fibers will not be compromised. Furthermore, should the joint be disassembled at some future point, the peg will likely be more easily removed, as observed when structures assembled using pegged joints are disassembled to be moved and reconstructed in another location (as observed at the site in Tokyo, Japan, where aged traditional peg-jointed, thatched farm houses have been gathered from around the country and preserved for the sake of their historic interest and value).

The point of all this is to apply this observation to the metaphor Mark Yarhouse has used to identify himself as a conservative Christian psychologist and researcher pursuing GLB related studies. I have had the privilege of knowing Mark for a number of years and was also blessed by the experience of working directly with Mark and his doctoral mentor, Stanton Jones, as the groundwork was being laid and the initial assessment was being done for the longitudinal study to which Mark refers in his article. I remember well being present at the occasion when Mark and Stan engaged in a dialogue with David Meyer regarding the merits of the historic biblically based position regarding the prohibition of homosexual behavior, particularly related to same-sex marriage versus the accepting and affirming position which has been increasingly observed within the broader spectrum of the Christian community. I have continued to interact periodically with Mark and have read many of his writings regarding GLB and sexual identity issues, having had the opportunity to offer him feedback on a few of his pieces prior to publication. As such, I consider myself to know Mark and his work reasonably well.

I readily respond to Mark identifying himself as a round peg in a square hole. Issues regarding homosexuality and the responses to those issues by the GLB community on the typically thought of liberal side, and those from the Christian community, typically perceived as even rigidly conservative, have been addressed by Mark with the stretching impact of a round peg rather than the cutting effects of the sharp edges of the square.

Let me make one further brief point concerning myself before I go farther. I observe myself to have more of the encouraging nature of Barnabus, rather than the critically (in the positive sense) analytic nature of the Apostle Paul. As such, my response to Mark's very self-descriptive portrayal will take the former rather than the latter approach in my effort to offer an "edifying" comment. This is not to say that Mark cannot profit from critical comment, implying that his thoughts and words are beyond improvement. I must acknowledge, however, that I have found nothing in his

article that triggered edifying recommendations, which I observe to likely say more about me than about additional or more reflective material Mark might have included. Yet, I do see value in our reflecting more upon what we have to gain from Mark than what I might personally contribute to him.

The first observation that comes to mind is that Mark is a well read and thoughtful writer, drawing from many sources, philosophically, theoretically, and clinically (even to the point of providing helpful information regarding the source of the "peg and hole" metaphor with its historic versus more recent meaning). Mark is open to a broad array of perspectives, drawing from both the GLB community and the spectrum of views within the broader Christian community.

A second observation is that Mark has been very productive in his thinking and writing, as he has "stood on the shoulders of those preceding him." He developed a rigorous approach to academic inquiry, particularly as he served as a research assistant to Stan when he was a graduate student under Stan's mentorship. I remember him telling me that he was encouraged by someone (likely Stan) to commit himself to writing at least one page a day intended for publication. Mark's prolific publication and professional presentation lists are evident testimony to his following through with that commitment.

A third observation, and this is critical to his work as a Christian researcher, is his deep and uncompromising commitment to the Bible as his "primary authority in all matters of faith and practice," as spoken of in the Westminster Catechism. As such, Mark has manifested himself to be one who is a faithful Christ follower, and specifically in his work in his chosen field. He exemplifies well the perspective articulated by Johnson (1997) in his article entitled "Christ, the Lord of Psychology." At the same time, Mark manifests a consistent pursuit of balance, avoiding the tendency to adopt and promote a dogmatic position in spite of contrasting evidence. This pattern on his part reminds me of the admonition I remember hearing or reading that it is wise to hold one's beliefs in an open and slightly cupped hand. That which is true and receives confirmation through one's life will readily remain, while that which is worthy of modification is open to examination and needed adjustment without undue resistance. What is unworthy to be retained will be more easily sifted out and discarded as a result of the open handedness of the holder.

A fourth observation, as noted clearly in Mark's article, is that he is able to discern both the strengths and limitations of what he observes in the thinking and behavior of those from the respective communities with which he is concerned. He informs the rest of us by readily sharing his observations, as he has done

so well in this piece. He has noted in his discussion of the “challenges” and the “lessons learned” what is vital for us to consider, as he has pursued his career of dialogue with members of and research regarding issues of concern to both the GLB and Christian communities. We will all do well to give careful consideration to each of the points that he makes. Furthermore, Mark is able to see beneath the very evident and emphasized surface of issues as he dissects them and comes up with helpful and elaborated consideration thereof. One key example, as noted in his article, is the breaking down of the concept of “Gay identity” into its three component levels, namely, the experiencing of some degree of same-sex attraction, the conclusion that one experiences a sufficient degree thereof to conclude that one manifests a same-sex or homosexual orientation, and the third and chosen component, specifically, the choosing to assume a gay identity. My observation is that such a choice tends to “lock” one into the position with which one has chosen to identify, making it more challenging to consider alternatives.

One suggestion I might offer to Mark is that, if he has not already done so, he might consider adding a fourth level of identity. Specifically, this level would involve the choice to publicly identify as a member of the Gay community, thereby typically identifying with and embracing the major points of the community’s perspective and agenda.

Though there are many more observations regarding Mark and his work that I could make, I conclude with the following. Mark has manifested distinct wisdom in pursuing and maintaining a commitment to engage with both sides of the same-sex debate. This debate typically involves the more vocal and visible opponents being GLB activists, on the one hand, in conflict with conservative Christian anti-homosexual activists, on the other, and vice versa. His example of responding to the opportunity to engage with Douglas Haldeman, which led to several symposia at the American Psychological Association (APA), is a helpful model for such engagement. Another example is his collaborative work with Warren Throckmorton of Grove City College on the development of a Sexual Identity Therapy Framework. To my knowledge, this is the first significant attempt to bridge the gap of the opposing positions of gay affirmation and sexual reorientation approaches, regarding which Mark comments in his article.

The most significant testimony to date in support of Warren’s and Mark’s perspectives is the affirming mention of their model by the APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation. Though I might be stretching the biblical point a bit, this affirmation brings to mind the words of Jesus when he stated that when non-believers would observe

the good works of believers, they would glorify God. I am not holding my proverbial breath, waiting for any official statement from any segment of APA that explicitly expresses such a God glorifying observation (though some such would have some possibility being expressed within the framework of Division 36, that division being devoted to the consideration of religious issues), but such affirmation given the sexual identity therapy model may be as close as we can anticipate.

In conclusion, I want to express my personal gratitude for the life and work of Mark Yarhouse as a significant model of the committed Christian professional, providing meaningful service to both the Christian and the GLB communities, though segments of both may experience some degree of difficulty discerning and appreciating that service. I have learned much from the reading (and occasional critiquing) of Mark’s writing and have been blessed by his support and encouragement to me as well. Finally, and as words of admonition more than actual edification as defined in the charge to us responders, may all of us as Christian professionals be as committed to faithful service to the Kingdom of God as has been Mark. And may Mark remain as faithful as I have observed him to be thus far, always open to what the Lord of psychology would have him pursue in his service to the Lord’s Kingdom,.

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## In Praise of Round Pegs

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During the last couple of decades of the 20th century, the mental health professions were mired in controversies involving sexual orientation change efforts. For years, professionals debated the causes of sexual orientation and the efficacy of efforts to change sexual orientation. The sides were drawn and often involved conservative Christian psychologists on one side and GLB psychologists on the other. In the paper that is the focus of this issue, Mark Yarhouse describes his efforts to seek common ground and move into the dialogical mode of relating religious faith to psychological prac-

tice. If you are someone who wants to understand the history and narrative of this dialogue, you must study this paper because Mark has been involved in nearly every successful effort to build bridges.

I was one of the “conservative Christian mental health professionals” Mark referred to as a participant in his 2000 American Psychological Association (APA) symposium, entitled, *Gays, Ex-Gays, Ex-Ex-Gays: Key Religious, Ethical and Diversity Issues* (Yarhouse, 2000). I presented a review of the literature on sexual reorientation change which was eventually published in *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* (Throckmorton, 2002). While Mark is correct that the presenters modeled “mutual respect to an audience that might be anticipating a fight reminiscent of an episode of *Jerry Springer*,” I will add that the crowd was perhaps hoping for that fight. The atmosphere was electric with disbelief and derision openly expressed by some members of the crowd during the presentations and subsequent Q & A session. I provide that bit of inside baseball because it is important to reflect on Mark’s courage and persistence in the face of skepticism and criticism from all ideological sides. I should also give credit to Ariel Shidlo, Michael Shroeder, and Douglas Haldeman who also took some heat for their involvement.

In retrospect, the 2000 symposium was a groundbreaking event. It paved the way for a decade of uncommonly fruitful and effective dialogue between conservative Christian psychologists and the major professional mental health associations. While debates about sexual orientation continue, there are fewer professionals who now engage in polarizing rhetoric, and there has been cooperation toward a recognition of the vital perspectives offered by both sides. Mark was kind to ask me to be a part of two additional symposia, one in 2004 (in Honolulu – my favorite conference ever) regarding sexual identity and adolescence (Yarhouse, 2004) and then another on the then new Sexual Identity Therapy Framework in 2007 (Yarhouse & Beckstead, 2007).

As Mark noted in this issue, the Sexual Identity Therapy Framework (Throckmorton & Yarhouse, 2006) was referenced favorably in the recent Report of the APA Task Force on Appropriate Therapeutic Responses to Sexual Orientation (2009) as one option for therapists who work with same-sex attracted clients who experience dissonance with their religious beliefs. Furthermore, Mark’s work on sexual identity as a self-attribution involving a synthesis of sexual attractions, biological sex, gender identity, behavior, and personal values and beliefs was referenced frequently in the APA report. The APA task force authors created space for sexual minorities who do not affirm a gay identity by highlighting two broad kinds of attribution paradigms, organismic congruence and telic congruence (APA, 2009). Organismic congruence refers to “living with

a sense of wholeness in one’s experiential self” (APA, 2009, p. 18), while telic congruence refers to “living consistently within one’s valuative goals” (APA, 2009, p. 18). Persons who experience same-sex attraction but do not identify as gay often do so for reasons of religious affiliation.

The publication of the APA task force report, just 9 years after the 2000 symposium, helped solidify consensus about a therapeutic approach to help clients to make highly personal meanings of the experiences of same-sex attraction. The APA task force reached out to religious groups and media when the report was released to explicitly communicate, in the words of task force chair, Judith Glassgold, that “we have to acknowledge that, for some people, religious identity is such an important part of their lives, it may transcend everything else” (Simon, 2009, August 6). Indeed, Mark Yarhouse deserves much credit for his contributions and willingness to be a round peg.

Theoretically and empirically, work is needed in order to validate the clinical utility of the sexual identity development model as well as the sexual identity therapy framework. One need is to integrate the burgeoning literature on the biology of sexual orientation in the context of social stigma experienced by sexual minorities. Sexual minorities often repress early awareness of same-sex attraction due to social stigma. The role of stigma as a co-variable in the attributional process requires more attention.

Looking ahead, more work is needed in order to apply the progress of the past decade. The findings and recommendations of the APA task force have only begun to be applied within the mental health professions. There are fruitful areas of dialogue that can be addressed between Christian psychologists who promote the sexual identity framework and religious communities which deeply distrust gays and lesbians. In this way, the approach modeled by Mark as a means of bridge building may also be necessary in working within the evangelical world. In some ways, like the clients we serve, we are round pegs wherever we are with an abundance of square holes.

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## Walking a Fine Line

Mark A. Yarhouse

*Regent University*

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When I first launched the Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity (ISSI) several years ago, one image we used on our brochures was that of a person walking on a tightrope. The person was maintaining balance along a wire pulled tight and anchored between two points. We wanted to illustrate the challenge Christian sexual minorities face in finding balance between their sexual and religious identities. What I have found over the years is that they are not the only ones walking a fine line.

I want to thank each person who provided commentary on my article, "Round Peg, Square Hole: Being an Evangelical Christian in GLB Studies." The range of reactions reflects much of how people have responded to my work, with the exception of the most strident opposition, which I have also heard from both "sides" (for lack of a better word). In any case, if a tightrope walker relies on a pole or umbrella to attain equilibrium, the feedback of one's peers is often helpful in maintaining balance.

Andrew Comiskey appreciated the three-tier distinction between attraction, orientation, and identity, and this is a central set of concepts for how I approach the topic. At the same time, he asked whether I do not take change of orientation far enough and whether my emphasis on identity is a kind of "atonement" for the prior mistreatment of sexual minorities, but one that is itself "shackled by the limits of a purely psychological perspective." Perhaps. I would note that a focus on identity does not preclude the possibility of attractions or orientation changing over time (through natural fluidity or some other mechanism), but by expanding the emphasis from orientation to identity, it may protect the person from a narrow focus on orientation that can sometimes be painful if the person does not experience categorical change. In this sense, I think Andrew Comiskey and I agree that an emphasis on identity is ultimately the most important consideration. My own experience has been that translating psychological concepts, such as sexual identity, to theological concepts for the Christian, often brings us to theological and biblical anthropology, the *imago Dei*, and a discussion of Christ-likeness, which is very much in keeping with what I read in Andrew Comiskey's work.

Phil Henry made a slightly different observation, but one that had to do with instilling hope for change of orientation, and he wants this to be part of what Christians bring to the table that is a resource to the broader

community. The more we move beyond personal testimonies to a more public claim of categorical change (to bring something to the broader community), the more proponents and practitioners of reorientation therapy are obligated to conduct the research to support claims of success or the promise of change. I urge those who practice change of orientation therapy to document those changes in a more rigorous research methodology. How I read my own research on attempted change of orientation (which was not through therapy but through Christian ministries) is that the results rebut the *cynical pessimism* of those who say that no one has ever experiencing meaningful shifts in their attractions or orientation. But the other side of the debate is often *arrogant optimism*: that anyone who tries hard enough or has enough faith can change. What I argue for is *realistic hope* (or, in Christian circles, realistic biblical hope), by which I mean that while meaningful gains may be experienced by some people, most people do not report categorical shifts from homosexuality to heterosexuality. Ultimately, what Phil Henry and I share in common is a concern for client well-being, but we are approaching what it means to protect client well-being differently. Henry uses motivational interviewing to protect the client from undue pessimism; I use advanced informed consent to protect the client from unrealistic expectations (too high a standard of success given the likelihood of 180-degree change). Having said that, I want to hold my present understanding with humility, recognizing that there is just not that much current research upon which to draw. If those who advocate the role of motivational interviewing in changing sexual orientation (or preparing a person to anticipate or experience such change in a therapy or ministry) would conduct a series of studies demonstrating the positive gains toward categorical change, then such an option would have a more prominent place at the table, at least among moderate voices in the mental health fields whose decision-making is driven largely by research findings.

Reading Kathleen Ritter's commentary reminded me of an exchange I had several years ago. At that time, I was writing up the results of a study of Christian sexual minorities who did not identify as gay, and a lesbian psychologist agreed to review my work and help me strengthen my writing. She raised a question that has stayed with me for years now. She asked, "How do people

form an identity with a negative (that is, *not being gay*)? And is it sustainable over time?" Kathleen Ritter raised a similar concern in her commentary: "Over the long haul, however, people must find ways to integrate various identities without shame or self-loathing, and to reframe them in a positive light." I think this is a critical issue for psychologists who support a conservative sexual ethic. The difficulties here actually fuel the emphasis on change of orientation, in my view. The positive that people seem to want to offer is heterosexuality. But if heterosexuality is elusive, incomplete, or (in many cases) unattainable, what then? I think the answer has to come not from me, but from Christian sexual minorities who come to terms with celibacy. My experience with them has been that those who do live out celibacy do so in close Christian community and think of their sexuality not in terms of genital sexual acts (anatomy) but more broadly, as when Lewis Smedes in his book, *Sex for Christians*, discusses sexuality in terms of *gender sexuality* (being male or female), *erotic sexuality* (the longing for completion in another), and *genital sexuality* (what a person does behaviorally). It appears to be the longing for completion in another that is critical, as Christians view that as always incomplete, even in marriage, and only ultimately realized in relationship with God. That is a mystery that is beyond me, but it is an area for further understanding and discourse, as well as research. We have to understand those who commit themselves to this life trajectory, who value telic congruence (living according to one's values and spiritual strivings) over organismic congruence (living according to one's biological impulses), to hear their experiences and the challenges they face, as well as the moments of greater clarity, insight, and peace. This is a concern that extends beyond the sexual minority to single heterosexual Christians who are sexual beings and who find ways to respond to their own impulses and to this broader view of sexuality in light of their deeply-held religious beliefs and values.

As with the other commentaries, those from Jeffrey Eckert, H. Newton Malony, Gary Strauss, and Warren Throckmorton reflected an appreciation for the work that has been done to build bridges and practice "convicted civility" in writing, research, and professional relationships. Jeffrey Eckert suggested there is benefit to be gained from defining terms, especially what attraction means. I am not sure I have defined the term attraction before, but I would certainly want to recognize the multi-faceted dimensions such as emotional/romantic and sexual/physical dimensions mentioned in his commentary. Jeffrey Eckert also raised the question about volition, as I indicated that "most" people "find themselves" experiencing same-sex attraction (in contrast to a claim about volition). I qualify with "most" to make room for experiences like those of Sue Wilkinson, a professor at Loughborough University, who shared the following: "I was

never unsure about my sexuality throughout my teens or 20s. I was a happy heterosexual and had no doubts. Then I changed, through political activity and feminism, spending time with women's organisations. It opened my mind to the possibility of a lesbian identity." ([http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/women/relationships/article2002552.ece](http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/relationships/article2002552.ece))

Newt Malony encourages us to both *Mind the Gap* and *Mind the Store*. He joins other commentators in recognizing the difference between a line of research and Christian convictions. I heartily agree that these two things—while important and in relationship to one another (what I would envision as integration)—are not the same thing, but science and religion, psychology and Christianity, can be in a meaningful dialogue provided that each understand the other and their own identity and purpose. I genuinely appreciate Malony's pastoral heart toward those who experience same-sex attraction. He brings a good word to help all of us remember the *person*, as well as the importance of the place of *grace* in all of our lives.

Gary Strauss offered an interesting image that I have actually used to describe the early stage of my career: "that it is wise to hold one's beliefs in an open and slightly cupped hand." That is actually how I described my transition from graduate school at Wheaton College to my first several years of work at Regent University, when, as an assistant professor, I was making decisions about lines of research. I think by holding this whole area in an open and slightly cupped hand, it has helped me not to have too much of my "self" invested in the topic or my own views, etc., but to be a little more dispassionate in my writing and conference presentations. This has actually helped foster some good will with those who are moderate voices, but who disagree with me on matters of sexual ethics.

Warren Throckmorton has been in several of the sessions I referenced in my original paper, and I was glad that he could flesh them out a little more and give credit to those who engaged us in several early exchanges of ideas. He reminds all of us that there is more work to be done in this important area, and that real people are on the other end of these discussions. As Richard Mouw would say, we do well to practice our work with convicted civility.

The topics of homosexuality and sexual identity lend themselves to polarized debates. But there is also in all of this an opportunity for those who are willing to walk a tightrope, for those who seek a balance so that they can help others find balance. Make no mistake: there are plenty of people on either side to pull you in either direction, and there is a need for balancing tools, such as the wisdom of one's colleagues. I again wish to thank each contributor for his or her thoughtful reflection and commentary.

# The Exemplar Project: Finding What Makes a Church Exemplary in its Ministry to Persons who Experience Same-Sex Attraction or who Struggle with Sexual Identity Concerns

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*The purpose of the Exemplar Project was to explore approaches used by church-based ministries that are considered exemplary in their outreach or ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns. Twenty-eight church-based ministries and one stand-alone parachurch ministry were nominated as exemplary. Of these, 14 completed an on-line survey that asked specific questions about their ministry vision, goals, demographics, and leadership structure. A typology of three types of church-based ministries emerged from the data: ministry to brokenness, welcoming but not affirming, and gay affirmative. Although there are significant differences among ministries in theological doctrine, they have much in common, including being under-resourced and often invisible within their own communities, as well as sharing interest in assisting persons who are sorting out sexual identity conflicts.*

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One of the many practical considerations for Christians who experience same-sex attraction or who have a homosexual orientation is finding a church setting within which they can worship. Their own attractions conflict with a Christian view of heterosexuality as normative, an understanding drawn first from the creation narrative and what has historically been viewed as the revealed will of God with respect to heterosexual sexuality and sexual expression (Love, Bock, Jannarone & Richardson, 2005; Yarhouse & Nowacki, 2007). Today, of course, we see much more heterogeneity among Christian denominations regarding homosexuality. Many mainstream religious denominations are revisiting these understandings of sexuality and the morality of same-sex behavior. Some distinguish between a homosexual orientation and its expression, while others are explicitly gay affirmative (e.g., Metropolitan Community Church).

The conflict can be particularly complex when Christians who experience same-sex attraction hold to orthodox teaching on human sexuality and sexual expression. They may believe in the traditional understanding of sexual ethics, but still find the local church to be a community that is unwelcoming to them, even if they are trying to live faithfully before God.

For sexual minorities seeking a conservative Christian church, the implementation of doctrine creates several challenges for sexual minorities by fostering a climate that truly tests whether moral proscriptions can be held while offering hospitality to those who experience same-sex attraction (the “hate the sin but love the sinner” phrase that is ubiquitous in some conservative religious circles).

Beckstead and Morrow (2004) state that persons who hold conservative religious values may have difficulty incorporating same-sex sexuality into their lives due to what is taught and modeled in their religion. Of course, from a gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) perspective, incorporating same-sex sexuality means accepting one’s attractions as part of God’s diverse creation that are to be valued and embraced by the person and to be expressed in same-sex relationships (Yarhouse & Tan, 2004). Such a view would be expressed, for example, by the Metropolitan Community Church or other gay-affirmative religious groups:

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches is a Christian Church founded in and reaching beyond the Gay and Lesbian Communities. We embody and proclaim Christian salvation and liberation,



Christian inclusivity and community, and Christian social action and justice. We serve among those seeking and celebrating the integration of their spirituality and sexuality. ([www.mcccchurch.org](http://www.mcccchurch.org), Mission Statement)

Mainstream psychology increasingly portrays conservative Christianity as irreparably problematic for sexual minorities. A consistent message is to encourage the distinction between religion and spirituality, so that GLB persons can leave the organized religion they grew up with while retaining a vital spirituality that can itself be nurtured (Grant & Epp, 1998; Schuck & Liddle, 2001). Grant and Epp went as far as to portray conservative or traditional religion as “pathological religion” (p. 32), one that when encountered by a mental health professional, must be responded to with empathy.

These recommendations are understandable when the conflict is viewed through the lens of a gay-affirmative approach. But such an approach fails to fully appreciate the religious perspectives often held by sexual minorities themselves (Wolkomir, 2006; Yarhouse & Tan, 2004). For example, in a recent climate survey of three Council of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) member institutions (Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean & Brooke, 2007), 104 sexual minorities were asked what recommendations they had for their institution and for the local church. Many suggestions were offered and focused primarily on finding ways to demonstrate love to sexual minorities and finding ways to engage the topic more openly. These suggestions were provided by sexual minorities, the vast majority of whom were conservative in terms of a Christian sexual ethic.

These findings are consistent with an earlier qualitative study of 14 young adult sexual minorities (some of whom identified as gay, some of whom did not) who offered their thoughts on what they would have liked from Christianity (Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, & Tan, 2005). These suggestions included open communication (about homosexuality), acceptance, resources, and accountability. These same participants shared how Christianity harmed them – the primary themes were lack of support and guilt and shame.

The challenge remains as to how local churches can minister effectively to sexual minorities. Certainly, some churches want to minister and reach out to sexual minorities, but may find it difficult to do so. Church leaders often want to know what kinds of outreach or ministry other churches provide or which churches are doing good work in this area.

The present investigation is a study of church-based ministries that are exemplary, or worth imitating, in their outreach or ministry to the community of persons who experience same-sex attraction or who

struggle with sexual identity concerns. The purpose of this study was to explore this area of ministry and to learn how churches provide services to this population. Through this project, it was our hope to better understand and assess what makes a church-based ministry exemplary in its work with persons who experience same-sex attraction; identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or who have sexual identity concerns.

## METHOD

The current study was born in response to the requests from pastors and church leaders to know what they could do to minister to individuals with sexual identity concerns in their congregations. The Institute for the Study of Sexual Identity (ISSI) has received requests for consultations with various church bodies to address the issues faced by individuals who experience same-sex attraction as well as the issues churches may face in ministering to them. These petitions for help in understanding how to best minister to this population prompted ISSI to hold a forum for local area pastors and a focus group discussion at a regional conference for pastors, lay-leaders, and individuals with same-sex attractions. These two preliminary events were the catalysts for this project as it further investigated how churches are offering ministry and outreach services to persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns.

Due to the relative under-representation of studies about this population, primarily descriptive statistics and qualitative methodology were employed. Qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate for analyzing relatively unexplored research questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984), and in this study, qualitative methodology allowed respondents to share details about their church-based ministries.

### Participants

Twenty-eight church-based ministries and one stand-alone, parachurch ministry across the continental United States were nominated as exemplars. Ministry personnel from 14 of the 29 nominees responded to the request to complete the online survey, yielding a response rate of 48.28%.

The ministry leaders who participated in this project were asked some general questions about the church to which they belonged. They were asked about church membership, church location, and the number of paid staff. One of the churches (7.14%) had a membership of between 0-300. Three of the churches (21.43%) had 300-500 members. Two (14.29%) had 500-1,000 members. Four of the churches (28.57%) had 1,000-3,000 members. Three of the churches (21.43%) had 7,000-15,000 members. And the final church (7.14%) had more than 15,000 members. The locations of the

churches ranged from rural (n=1, 7.14%), to suburban (n=7, 50%), to urban (n=6, 42.86%).

In regards to the number of paid staff for the churches, one of the churches (7.14%) had 0-5 staff, 5 (35.71%) had 6-10 staff, and 1 (7.14%) had 11-15 staff. On the other hand, 2 churches (14.29%) had 20-30 staff, another 2 (14.29%) had 30-50 staff, and the final 3 (21.43%) had more than 50 paid staff members.

## Procedure

Church-based ministries were nominated as exemplary by third-party persons solicited through religiously-identified listserves and postings on web sites. Additionally, churches were nominated by word of mouth and the “snowball” technique (i.e., a gatekeeper was told about the study who then solicited participants for the researchers and other participants were invited to share about the study with would-be participants). The announcement identified *church exemplars* as “churches that provide ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction or are sorting out sexual their sexual identity.” The announcement then also defined *exemplary* as “a person or thing worth imitating; good model or pattern” or “an archetype” and *to minister* as “to attend to the needs of others, to give aid.”

After a church was nominated by an individual, the research coordinator contacted the church via email and telephone to inform the church leader that someone had nominated the church as being one worth emulating in regards to how it ministers to individuals who experience same-sex attraction. The ministry representative was asked to participate in an online web survey and provided with the appropriate URL link.

The study progressed in two phases. In phase 1, research participants completed an on-line set of questions that inquired about the ministry in their churches. In phase 2 of the project, 5 ministries were selected and asked if they would allow the research assistant to visit them to learn more about the ministry firsthand. Four of the 5 churches contacted about further face-to-face interviewing agreed to the visit, the fifth church agreed to a telephone interview. The research assistant visited the church ministries to ask follow-up questions, observe ministry activities and facilities, and interact with staff.

## Data Analysis

Several questions were open-ended and allowed respondents to share information about their ministries in a descriptive manner. These items were downloaded from the secure website to an Excel spreadsheet, and the researchers analyzed the data independently and met to review the themes that emerged from their read-

ing of the data. This resulted in several broad themes for answers to each item. If needed, the researchers could re-review the data independently and convene again until consensus was reached on all items. A similar method was employed to develop subthemes. The researchers reviewed the data independently and developed subthemes from the themes, and these were reviewed together so that the researchers could discuss the various subthemes. If needed, the researchers could re-review the data independently and convene again until consensus was reached on all subthemes.

## RESULTS

### Quantitative data

The results of the survey revealed valuable information about the means, methods, and models of church-based ministries seeking to reach out to and support individuals who experience same-sex attractions; identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or have sexual identity concerns.

*Participants and Target Populations of the Church-Based Ministries.* All 14 ministry leaders noted that their churches serve “people who experience same-sex attraction (but do not identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual).” Moreover, 13 of the respondents (92.86%) also indicated that they minister to “individuals with sexual addictions (e.g., pornography or compulsive masturbation).” Ten of the 14 (71.43%) churches minister to “openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual individuals.” Eight of the churches (57.14%) minister to “parents/spouses of someone who experiences same-sex attraction or identifies as gay, lesbian or bisexual,” and 4 (28.57%) indicated that they work with transgendered individuals. Of the 9 churches (64.29%) that noted that they also work with “Others,” 3 expanded their service to anyone desiring it; and the other 6 churches indicated serving various groups ranging from survivors of childhood sexual abuse to abusers of alcohol and other substances.

When asked about the age ranges of the people to whom they minister, all 14 church leaders indicated that they work with young adults between the ages of 18-29 and adults 30-54 years of age. Half of the churches (50%) indicated that they also work with older adults 55-80 years of age. Additionally, 7 churches (50%) noted that they work with adolescents between the ages of 13-17. However, only 3 of the 14 churches (21.43%) noted that they work with children between the ages of 5-12.

It may seem obvious that a church with a larger congregation would serve more individuals in their outreach and support ministries; however, our findings did not necessarily fully support this notion. Five of the 14 churches (35.71%) noted that they serve or minister to more than 50 people a week. Two of these five

churches reported having 300 to 500 members in their congregations. Whereas one of the other churches had 500 to 1,000 members, another had 7,000 to 15,000, and the final one had more than 15,000 congregants. Two churches (14.29%) indicated that they serve 21 to 50 individuals in a week's time; their congregations were 500 to 1,000 and 1,000 to 3,000 people strong. Three of the respondents (21.43%) noted that they minister to 16 to 20 weekly. The size of one of these congregations fell between 1,000 to 3,000 members. The other two indicated having memberships of 7,000 to 15,000 people. Two other respondents (14.29%) noted that their ministries serve 11 to 15 individuals a week. One of these churches had 0 to 300 members whereas the other had 1,000 to 3,000 congregants. One other ministry leader (7.14%) indicated serving 6 to 10 individuals in a church with 1,000 to 3,000 congregants. One respondent (7.14%) noted that the church he represents, which had 300 to 500 members, ministers to 0 to 5 individuals a week. As these results show, the size of the church may not necessarily positively influence the number of individuals served each week. In other words, a church with thousands of congregants may not necessarily serve a lot of people in their ministry to individuals experiencing sexual identity concerns.

The ministry personnel were also asked to describe the guidelines that the participants of their ministries would need to follow, if there were such guidelines. Nine (64.29%) of the 14 churches indicated that they did indeed have guidelines or rules for their participants to adhere to in order to receive services. The types of guidelines ranged from simple, open-ended style guidelines to itemized lists of expectations and requirements. Many of the church-based ministries with guidelines for their participants noted that confidentiality and sincerity of heart were important considerations for their participants.

An example of an open-ended guideline is as follows: "They must just simply come and receive. Everything is there for them...we make it easy to come and receive." Whereas other guidelines included more specific tenets: "We expect that individuals to not harass or exploit other members for their own purposes. Our foundation raises the question, in what relationships is sex appropriate? We move forward from there, engaging in conversation and in journey [sic] with individuals."

Others expressed more specific and stringent regulations. For example, one ministry wrote the following:

1. No smoking, alcohol, drugs, or inappropriate use of over-the-counter medications. All prescription drugs, over-the-counter medicines, depressants, stimulants, and diet

drugs need to be discussed with your mentor. 2. Healthy emotional and physical boundaries are essential. Therefore, there is to be no sexual/emotional misconduct. Any temptations, fantasies, attractions, or dreams should be discussed with your mentor. Sexual misconduct includes viewing pornography, visiting an adult bookstore, emotional dependency, voyeurism, stalking, masturbation, or any sexual contact with another person. 3. Ongoing disrespect for the program, dishonesty, lack of participation, and disregard for one's mentoring relationship may result in probation or dismissal. 4. While in the program, participants may not have contact with anyone involved in unrepentant emotional dependencies or inappropriate sexual behaviors. ... 9. Participants are required to attend all men's and women's events. 10. Participants are required to set up all personal computers with internet accountability. ... 13. It is necessary for participants to lean into and receive counsel from mentors and leaders (e.g., clothing, finances, schedule, social interactions, peer relationships). 14. During the length of the program, no alone one-on-one time will be spent with the opposite sex, or if dealing with SSA, no one-on-one time will be spent with any other individual also dealing with SSA, unless approved by [Program] Director. ... 20. If participant is married, participant agrees to follow all additional guidelines set up by leaders and spouse. 21. Participants agree to discuss all media usage and preferences with mentors, and abide by boundaries set by mentors. (e.g., games, concerts, etc.). ... 24. Participants agree not to breach other participants' confidentiality. 25. If participants have been sexually active outside of marriage, it is required that they be tested for sexually transmitted diseases. 26. Participants agree to become members of [Church hosting ministry].

*Services Provided.* The ministry leaders were asked to choose what types of services either they or their ministry offers. They chose one or more from the following list: 1-on-1 counseling, support groups, Bible studies, mentoring/discipleship, training, speaking engagements/consultation, conference hosting, referral to mental health professionals, and other (please specify). Nearly 86% of the church ministries surveyed (12 of the 14 churches) offered referrals to mental health professionals. Ten church ministries (71.43%) offered 1-on-1 counseling, and 10 offered support groups. Furthermore, over half (57.14%) of the churches

noted that they offered mentoring and/or discipleship. Seven of the churches put forward trainings, and 7 of the leaders offered speaking engagements or consultation services. Slightly less than half of the surveyed churches (42.86%) offered Bible studies specifically for these individuals and host conferences related to sexual identity concerns. Four of the churches marked that they provide other services like residential counseling programs and referrals to healing ministries or specific addictions groups.

Leaders were also asked to identify those services, from the list above (plus one additional option of HIV/AIDS hospice volunteers), that they or their ministry offered in the area of their town or city where individuals who identify as gay predominantly reside, work, or recreate. Twelve of the churches responded to this question; half of which indicated that they offered no services directly in the "gay section" of their towns, and one other noted in the "other" category that he was unsure of the meaning of the question. Thus, of the 5 churches offering services in the proximity of many known gay-identified individuals, 3 churches run support groups, 3 held Bible studies, 3 offered mentoring/discipleship opportunities, and 3 leaders conducted speaking engagements/consultation. For example, one respondent indicated that the church ministry this individual led offers support groups, Bible studies, mentoring/discipleship, speaking engagements/consultation, and referrals to mental health professionals. In contrast, a different church leader specified offering 1-on-1 counseling and speaking engagements/consultation in the predominantly gay section of town.

*Fees for Services.* Respondents indicated in whole dollar amounts what their charges are for the services they offered. Four of the ministry leaders indicated charges of \$20, \$35, \$80, and \$90 per session for 1-on-1 counseling. The mean cost per session was \$56.25. Three of the ministries offered support groups for which two of them charge \$150, and the third \$275. Two ministries indicated costs for their trainings and speaking engagements. One of these leaders charged \$50 and the other \$300 for these services. Lastly, one ministry charged \$50 for additional materials not covered by the costs of the ministry programs. Six of the 14 ministries surveyed indicated that they did not charge any fees for the services offered, and one respondent skipped the question.

*Ministry Leadership.* The ministry personnel responding to the survey were asked detailed questions regarding their leadership teams, the style and organization of the ministry leadership, and the requirements for their leaders. In regards to the individuals running the everyday operations of the ministries surveyed, 4 of the respondents noted that multiple people run their ministries, which may have consisted of any

combination of the following: a staff pastor, a staff counselor, volunteer mental health provider, another staff member, or volunteer layperson(s). Of the 10 churches that are run by a single leadership person, 4 of them were run by pastors on staff with the churches, another 4 were run by lay volunteers, and 2 were run by a staff psychologist or counselor. Overall, half of the sample indicated that a staff pastor was intricately involved in the daily operation of their ministries; furthermore, nearly 36% of the ministries had laypersons concerned with the ministries' daily functioning.

The respondents were asked if the individual(s) running the everyday operations of their ministries personally experienced same-sex attraction or identified as gay. One of the participants skipped the question. However, 7 (50%) of the sample indicated that their ministries were not run by someone who experiences attractions to persons of the same-sex. The remaining 6 (42.86%) church-based ministries had people who have (or have had) same-sex attractions or identify (or have identified) as gay or lesbian running the everyday operations of their ministries.

Working leaders, including small group leaders and other lay leaders, are many times the leaders involved in weekly events, discipleship, Bible studies, and so on. Participants were asked how many working leaders their ministries had as well as the guidelines these leaders needed to follow. Eight of the churches (57.14%) had 0 to 5 of these leaders, and 2 (14.29%) of them had 6 to 10 working leaders. The remaining 4 churches (28.57%) had more than 20 working leaders. These working leaders had guidelines as simple as a "calling and passion from the Lord to serve the LGBT community" to more complex ones such as: "1) Purity, 2) Church involvement, 3) Screening, 4) Training, 5) Submission to supervision, 6) Ministry Involvement (on-the-job training), 7) Christian, 8) Leadership ability (or experience), 9) Certification (in some areas), 10) Commitment." One of the respondents noted that their ministry did not have any guidelines due to not having enough leaders, and a second stated that due to the nature of this ministry guidelines were not applicable.

*Budgets, Publicity, and Events.* The ministry representatives were asked about the general operations and marketing for their particular ministry. The average yearly budget for thirteen of the fourteen respondents ranged from no budget to more than \$5,000 a year. One respondent skipped this question. Three (21.43%) had no budget, 1 (7.14%) had a budget of \$0-\$500, 1 had a budget of \$1,000-\$2,000, 3 (21.43%) had budgets of \$2,000-\$5,000, and 5 of the church ministries (35.71%) had budgets of more than \$5,000 a year. In terms of marketing, nearly 29% of the respondents noted that they did not publicize their

ministry in their church bulletin, another nearly 29% only advertised once a quarter or less in their bulletins. Slightly more than 7% of the churches advertised either every other month or once a month. In contrast, nearly 21.5% of the churches had notices about their ministries in their bulletins weekly. The remaining respondent skipped the question.

In addition to noting how often the church publicized information in their Sunday bulletin about their ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction, ministry leaders were asked about other ways their services are marketed. Respondents chose from eight marketing options with frequencies ranging from “do not use this medium” to “more than once a week”. Five of the 14 churches (35.71%) noted that they provide information in their church newsletter once a month or once a quarter. Nine of the churches (64.29%) had brochures available more than once a week, weekly, once a month, or every other month. Four ministries (28.57%) ran an information table open more than once a week, weekly, or once a quarter or less. Seven of the churches (50%) had verbal announcements during their Sunday services ranging from weekly, to once a month, or once a quarter or less. Two of the churches (14.29%) ran ads in their local newspapers, on the radio, and/or on local television stations either once a month or once a quarter or less. Four of the ministries (28.57%) announced their events during denominational or multi-church/associational meetings once a quarter or less. Ten of the 14 churches (71.43%) had websites that announced ministry events either more than once a week or once a quarter or less. Five of the ministries had email announcements that went out more than once a week, every other week, once a month, every other month, or once a quarter or less.

Another way of marketing a ministry is by hosting or attending additional events. Participants were asked about the frequency with which their ministries sponsor or participate in additional events. Two of the ministry representatives (14.29%) did not respond to this query, another 2 (14.29%) noted that they do not participate or sponsor other events, and an additional 2 (14.29%) noted that they only do so less than once a year. Whereas 5 (35.71%) of the ministries either sponsored or participated in additional events 1 to 2 times a year and 3 (21.43%) of them did so 3 to 6 times a year.

The final question related to marketing asked about ministry affiliations. Nine of the ministries (64.29%) were affiliated with a national or umbrella organization. However, 4 (28.57%) of them were not, and one ministry representative skipped the question. Of the 9 ministries that were affiliated with outside organizations, 56% of them were affiliated with either

Exodus International or Exodus North America, and 22% with Desert Streams Ministries. The remaining 22% were affiliated with other organizations.

### Qualitative Data

*Description of Ministry.* We asked participants the following: “Please describe your ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction.” All of the participants responded to this item, and their responses were organized under the following themes: *Same-Sex Attraction as Unwanted Struggle* (6 ministries); *Relationship with Christ* (5 ministries); *Acceptance of Person* (4 ministries); and *Wholeness/Restoration* (4 ministries).

As an example of Same-Sex Attraction as Unwanted Struggle, one participant shared: “What we offer at this time is one-on-one counseling and support groups for those struggling with unwanted same-sex attractions.”

Five ministries emphasized *Relationship with Christ*. An example was, “We want to create space for the individual to be authentic and honest about their sexual attractions toward the same sex and provide them with a means of building their relationship with Christ.”

Four ministries indicated an emphasis on *Acceptance of the Person*. An example of that was, “We show acceptance and welcome these persons into worship just as we do anyone else.”

Finally, *Wholeness/Restoration* was a theme shared by 4 ministries. One wrote, “[A] Christ-centered support group offering hope and restoration to men and women impacted by homosexuality and other gender identity-related issues.”

*Mission/Vision.* We asked participants to describe their mission statement or vision for ministry (“What is the mission statement or vision of your ministry?”). Six themes emerged from the qualitative data: *Healing and Health* (10 ministries); *Jesus as Central to Healing* (6 ministries); *Love/Acceptance/Compassion* (6 ministries); *Creating a Space* (for issues to be addressed) (4 ministries); *Education and Equipping* (4 ministries); and *Creating/Being Community* (2 ministries).

With the theme of *Healing and Health*, one participant shared the following: “We are here to bring healing to all people, teaching them the truth about our God and His love for them.”

In the area of *Jesus as Central to Healing*, one participant shared “We believe that true wholeness and purity is only possible with an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.”

*Love/Acceptance/Compassion* was another emergent theme represented by 6 of the ministries. One participant indicated the following: “We are committed to providing an atmosphere of unconditional love, acceptance and support through this ministry.”

Four of the ministry leaders indicated a theme of *Creating a Space* that is safe for individuals to address their issues or concerns. One respondent noted: "Our purpose is to create an environment for the healing of any sense of separation that may exist between homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender and heterosexuals."

*Education and Equipping* of ministry participants as well as the Church as a whole was the fifth theme to emerge from the mission/vision statements of the represented ministries. One respondent stated it as such: "We educate and equip the Body of Christ to provide healing for the sexually broken and support for family and friends while assisting those with unwanted sexual struggles."

The final theme to surface was of *Creating/Being Community*. Of the 2 ministries to indicate this theme, one respondent noted: "Community: As a ministry within the body of [our Church], we value creating and fostering a context for authentic Christian community."

*Advice to Other Churches*. We asked the following question: "If you could give advice to another church on how to minister to individuals who experience same-sex attraction or have sexual identity concerns, what would you say?" Four themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative data: *Safe Place* (5 ministries); *Leadership* (4 ministries); *Training/Supervision* (4 ministries); and *Loving People Where They Are* (2 ministries).

Regarding the theme of *Safe Place*, one participant offered the following: "If the leaders of the church don't make it a safe place to tell the 'truth' about personal struggles, whatever the struggles are, then it would be difficult to minister to hurting bro and sis."

Four ministries indicated the importance of *Leadership*. For example, one participant shared, "Build a leadership team of individuals who truly have a missionary's heart for this issue and will commit to praying without ceasing."

*Training/Supervision* was also a theme emerging from four of the ministries. These respondents noted that prospective leaders for a ministry to individuals who experience sexual identity concerns or have same-sex attractions would do well to obtain training or supervision from a respected source. One such participant aptly stated: "Go somewhere and intern or train."

With the theme of *Loving People Where They Are*, a participant shared the following: "Reach out, love and accept all who come through your doors."

*Improvements*. We asked participants about aspects of their ministry they would like to improve. The question was, "What are some things about your ministry that you feel are not exemplary?" Two themes emerged from the responses to this question: *Financial* (4 ministries) and *Public Relations* (4 ministries). For

example, one ministry discussed *Financial* by sharing: "We are always terribly low on financial support and funding, especially when it comes to youth." As an example of *Public Relations*, one participant shared: "We have not done a good job of letting our community know of our openness to all people. We rely probably on word-of-mouth too much."

## DISCUSSION

### A Typology of Churches

The fourteen churches that responded to the online survey can be categorized into having three types of ministries: *ministry to brokenness*, *welcoming but not affirming*, and *gay affirmative*.

*Ministry to brokenness*. The churches holding to the ministry to brokenness model were traditionally evangelical churches that tend to maintain a ministry model supporting the view of same-sex attraction and homosexuality as evidence of human brokenness in need of healing. Eight of the 14 churches (57.14%) fell into this category. A typical description of one of these church ministries could be summarized by the following response:

Our ministry is committed to helping men and women who seek healing in areas of sexual and relational brokenness. It is aimed to help those struggling with the effects of sexual abuse, sexual promiscuity or sexual addiction, homosexuality, co-dependency, or self-hatred. Thankfully, Christ's capacity to touch and restore us at deep levels of shame and brokenness extends to all of us, regardless of the specifics of our issue.

*Welcoming but not affirming*. The welcoming but not affirming churches seemed to hold several commitments simultaneously. One commitment, to be hospitable and accepting, demonstrated an understanding that the church needs to be a place that is open for all to enter and find a safe place to seek closer relationships with God. Another commitment was to not waver from orthodox understanding of scripture, by which they asserted a traditional Christian sexual ethic. There were 4 churches (28.57%) that fell into this category. A respondent from an open and accepting church described their church as follows:

[Our church] does not have a specific ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction. The main way same-sex attraction is approached through individual relationships and statements (when it fits) within the sermon. We maintain a biblical view that having a sexual relationship with someone of the same sex is sin and not fulfilling the victorious life available in Christ. We show acceptance and welcome these persons into wor-

ship just as we do any one else....SSA [sic] is usually listed with other areas of struggle such as substance abuse, anger, depression, infidelity, etc.

And another one simply stated: "We are a small family-oriented church in California. Our focus is love and acceptance of ALL people, regardless of their life choices."

*Gay-affirmative.* The churches considered gay affirming or "pro-gay" have philosophies and theologies that deviate from traditionally orthodox understandings of Scripture, or find support for same-sex relationships within the Bible. Thus, they tend to facilitate the integration of same-sex attractions into gay identities while also providing a venue for Christian growth and worship. Two of the churches (14.29%) responded in this fashion. A description of this type of church is best captured by the following response:

Our purpose is to create an environment for the healing of any sense of separation that may exist between homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender and heterosexuals at [our church] and the greater community, and to heal any personal sense of separation that may appear within lesbians, gays, bisexuals and transgender individuals. We are here to anchor the consciousness of Wholeness and reveal and celebrate our oneness in God; to fully realize that each is a unique and perfect expression of God and to embrace and empower the many gifts this facet of God reveals. We are committed to providing an atmosphere of unconditional love, acceptance and support through this ministry, thereby uplifting us all to fully express as God has ordained through every sexual, affectional [sic] or gender preference/orientation.

### Shared Themes

In addition to the typology of ministries revealed through this study, it is important to note that the various themes emerging from the qualitative data were at times shared by any of the three types of churches. For instance, all three types shared the theme of *Healing and Health* that came out of the mission or vision statements of the church ministries. The advice of creating a *Safe Place* where people can be open and authentic was shared by ministries with a *ministry to brokenness model* and the *welcoming but not affirming* type. Hence, the presumption that any one of the particular types of church-based ministries we found would be the only one to advise other leaders in a certain direction, like getting training, for instance, would be in error. Additionally, a gay-affirmative church-based ministry may share beliefs that a ministry to broken-

ness church-based ministry would also have. In other words, there may be more similarities between the types of ministries as opposed to vast differences in approaches. Thus, any preconceived notions may need to be tempered until one has fully examined the ministry in question.

The differences that do exist, however, are likely to be tied to doctrine and related proscriptions surrounding sexual behavior and to some extent identity. Put differently, ministries may share a desire for education, support, training, pastoral care, and so on, but they do so out of a position informed by either a theological understanding that same-sex behavior is a moral good (*gay-affirmative*) or a moral concern (*welcoming but not affirming, ministry to brokenness*).

Previously it was mentioned that ISSI conducted a pastors' forum and a focus group addressing similar issues as this study. It is important to note that many of the themes that came out of the responses from these 14 ministry leaders are also evident in the remarks noted from both of the previous venues. For example, having an open and honest environment where people can discuss their sexual identity concerns without criticism was a request made by the focus group that was answered in the mission of 4 of the 14 ministries. Moreover, 5 of the ministries echoed the need for having a safe place in their advice to other churches. To further emphasize the importance of creating a space for persons who experience same-sex attractions; identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual; or who have sexual identity concerns, Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, and Tan (2005) reported that nearly half of their sample of same-sex attracted young adults desired open communication and acceptance in terms of support from their faith community.

Training, further education, and supervision or consultation are also themes that have risen out of not only this study, the pastors' forum, and the focus group, but in the pilot study conducted by Yarhouse, Brooke, Pisano, and Tan (2005) as well. It seems as though there is a growing consensus amongst church leaders, lay persons, and individuals who experience same-sex attraction that church bodies in general need to be better informed about the issues surrounding areas of sexual identity and same-sex attraction and the potential conflict with one's religious beliefs and values.

Love, acceptance, and compassion are other common themes that were readily apparent. The individuals in Yarhouse and colleagues' (2005) study were looking for love and acceptance; the people involved in the focus group asked to be accepted and treated with compassion; the pastors in the forum desired to know how to lead their congregants to be compassionate towards the issues of and people affected by homo-

sexuality; finally, the ministry leaders in the current study advocated for loving people where they are as well as demonstrated acceptance, love, and compassion within the missions, visions, and descriptions of their ministries.

### CONCLUSION

The Exemplar Project was a study of the approaches of church-based ministries that are considered exemplary – by third-party persons solicited through religiously-identified listserves and postings on web sites – in their outreach or ministry to persons who experience same-sex attraction or who struggle with sexual identity concerns. We report in this paper the data gathered from 14 ministries whose representatives completed an on-line survey that asked specific questions about their ministry vision, goals, demographics, and leadership structure. What we found was that many churches that are considered exemplary in their ministry to sexual minorities shared much in common. They were usually under-resourced and somewhat invisible within their own communities. They shared a common burden to provide care to “the least of these” even when significant differences existed in terms of theological doctrine. But the pastoral applications and desire to “come alongside” those who are sorting out sexual identity conflicts was perhaps most fundamental in these ministry exemplars, and we hope that this initial study is the beginning of a broader discussion about how churches can facilitate meaningful engagement, support, and ministry to those who are often battered and bruised – often by the very churches that could provide ministry.

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# Characteristics of Mixed Orientation Couples: An Empirical Study

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*This study looks at couples in mixed sexual orientation marriages. A mixed sexual orientation marriage is one in which one partner is heterosexual and the other partner is a sexual minority by virtue of experiencing same-sex attraction. Participants were contacted through a number of organizations that provide resources to couples in such relationships, as well as through advertisements on the internet. Two hundred and sixty seven participants (106 sexual minorities, 161 spouses) completed an online survey that consisted of a questionnaire with both quantitative and qualitative components. Analysis suggested a number of themes related to how spouses learned about their partners' experiences of same-sex attraction, motivations for keeping the marriage intact, and coping activities.*

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## CHARACTERISTICS OF MIXED ORIENTATION COUPLES

The most recent national probability study in the U.S. reported that 4.2% of men identified themselves as gay (and 2.6% as bisexual), while 0.9% of women identified themselves as lesbian (and 3.6% as bisexual) (Herbenick, Reece, Schick, Sanders, Dodge, & Fortenberry, 2010). Previous studies have reported that 2% of men and 0.9% of women identified themselves as homosexual (and an additional 0.8% of men and 0.5% of women identified themselves as bisexual) (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, & Michaels, 1994). In the Laumann et al. (1994) study, a higher percentage of men and women reported having engaged in same-sex behavior in the past five years (4.1% of males; 2.2% of females), and an even higher percentage reported same-sex behavior in their lifetime (9.1% of males; 4.3% of females). Many of these individuals are or have been heterosexually married, that is, they are publicly heterosexual, married, and may engage in sex with their partner of the opposite sex, despite past and/or current experiences of same-sex attraction. It is unknown how many men and women who experience same-sex attraction or identify privately as homosexual or bisexual are married, though Buxton (2001) estimated that upward of 2 million sexual minorities are currently or have been heterosexually married (cf., Harry, 1990).

Although relatively little research exists on the

experiences of mixed orientation couples, there has been some research on the experience of “coming out” to one’s partner and the difficult decision to renegotiate expectations for marriage in light of a desire to integrate experiences of same-sex attraction into a gay identity (Hill, 1987; Matthews & Lease, 2000). What research does exist on this topic indicates that the process of disclosure is often difficult for both partners, and can shake a marriage to its core (Buxton, 2001). Further, some research suggests religious motivations for remaining married that are of relevance to Christian psychology (e.g., Yarhouse, Pawlowski & Tan, 2003; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006; Yarhouse, Hull & Davis, 2009). The research suggests, however, that many mixed orientation relationships do not survive. It has been estimated that only about a third of couples even attempt to stay together after disclosure (Buxton, 2004). Of that third that attempt to stay together, only about half remain intact for three or more years (Buxton).

Yet some mixed orientation relationships do stay together. In a series of studies of mixed orientation relationships in which both partners reported marital satisfaction, we identified several themes that appeared to be related to the decision to stay together, including religious commitments, love for their spouse and children, trust, and a desire to remain committed to their partner (see Yarhouse et al., 2003; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006; Yarhouse, et al., 2009).

Religious commitments, in particular, may be important to Christian psychology, and it may impact decisions and recommendations offered to couples in these unique relationships. There is an opportunity present to develop responses to sexual identity concerns that is more respectful to religious and spiritual considerations. Mixed orientation marriages reflect but one expression of sexual identity concerns. Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on mixed orientation relationships, let alone research that reflects uniquely Christian or even broader religious considerations. This study did not examine a Christian population specifically, but sought to understand the broad experiences of mixed-orientation couples in general and consider faith and religious coping as an important variable in understanding their overall functioning. Past research has suggested religious coping is an important factor in some mixed orientation relationships, providing support for this consideration (Brownfain, 1985; Yarhouse et al., 2009; Yarhouse et al., 2003; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006).

In an effort to explore this largely unstudied population, information was obtained in an attempt to learn about the perceptions and experiences of mixed orientation couples. The information gleaned from this research may expand our understanding of the diverse ways in which couples negotiate and respond to various constraints facing the marital dyad when one of the two persons experiences same-sex attractions or identifies as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

## METHOD

### Participants

This study was part of a larger study examining various aspects of mixed orientation couples. Participants were collected primarily from a sample within the continental U.S.; however, some participants were from other countries, including Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Multiple organizations with a relationship to this population notified their contacts of the study. However, a large number of participants were not affiliated with any organization and discovered the survey through online searching or other contacts. A number of participants logged into the survey (sexual minorities  $n=201$ ; spouses  $n=297$ ); however, only participants that completed at least sixty percent of the survey were kept in the final sample, resulting in an  $N$  of 267 participants. The final sample consisted of 106 sexual minorities (i.e., the spouse who experiences same-sex attractions) and 161 spouses (i.e., heterosexual spouses). This included both individuals who were currently in a mixed orientation marriage at the time of the study or who were previously in a mixed orientation marriage (i.e., separated, widowed, or divorced). Those who were previously in a mixed-ori-

entation marriage but were not currently at the time of the study (e.g., divorced, widowed, separated, etc.) were asked to answer the questions based on their experience in the relationship. For example, when assessing relationship satisfaction, individuals who were no longer in the mixed-orientation marriage were asked to answer the questions based on their level of satisfaction in the relationship. Also, the two groups were collected independently; therefore, they are not necessarily from the same mixed orientation relationship. Out of the 267 participants, 178 (66.7%) indicated they were currently married to their mixed orientation spouse at the time of the study. Twenty-seven (10.1%) were married but separated, 40 participants (15.0%) were divorced from their mixed orientation spouse, and 4 individuals (1.5%) indicated they were currently in a same sex union. Eighteen individuals (6.7%) did not respond to the relationship status question.

Two-hundred and thirty-three of the participants (87.3%) of the participants were Caucasian, 5 (1.9%) identified as Latino/Hispanic, 2 (.7%) identified as African American, 1 (.4%) participant identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, and 7 participants (2.6%) identified their ethnicity as "Other." Nineteen participants (7.1%) did not identify their race/ethnicity. This sample is clearly not representative of the typical population in regards to race/ethnicity; however, it may be representative of this population in particular. Previous studies of mixed orientation relationships have also suggested a primarily Caucasian sample (Matteson, 1985; Yarhouse et al., 2001), while many other studies do not clearly describe the ethnicity of their sample. In regards to gender, 91 participants (34.1%) were male, and 159 (59.6 %) were female, while 17 (6.4%) did not indicate their gender. The average age was 45.13 years. The average length of marriage was 16.21 years, including those were still married and those who separated or divorced. For the individuals who were no longer in their mixed orientation marriage, the average length of time since their separation or divorce to the time of the study was 4.74 years.

The majority of the participants indicated they earned an income between \$20,000- \$80,000 ( $n=126$ ; 47.2%); however, a large number of participants ( $n=82$ ; 30.7%) indicated they earned greater than \$100,000. Three percent ( $n=8$ ) of the participants indicated earning \$20,000 or less a year, 9.4 % ( $n=82$ ) stated they earned between \$80,000 - \$100,000, and 9.7% ( $n=26$ ) did not indicate their income level. The sample was largely highly educated, with 28.1 % ( $n=75$ ) having earned a Bachelor's degree and 37.8% ( $n=101$ ) having earned a graduate degree. The rest of the sample identified their education level as follows: seven (2.6%) had a GED or High school diploma, 42 (15.7%) had some college education, and 23 (8.6%)

had an Associate's degree. Nineteen individuals (7.1%) did not indicate their level of education.

When asked about their religious affiliation, 111 individuals (41.6%) identified as Protestant Christian, 31 individuals (11.6%) identified as Roman Catholic, 5 participants (1.9%) identified as Jewish, 3 participants (1.1%) identified as Buddhist, 2 individuals (.7%) identified as Hindu, 49 individuals (18.4%) chose "Other" as their religious affiliation, while 42 individuals (15.7%) indicated having no religious affiliation. Twenty-four participants (9.0%) did not identify their religious affiliation.

The sexual minority participants were specifically asked about their sexual identity. Out of the 106 participants in this group, 31 (29.2%) identified as *Bisexual*, 38 individuals (35.8%) identified as *Gay/Lesbian*, three participants (2.8%) identified themselves as *Queer*, 4 participants (3.8%) identified themselves as *Questioning*, one participant (.9%) identified themselves as *Bicurious*, and 9 participants (8.5%) identified themselves as *Straight*. Nine participants (8.5%) chose *Other* as their sexual identity, 9 participants (8.5%) chose *No Label*, and 2 participants did not respond at all.

All individuals were asked whether they had ever had other marriages apart from their mixed orientation marriage. Out of the 106 total sexual minority participants, 99 responded to this item, with 86.9 percent (n=86) indicating No and 13.1 percent (n=13) indicating Yes. Out of the 161 heterosexual spouse participants, 152 responded to the item, with 73.7 percent (n=112) indicating "Yes" and 26.3 percent (n=40) indicating "No." The majority of individuals indicated the other marriage occurred before their mixed orientation marriage.

## Measures

A questionnaire was developed by the researchers that assessed various areas, including relationship history, relationship dynamics, sexual functioning, relationship satisfaction, coping skills, sexuality orientation and identity, as well as other factors. The items were developed primarily using previous research to determine key research questions and variables salient to mixed-orientation relationships. Some items were adapted from previous studies when the items were public domain or permission was gained from the author. Finally, in addition to the questionnaire developed by the researchers, some specific measures were used, such as the Religious commitment Inventory (RCI-10) and the Kinsey Scale.

*RCI-10.* The RCI-10 was used as a general assessment of religiosity (Worthington et al., 2003). Test-retest reliability has been reported at .87 and coefficient alpha is .93. It has also demonstrated good construct,

criterion-related, and discriminate validity (Worthington et. al., 2003). The RCI-10 asks about various aspects of religious commitment, including personal acts of worship (e.g., prayer), behaviors (e.g., church attendance), as well as the perception of the importance of religion and faith in the individual's life. The measure has 10 items on a 5-point Likert scale from "Not at all true of me" to "Totally true of me." Scores can range from 10 to 50.

*Kinsey scale.* The Kinsey scale was used as a general measure of sexual orientation. The original measure asks individuals to rate aspects of their sexuality on a continuum from exclusively heterosexual (0) to exclusively homosexual (6); the categories were scaled from 1 to 7 to get a quantitative value. There are four versions of the scale, each assessing a different domain: sexual behavior, sexual attractions, emotional attachments, and sexual fantasy. All versions use the same rating scale, but applied to the respective domains. Participants were asked to give a rating for their experience prior to their marriage and again for their current experience.

## Procedure

Participants completed the survey online using a secure online survey program. There were two separate versions of the survey, one for sexual minority participants and one for the heterosexual spouses. The surveys were identical, except the version for sexual minorities included additional questions specifically related to sexual orientation and identity. The complete questionnaires were a compilation of multiple measures and individual questions, including those used for this specific study. The links to the surveys were housed at an independent website solely used for the study, where individuals were given a brief description of the study and instructions on how to participate. The link to the study's website was posted on various websites, blogs, and newsletters where individuals in mixed orientation relationships may visit. The link to the website was also emailed to individuals involved in various organizations who had specific affiliations to this population. Individuals searching online for information regarding mixed orientation relationships could also find the study, as the website would come up in search engines. Only participants who were at least 18 years old and were currently or had been previously in a mixed orientation marriage could participate. Qualifying questions at the beginning of the survey eliminated any participants who did not meet these requirements.

## Data Analysis

Due to the relative under-representation of research on mixed orientation couples, a mixed quantitative

and qualitative research methodology was employed. Methodologies that are more descriptive or qualitative in nature are deemed appropriate for analyzing relatively unexplored research questions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Such a methodology allowed participants to share multiple aspects of their experiences in mixed orientation relationships. Data collection was designed to provide frequency counts and other descriptive calculations along with free-writing options that allow an initial step toward a grounded theory (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Past and current experiences of motivations for marrying and staying married, coping strategies, and many other factors could all be engaged with less influence from *a priori* assumptions.

Qualitative responses were organized into themes and subthemes, and the first author worked with the other authors to organize this information inductively with the hope of identifying “multiple realities” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that might be represented among the perspectives of participants. If needed, each reviewer was available to re-review the data independently until consensus was reached on all items.

## RESULTS

### Disclosure

*Time of disclosure.* Both groups were asked to indicate the time in their relationship at which disclosure took place. They were asked to select from specific time periods, which included “when we first met,” “prior to engagement,” “before you married,” “after you married,” “after separation,” and “never.” Out of the sexual minorities who responded (n=104), the largest group reported disclosure took place after they were married (n = 50; 48.1%). The next largest group indicated disclosure took place prior to engagement (n= 25; 24 %). Twelve individuals (11.5%) indicated disclosure took place when they first met their spouse, 10 individuals (9.6%) indicated disclosure took place after engagement but prior to marriage, 1 individual (1%) indicated disclosure took place after they were separated from their spouse, and 6 individuals (5.8%) stated that they never disclosed their same-sex attractions.

From the heterosexual spouse group, the frequencies were similar but not identical. Out of the 155 individuals that responded to the item, the highest percentage (n= 94; 60.6%) stated disclosure took place after they were married. The next largest percentage (n=23; 14.8%) indicated that their spouse never actually disclosed their same-sex attractions. Eighteen individuals (11.6%) stated disclosure took place prior to engagement, 8 (5.2%) stated it occurred when they first met, 7 (4.5%) stated it occurred after their engagement but prior to marriage, and five individuals (3.2%) stated it occurred after they were separated. Six individuals did not respond to this item.

*Method of disclosure.* Both groups were asked to indicate how disclosure occurred; 102 sexual minorities and 154 spouses responded. For both groups, the largest number of respondents indicated disclosure was totally voluntary; however, a larger percentage of sexual minorities responded this way than spouses (sexual minorities n=75, 73.5%; spouses n=65, 42.2%). For the sexual minority group, the rest of the respondents answered as follows: *Because of question from spouse* (n=11; 10.8%), *Discovery/various circumstances* (i.e., unintentionally) (n=11; 10.8%), and *Encouraged by others* (n=5; 4.9%). The rest of the spouses group responded with a similar distribution, but with different percentage levels: *Discovery/various circumstances* (i.e., unintentionally) (n=46; 29.9%), *Because of questions from spouse* (n=37; 24%), and *Encouraged by others* (n=6; 3.9%).

*Reactions to disclosure.* Both groups were asked about their reaction to the disclosure of the sexual minority spouse’s same-sex attraction. The heterosexual spouses were asked about their reaction to disclosure, and the sexual minority spouses were asked about their own reaction as well as their spouses’ reaction. They were given a number of choices and were asked to choose all that applied to them (see Table 1).

For the heterosexual spouses, the five most frequently identified responses for their own reaction to their spouses’ disclosure of same-sex attractions were: *Devastation* (n=99); *Shock* (n=95); *Anxiety* (n=93); *Confusion* (n=93); and *Betrayal* (n=85). When the sexual minority group was asked about their spouses’ reaction to their disclosure they indicated: *Confusion* (n=45); *Understanding* (n=43); *Acceptance* (n=43); *Other* (n=29); *Anger* (n=28); and *Disappointment* (n=28) as the top responses. Finally, the sexual minority spouses were asked about their own experience and reactions to disclosing to their spouse about their same-sex attractions. They identified *Relief* (n=58); *Anxiety* (n=49); *Peace* (n=37); *Other* (n=32); and *Confusion* (n=27) as the most prevalent reactions. It is interesting to note the differences among the groups both in their own reactions and in their perception of their spouses’ reactions.

### Motivations to Marry

Both groups were asked various questions about their relationship history and their motivations to marry into the mixed orientation marriage. The group of sexual minority respondents indicated they dated for an average of approximately two years before deciding to marry. The group of heterosexual spouses responded similarly, with an average length of dating of approximately 2.62 years before deciding to marry.

Both groups were asked to describe their motivations for marrying into their mixed orientation mar-

Table 1

*Reactions to Disclosure (Frequency of Response)*

	Heterosexual spouses' response to sexual minority spouses' disclosure	Sexual minority spouses' account of their spouses' reaction	Sexual minority spouses' account of their own response
Disbelief	64	19	5
Anger	71	28*	3
Disgust	35	18	5
Understanding	58	43*	10
Confusion	93*	45*	27*
Shock	95*	34	8
Disappointment	60	28*	13
Approval	8	10	6
Acceptance	37	43*	17
Betrayal	85*	25	4
Devastation	99*	20	14
Tolerance	30	22	4
Relief	39	8	58*
Peace	13	16	37*
Anxiety	93*	32	49*
Other	50	29*	32*

Note. \*One of the top five most frequent responses for that group

riage. Respondents were given a list of possible motivations, and they were asked to rate each one on a Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*) based on the degree to which it applied to them. Both groups reported similar motivations. Out of the individuals that answered the questions, the most popular motivations of the sexual minority group were "Wanted children and a family" (n=86; 79.8%), "Seemed like the natural or right thing to do" (n=77; 74.8%), "We were in love" (n=84; 80.9%), and "Wanted a Companion" (n=86; 84.3%). The responses that the sexual minority group most rejected as motivations to marry, were "Pressure from Family" (n=68; 66.7%), "Pressure from future spouse" (n=79; 77.5%), "Advice from someone else" (n=78; 76.5%), and "Wanted to hide same-sex attractions" (n=64; 63.4%) (see Table 2).

The motivations for marrying were similar for the group of heterosexual spouses with "Wanted children and a family" (n=109; 71.7%), "Seemed like the natural or right thing to do" (n=132; 85.1%), "We were in love" (n=147; 93%), and "Wanted a companion"

(n=114; 80.9%) as the motivations they agreed with the most and responded as *Strongly Agree* or *Agree*. On the other hand, the spouses group responded as *Strongly Disagree* or *Disagree* most frequently to "Relief from loneliness" (n=100; 65.8%), "Pressure from family" (n=132; 86.8%), "Pressure from future spouse" (n=118; 77.6%), "Everyone else was getting married" (n=115; 75.7%), "Thought spouse's same-sex attraction would go away" (n=92; 75.4%), and "Advice from someone else" (n=124; 86.7%) as motivations for marrying (see Table 3).

### Motivations to Maintain Marriage after Disclosure

In terms of qualitative analyses, both groups were asked about the reasons why they maintained their marriage after disclosure. For sexual minorities, the most frequently cited reasons were *love* (n = 51), *children/family* (n = 44), and that they felt their marriage was a *good marriage* (n = 36), which incorporated statements reflecting happiness, shared values, and an emotional bond. The theme of *faith/religion* was cited

Table 2

*Motivations to Marry for Sexual Minorities by Percentage*

Reasons for marrying...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Did not answer
Relief from loneliness	18.4 (n=19)	17.5 (n=18)	8.7 (n=9)	42.7 (n=44)	12.6 (n=13)	n=3
Pressure from family	41.2 (n=42)	25.5 (n=26)	7.8 (n=8)	20.6 (n=21)	4.9 (n=5)	n=4
Pressure from future spouse	39.2 (n=40)	38.2 (n=39)	6.9 (n=7)	10.8 (n=11)	4.9 (n=5)	n=4
Everyone else was getting married	28.4 (n=29)	26.5 (n=27)	10.8 (n=11)	26.5 (n=27)	7.8 (n=8)	n=4
I thought my same-sex attraction would go away	25.7 (n=27)	14.3 (n=15)	15.2 (n=16)	23.8 (n=25)	21.0 (n=22)	n=1
Advice from someone else	36.3 (n=37)	40.2 (n=41)	5.9 (n=6)	14.7 (n=15)	2.9 (n=3)	n=4
I wanted to hide my attraction for same-sex individuals	39.6 (n=40)	23.8 (n=24)	12.9 (n=13)	11.9 (n=12)	11.9 (n=12)	n=5
I wanted children and a family life	8.7 (n=9)	4.8 (n=5)	6.7 (n=7)	34.6 (n=36)	45.2 (n=47)	n=2
It seemed the natural and “right” thing	7.8 (n=8)	5.8 (n=6)	11.7 (n=12)	46.6 (n=48)	28.2 (n=29)	n=3
We were “in love”	3.8 (n=4)	5.8 (n=6)	9.6 (n=10)	43.3 (n=45)	37.5 (n=39)	n=2
I wanted a companion	4.9 (n=5)	4.9 (n=5)	5.9 (n=6)	46.1 (n=47)	38.2 (n=39)	n=4

explicitly as a reason for maintaining the marriage by nineteen sexual minority participants.

Spouses of sexual minorities were asked the same question, and the most frequently cited themes for

spouses were *children/family* (n = 52), *love* (n = 46), with other themes also noted by fewer participants, such as *good marriage* (n = 27), *financial reasons* (n = 23), and *companionship/friendship* (n = 21). The theme

Table 3

*Motivations to Marry for Spouses by Percentage*

Reasons for marrying...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree	Did not answer
Relief from loneliness	38.2 (n=58)	27.6 (n=42)	12.5 (n=19)	17.8 (n=27)	3.9 (n=6)	n=9
Pressure from family	59.2 (n=90)	27.6 (n=42)	5.9 (n=9)	5.3 (n=8)	2.0 (n=3)	n=9
Pressure from future spouse	51.3 (n=78)	26.3 (n=40)	7.2 (n=11)	10.5 (n=16)	4.6 (n=7)	n=9
Everyone else was getting married	50.0 (n=76)	25.7 (n=39)	11.2 (n=17)	9.2 (n=14)	3.9 (n=6)	n=9
I thought my spouse's same-sex attraction would go away	63.9 (n=78)	11.5 (n=14)	13.9 (n=17)	8.2 (n=10)	2.5 (n=3)	n=39
Advice from someone else	63.6 (n=91)	23.1 (n=33)	4.2 (n=6)	7.0 (n=10)	2.1 (n=3)	n=18
I wanted children and a family life	16.4 (n=25)	9.2 (n=14)	2.6 (n=4)	40.8 (n=62)	30.9 (n=47)	n=9
It seemed the natural and "right" thing	5.8 (n=9)	3.9 (n=6)	5.2 (n=8)	43.2 (n=67)	41.9 (n=65)	n=6
We were "in love"	1.9 (n=3)	1.3 (n=2)	3.8 (n=6)	32.9 (n=52)	60.1 (n=95)	n=3
I wanted a companion	3.5 (n=5)	6.4 (n=9)	9.2 (n=13)	53.9 (n=76)	27.0 (n=38)	n=20

of *faith/religion* as a reason to maintain the marriage was cited explicitly by 9 spouses.

### Motivations and Process of Ending Marriage

When asked about the motivations and process of ending the marriage, 8 sexual minorities discussed being *unhappy in the marriage*, while 4 expressed that they *wanted something more*. Three sexual minorities indicated that they *could not lie/cheat anymore*, while 2 realized that they were *not going to change*.

When asked about the motivations and process of ending the marriage, 14 spouses shared that their *partner left/moved on*, while 11 indicated *infidelity on*

the part of their spouse. Nine referenced *lies/deception/no trust*, while 8 spouses cited *no intimacy* as the motivation for ending the marriage.

### Coping Strategies

Participants were asked about how they coped with the experience of same-sex attraction. The most frequently cited themes among sexual minorities were *communication* (n = 32), *social support* (n = 22), *boundaries* (n = 15), *denial/avoidance* (n = 11), *religious/spiritual* (n = 11), *redefining the relationship* (n = 11), and *therapy/counseling* (n = 10). Examples of *communication* were: "I am honest with her about my feelings. I confess/

apologize to her when I slipped up.” Another person shared: “Have open and honest conversations.” In terms of *social support*, one participant shared: “We talk to people about it (participate in online discussion groups, have other people over who struggle).”

Spouses of sexual minorities also provided information on coping strategies. The most frequently cited themes were *communication* (n = 26), *denial/avoidance* (n = 25), *social support* (n = 16), *boundaries* (n = 15), *redefine relationship* (n = 15), *sexual aids* (n = 11), and *positive focus* (n = 10). One spouse discussed *communication* this way: “We try to talk openly about it.” Another shared: “We openly and honestly discuss it.” On the theme of *denial/avoidance*, one spouse wrote: “My husband pretends that it isn’t there.” Another wrote: “I have him keep pornography out of the house. If he does his thing, I am not aware of it.” Still another wrote: “Nothing. It’s the big giant elephant in the room that we don’t talk about much.”

Both sexual minorities and spouses were also asked about religious coping activities. The most common themes cited by sexual minorities were *commitment/keep together* (n = 24), *religion as core* (n = 13), *specific religious practices* (e.g., prayer, church attendance) (n = 8), and *God’s will* (n = 7). On the theme of *commitment/keep together*, one sexual minority shared: “My religious upbringing certainly has laid the groundwork that ending a marriage is not an option. Even so, it’s just not an option for either of us because we are committed to each other.” Another wrote: “It is critical to my commitment to deal with the SSA [same-sex attraction]. Our religious faith means that we have a covenant marriage.” On the theme of *religion as core*, one sexual minority wrote: “Our marriage would have not survived if not for our faith, our church, and our relationship with Jesus Christ.” Another shared the following: “IT is the key. Without Jesus we would never have made it. He is the super glue that has held us together when we were both so broken.”

Spouses shared several themes as well. These included *being spiritual but not religious* (n = 17), *commitment/keep together* (n = 16), *religious practices* (n = 11), and *strength* (n = 11). As an example of *spiritual not religious*, one spouse shared: “More my personal spiritual belief. I don’t belong to a formal religion/Church at present.” Another shared: “I am spiritual but not institutionally religious.” On the themes of *commitment*, one spouse wrote: “We strongly believe in our marriage commitment to each other and to God.”

### Quality and Characteristics of Marital Relationship

*Relationship satisfaction.* Both groups were asked various questions about their relationship satisfaction and feelings about their mixed orientation marriage,

as well as questions detailing the dynamics of their relationship. Ninety-five individuals from the sexual minority group responded, with the highest number stating they felt *Extremely Positive* about their relationship’s future (n=37; 38.8%). The remaining individuals responded in the following manner: *Positive* (n=21; 22.1%), *Neither positive or negative* (n=18; 18.9%), *Negative* (n=12; 12.6%), and *Extremely negative* (n=7; 7.4%). The spouses group was asked the same question, and 113 individuals responded. The majority of individuals stated they felt *Positive* about their relationship’s future (n=29; 25.7%). The remaining individuals responded in the following manner: *Extremely Positive* (n=23; 20.4%), *Neither positive or negative* (n=23; 20.4%), *Extremely negative* (n=22; 19.5), and *Negative* (n=16; 14.2%). Therefore, the majority of people in both groups stated they felt *Positive* or *Extremely Positive* about the future of relationship. At the same time, while the majority of individuals reported feeling positive, it is interesting to note that a larger distribution of spouses reported negative feelings about the relationship’s future than did individuals from the sexual minority group, shining light on one possible area of discrepancy.

Both groups were specifically asked to describe the level of “happiness” in their mixed orientation marriage, using a Likert scale from 0 (*Extremely Unhappy*) to 6 (*Perfect*). The mean level of satisfaction for the sexual minority group was 2.9 which fell closest to the *Happy* label on the Likert scale. The mean score for the heterosexual spouses group was 2.1, which fell closest to the *A Little Unhappy* label. These scores, as well as those from the previously described item, suggest that relationship satisfaction might be slightly higher for the sexual minority spouses than it is for the heterosexual spouse in the relationship.

*Best and most difficult aspects of marriage.* Both groups were asked to indicate the best aspects of their mixed orientation marriage, as well as those factors that were most difficult in their relationship. A list of possible choices was given and respondents were asked to choose all that applied. If there was an option not listed, participants were given an option of “Other” with a qualitative component for them to describe their choice. The frequencies of the responses are summarized in Table 4.

For the question asking about the best aspects of their relationship, the heterosexual spouses most frequently chose *Friendship* (n=86); *Companionship* (n=72); *Affection for each other* (n=65); *Ability to Persevere* (n=64); *Shared Values* (n=63) and *Support* (n=63) as the best aspects of their relationship. The sexual minority spouses chose: *Friendship* (n=76); *Support* (n=73); *Companionship* (n=69); *Love* (n=65); and *Affection for each other* as the best aspects of their rela-



Table 4.

*Best and most difficult aspects of the relationship*

Best Factors	Heterosexual Spouses	Sexual Minority Spouses	Most Difficult Factors	Heterosexual Spouses	Sexual Minority Spouses
Support	63*	73*	SSA	58	55*
Friendship	86*	76*	Lack of trust	87*	28
Love	62	65*	Finances	68*	46*
Authenticity	38	43	Sex	101*	45*
Shared Values	63*	60	Parenting	34	28
Affection for each other	65*	61*	Lack of time	43	34*
Ability to persevere	64*	58	Intimacy	91*	45*
Mutual religious faith	40	48	Communication	68	33
Openness	45	47	Frequent Arguing	34	25
Companionship	72*	69*	Infidelity	39	15
Sex	28	42	Lack of Affections	72*	27
Other	16	6	Other	10	8

*Note.* \*One of the top five most frequent responses for that group

tionship.

When asked about the most difficult things about their relationship, the heterosexual spouses most frequently chose *Sex* (n=101); *Intimacy* (n=91); *Lack of Trust* (n=87); *Lack of Affections* (n=72); and *Finances* (n=68). The individuals in the sexual minority group most frequently chose *Same-sex attractions* (n=55); *Finances* (n=46); *Intimacy* (n=45); *Sex* (n=45); and *Lack of time* (n=34) as the most difficult aspects of their relationship. For both groups, sex and intimacy were cited as some of the most difficult variables in their marriage, as well as finances. The heterosexual spouses' remaining responses centered on emotional aspects of their relationship, particularly a lack of trust and affection. The group of sexual minority spouses indicated their same-sex attractions were the most difficult aspect of their relationship, while also identifying lack of time as a challenge.

*Sexual functioning.* Both spouses were asked various questions about the sexual functioning in their marriage. Those who were no longer in the marriage were asked to answer the question based on the last year or two of their marriage. This was an important

question since this can be a particularly salient and sensitive area for these couples. When asked how often they have had any type of sexual relations with their spouse in the past month, the sexual minority group responded with a mean of 4.88 (SD=6.68). The heterosexual spouse group had a mean of 2.83 (SD=5.59), highlighting another possible area of discrepancy.

Both groups were asked to indicate their frequency of sexual intercourse using a categorical question. The highest percentage of sexual minority respondents stated they had sexual intercourse *1-3 times a week* (n=43; 41.3%). The remaining individuals answered in the following manner, in order from greatest frequency to least: *Never* (n=21; 20.2%), *Less than once a month* (n=20; 19.2%), *About one time a month* (n=15; 14.4%). Two individuals did not respond. In contrast, the highest percentage of spouses indicated that they *Never* had sexual intercourse with their partner (n=69; 44.5%). The remaining frequencies of responses were: *1-3 times a week* (n=30; 19.4%), *Less than once a month* (n=25; 16.1%), *About one time a month* (n=23; 14.8%) and *greater than 4 times a week* (n=8; 5.2%). Six individuals did not respond.

Respondents were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the sexual relationship in the marriage on a Likert scale from 1=*Terrible* to 9=*Great*. The mean score for the sexual minority group was 6.02 (SD=2.53), which falls in between the two labels *Not pleasant, not unpleasant* and *More pleasant than unpleasant*. The mean level of satisfaction for the group of spouses was 4.62 (SD=2.88), which falls closest to the *Not pleasant, not unpleasant* label. This again suggests there is slight discrepancy in satisfaction level in regards to sexual functioning, with sexual minority spouses reporting greater levels of satisfaction than the heterosexual spouses.

In looking at the qualitative data, sexual minorities and spouses were asked how their sexual relationship changed following disclosure. The most frequently cited response described *negative change* (n = 77), with subthemes of *decreased frequency/stoppage* (n = 47), *decreased desire* (n = 28) and *insecurity/emotional difficulties* (n = 11) as most common. Twenty-one sexual minorities reported that their sexual relationship *improved* following disclosure. Subthemes identified here included *increased/broadened* sexual activity (n = 12), *improved relationship/emotionally* (n = 9), and *increased frequency* (n = 7). Other themes included *no change* (N = 31).

Spouses of sexual minorities also answered this question. The most frequently cited theme was *no change* (n = 38), followed by *negative change* (n = 29), and *improved* (n = 20). Among those who reported negative change, subthemes included *decreased frequency* (n = 11), *decreased desire* (n = 7), and *emotionally difficulty* (n = 7). Those who reported improvement discussed their relationship as *improved/emotionally close* (n = 9), *increased exploration/broadened sexual activity* (n = 8), and *increased desire* (n = 4), and *increased frequency* (n = 3).

**Extramarital relationships.** Both groups were asked about relationships occurring outside of their marriage. The large majority of respondents from both groups indicated their marriage was not open, or one in which spouses have mutually agreed that either spouse is allowed to have sexual relations outside their relationship. More specifically, 89 participants (84.8%) from the sexual minority group indicated their marriage was not open while 16 participants (15.1%) stated their marriage was. Similarly, 124 respondents (78%) from the spouse group described their marriage as not being open, while 35 participants (22%) stated theirs was.

If their marriage was not considered open, respondents were asked about the incidence and prevalence of extramarital affairs. When asked directly if they had ever been sexually involved with someone outside of their marriage, 95 total sexual minorities responded and 130 spouses responded. Out of the sexual minor-

ity respondents, 42 (44.2%) indicated that had been involved in at least one extramarital relationship, and 53 (55.8%) stated they had not. Out of the group of spouses that responded, 25 (19.2%) indicated they had been involved in an extramarital relationship, and 105 (80.8%) stated they had not.

Again, if the marriage was not considered open, respondents were asked to indicate the number of extramarital relationships they had with the same sex and the opposite sex and how long into their marriage the affairs began. The mean number of same-sex extramarital affairs was 3.14 (SD=4.98, range=25). There were four outliers deleted from this group that were substantially larger than the average for the remainder of the sample.<sup>2</sup> The mean number of opposite-sex extramarital affairs was 1.33 (SD=.58, range=1). The sexual minority group indicated that the extramarital affairs began on average 7.43 years into their marriage (SD= 7.72, range= 25). For spouses, the mean number of same-sex extramarital relationships was 2.20 (SD=1.64, range=3), and the mean number of opposite-sex relationships was 2.32 (SD=2.06, range=7). They indicated the affairs began on average 6.78 years (SD=7.84, range= 27) into their marriage.

**Use of same-sex fantasy.** The group of sexual minority respondents was asked about the need for and use of same-sex fantasy to achieve arousal during sexual intercourse with their spouse. Approximately 102 individuals responded. During the initial stages of love-making, 54 (52.9%) indicated the use of same-sex fantasy was *Not necessary* to become aroused, 30 (29.4%) stated it was *A little necessary*, and 18 (17.6%) stated it was *Absolutely necessary*. Individuals were also asked if they ever fantasized about the same-sex while further along in the act of love-making; 102 individuals responded. The results were relatively evenly distributed. Thirty-two (31.4%) stated they *frequently* fantasized about the same-sex, 20 (19.6%) indicated they did *occasionally*, 25 (24.5%) stated *Yes, but not often*, and 25 (24.5%) stated they never fantasized about the same sex while having intercourse with their spouse. Most individuals (n = 60; 64.5%) indicated their spouse was not aware of their same-sex fantasies, while 33 (35.5%) indicated their spouse was aware. Thirteen individuals did not respond to this item.

### Religious/Spiritual Values and Practice

Participants were asked various questions to assess their level of religiosity and spirituality. On the RCI-10, a measure of religious values and practices, sexual minority participants had a mean of 32.42 (SD= 14.16), and spouses had a mean of 27.52 (SD= 13.88). Spouses were at about average religious commitment, with sexual minorities reporting relatively higher religious commitment but would not be considered high on re-

ligious commitment (a score of 37 is considered high religious commitment; Worthington et al., 2003). Out of 103 respondents in the group of sexual minorities, 76 (73.8%) stated they attended religious services, with the majority of individuals stating they attended services *Nearly every week* (n=37, 38.1%) or *More than once a week* (n=24, 24.7%). Twelve individuals stated they *Never* attended religious services (12.4%), 3 individuals (3.1%) indicated they attended *Less than once a year*; 9 individuals (9.3%) stated they attended *Several times a year*, 1 individual (1.0%) indicated their attendance was *About once a month*, 5 participants (5.2%) indicated they attended *2-3 times a month*, and 6 individuals (6.2%) chose *N/A*. When asked about their use of prayer and/or meditation, 103 participants responded. A large majority (n=88; 85.4%) indicated they did pray or meditate while 15 participants (14.6%) stated they did not. When asked about frequency, the highest percentage of individuals who responded (n=101) indicated they used prayer or meditation *Daily* (n=28; 27.7%) or *Several times a day* (n=24; 23.8%). Five participants (5.0%) indicated they *Rarely* used prayer or meditation, 11 individuals (10.9%) stated they used it *Occasionally*, 6 individuals stated their frequency was *Weekly* (5.9%), 16 individuals indicated using prayer or meditation *Several times a week* (15.8%), and 11 participants (10.9%) chose *N/A*.

The group of heterosexual spouses was asked the same questions about religious/spiritual practices. Sixty-two percent of the respondents (n=100) indicated they did attend religious services while 36.3 percent (n=57) stated they did not; 4 individuals did not respond. In terms of frequency, 23 participants (16.2%) indicated they *Rarely* attended services, 12 individuals (8.5%) stated their frequency was *Less than once a year*, 20 individuals (14.1%) indicated they attended *Several times a year*, seven individuals (4.9%) stated their frequency was *About once a month*, 11 participants (7.7%) indicated they attended services *2-3 times a month*, thirty participants (24.6%) stated their frequency was *Nearly every week*, 24 individuals (16.9%) described their frequency as *More than once a week*, and 10 individuals (7.0%) chose *N/A*. Nineteen individuals did not respond.

When asked about the use of prayer and/or meditation, 127 (81.4%) spouses indicated they did pray or meditate, while 29 (18.6%) indicated they did not. Five individuals did not respond. The largest number of individuals in this group indicated they used prayer or meditation *Daily* (n=45; 31.3%). The remaining respondents were relatively evenly distributed, with the following frequencies: *Rarely* (n=4; 2.8%), *Occasionally* (n=21; 14.6%), *Weekly* (n=8; 5.6%), *Several times a week* (n=21; 14.6%), *Several times a day* (n=27;

18.8%), and *N/A* (n=18; 12.5%).

The demographic description of all the respondents' religious affiliation was described previously in the *Participants* section. As indicated in that section, the majority of individuals identified as Protestant/Christian. Individuals were also asked whether they considered themselves "Born Again," which is a common protestant evangelical Christian description. Seventy-nine sexual minority participants responded to this item, with 52 (65.1%) responding *Yes*, 18 (22.8%) responded *No*, and 9 (11.4%) stating they were *Unsure*. When asked the age at which they had this "Born Again" experience, 35 individuals responded with a mean of 14.61 (SD=6.59; range= 35). Out of the group of heterosexual spouses, 105 individuals responded to the initial question, with 46 (43.8%) stating *Yes* they considered themselves "Born Again," 52 (49.5%) stating *No*, and 7 (6.7%) indicating they were *Unsure*. Thirty-one individuals from this group responded to the item asking for the age at which they had their "Born Again" experience with a mean of 19.45 (SD=12.56; range=52).

### **Self-Report of Same and Opposite-Sex Attractions and Self-Identification**

The sexual minority participants were asked various questions about their sexual identity and orientation. Individuals were specifically asked to rate their subjective experience of same-sex attraction prior to marriage and currently on a 1-10 scale in which 1 represented no same-sex attraction and 10 represented strong same-sex attraction. Concerning same-sex attraction, the mean was 7.60 (SD = 2.48) prior to marriage and 8.02 (SD = 2.49) currently.

Individuals were also asked to complete a rating of heterosexual or opposite-sex attractions in keeping with the current thinking in the field that homosexual orientation/attraction and heterosexual orientation/attraction are best measured on independent scales (e.g., see Shidlo & Schroeder, 1999). Regarding heterosexual attraction, the mean rating was 5.02 (SD = 2.80) prior to marriage and 4.49 (SD = 2.92) currently.

The group of sexual minority participants was asked to indicate what sexual identity label they took both privately and publicly. In other words, individuals were asked how they describe themselves to others in terms of their sexual identity and then how they actually would describe and label themselves in terms of their sexual identity. As indicated previously, the highest percentage of individuals indicated they personally described themselves as *Bisexual* (n=31; 29.8%) or *Gay/Lesbian* (n=38; 36.5%). See the previous section, *Participants*, for further breakdown of the remaining identity labels.

In regards to how they identify themselves public-

ly, or how others would describe them, the majority of individuals chose *Straight* (n=67; 64.4%). The remaining distribution was as follows: *Bisexual* (n=5; 4.8%), *Gay/Lesbian* (n=11; 10.6%), *Queer* (n=1; 1.0%), *Questioning* (n=4; 3.8%), *Bicurious* (n=1; 1.0%), *No label* (n=8; 7.7%), and *Other* (n=7; 6.7%). All but two participants responded to this item. These results suggest there is a discrepancy in how the sexual minority participants describe themselves and identify publicly and how they actually consider themselves.

**Kinsey scale.** Individuals in the sexual minority group were given multiple versions of the Kinsey Scale, which is a general measure of sexual orientation. Participants were asked to complete four versions of the scale, assessing sexual behavior, attractions, emotional attachment, and sexual fantasy. They were asked to assess these domains both before they were married and currently, thus creating eight separate assessments. The mean score for the behavior Kinsey scale was calculated independently for the both time frames (“before marriage” and “currently”). All four versions of the Kinsey scale were averaged to create a Kinsey Expanded version that assesses all four domains of sexuality (behavior, attractions, emotional attachment, and fantasy). The results are summarized in Table 5.

The mean score of the Kinsey behavior scale before marriage was 3.60, which falls in between the *Largely heterosexual, but more than incidental homosexual* and *Equal amounts of heterosexual and homosexual* categories. The mean score of the Kinsey behavior scale currently was 2.80, which falls in between the *Largely heterosexual, but incidental homosexual* and *Largely heterosexual, but more than incidental homosexual* categories.

On the Kinsey Expanded version, the mean score for both before marriage and the current assessment were 4.33 and 4.57 respectively. Both of these scores fall in between the *Equal amounts of heterosexual and homosexual* and *Largely homosexual, but more than incidental heterosexual* categories.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in their Kinsey scores before marriage and currently. There was a

significant difference in their Kinsey behavior scale scores, indicating the sample’s sexual behavior significantly shifted *toward* the exclusively heterosexual side of the continuum since they have been married. This is likely simply a result of the fact that most of the participants were in a heterosexual marriage, thus decreasing the frequency of same-sex behavior. On the Kinsey Expanded scale, there was not a significant difference between their ratings before marriage and currently, suggesting there has been little change in their degree of overall sexual orientation (attractions, behavior, emotional attachment, and fantasy).

**Sexual identity developmental milestones.** Participants in the sexual minority group were asked to indicate the age at which they experienced specific sexual identity developmental milestones. The results are described in Table 6.

Additionally, individuals from the group of sexual minorities were asked whether they had ever been sexually active with someone of the opposite sex prior to marriage. One-hundred and four participants responded, with 58 (55.8%) responding *No* and 46 (44.2%) responding *Yes*.

## DISCUSSION

This study sought to add to the current research base on mixed orientation couples. These data expanded upon previously researched areas while also examining new areas, broadening our understanding of these complex and unique relationships. Special consideration was given to the role of religion and faith in these relationships and the application of these findings to faith communities.

Mixed orientation couples in this study presented as heterogeneous, reflecting in their responses a wide range of experiences. For example, both sexual minorities and heterosexual spouses identified diverse reasons for marrying including that it felt natural to do so, that they were in love, the desire for a companion, family and children, and so on. They were less likely to report feeling pressured by family or from their future spouse than individuals critical of such marriages might have assumed. Sexual minorities and heterosexual spouses

Table 5. Kinsey Scores (scaled 1 [exclusively heterosexual] to 7 [exclusively homosexual])

Kinsey Scale (N)	Before Marriage M (SD)	Currently M (SD)	Mean Diff.	t-score	2-tailed sig.
Kinsey Behavior Scale (93)	3.60 (SD=2.39)	2.80 (SD=2.37)	0.8	2.32	.02*
Kinsey Expanded Version (103)	4.33 (SD=1.69)	4.57 (SD=1.67)	-0.24	-1.09	.28

\*p<.05

Table 6

*Sexual Identity Developmental Milestones*

Developmental Milestone	N	Mean Age (SD)	Range
Awareness of same-sex feelings	99	14.08 (SD=7.10)	2-45
Confusion about same-sex feelings	86	16.12 (SD=7.39)	4-45
Intimately/romantically kissed by someone of same-sex	77	22.16 (SD=8.58)	8-45
Been fondled (breasts of genitals) of someone by the same-sex without orgasm	80	18.12 (SD=9.62)	4-45
Fondled (breasts or genitals) someone of the same-sex without orgasm	79	19.01 (SD=9.81)	4-51
Same-sex sexual behavior (to orgasm)	78	21.49 (SD=9.94)	8-51
Initial attribution that "I am gay/lesbian/bisexual"	84	25.93 (SD=10.91)	10-49
Took on identity label "gay/lesbian/bisexual"	65	32.98 (SD=11.62)	12-69
First same-sex relationship	70	25.08 (SD=11.50)	9-59
Intimately/romantically kissed by someone of opposite-sex	88	18.40 (SD=7.22)	9-50
Been fondled (breasts of genitals) of someone by the opposite-sex without orgasm	92	18.33 (SD=6.75)	6-41
Fondled (breasts or genitals) someone of the opposite-sex without orgasm	91	19.09 (SD=6.06)	13-41
Opposite-sex sexual behavior (to orgasm)	93	21.13 (SD=5.27)	12-41
First opposite-sex relationship	95	17.85 (SD=5.42)	11-50

also reported a variety of reasons for maintaining their marriage after disclosure. Again, love and children/family were commonly cited themes, as was faith/religion and more practical considerations, such as finances.

When asked about coping strategies, including religious coping strategies, such as commitment, the

centrality of religion, and specific religious practices, both sexual minority spouses and heterosexual spouses identified an array of coping activities, from more constructive strategies (e.g., communication, social support, and boundaries) to less healthy strategies (e.g., avoidance/denial). These findings seem consistent with recent reviews of literature (e.g., Kays & Yar-

house, 2010) on resilient factors in mixed orientation marriages.

The marriages themselves seemed to be characterized by satisfaction and positive feelings about the future of the marriage, although, again, a range of experiences were reported. Sexual minorities, on average, reported more positive satisfaction and a more positive view of the future of their marriage, which was also seen in the self-report of happiness. These findings are consistent with what has been reported in other studies of mixed orientation couples (e.g., Yarhouse et al., 2003), although, again, there have been a range of experiences reported. Further research would help clarify the interesting contrast between the experiences of sexual minorities and the heterosexual spouses.

In the area of sexual fidelity, sexual minority spouses reported a higher than average number of extramarital relationships (44.2% indicating an extramarital relationship), whereas national averages are at about 10% of women and under 25% of men (Laumann et al., 1994). These higher rates are consistent with previous research (e.g., Yarhouse et al., 2003) and may be more likely earlier in a marriage when a marriage is often viewed as more vulnerable to an affair. As discussed by Yarhouse and Seymore (2006), people often question whether they made the right decision in marrying their spouse, and they may find themselves more open to an extramarital relationship early in marriage. This could be heightened under marital strain. Added to the thought of whether they have married the right person, the complication of questioning one's sexual identity or wondering about the viability of a heterosexual marriage, and that may offer a partial explanation for higher rates of infidelity.

When asked about sexual experiences – frequency and satisfaction – this sample again reported a range of experiences, with about 20% of sexual minorities and 45% of spouses reported not having sexual intercourse with their spouse. In contrast, 41% of sexual minorities and almost 20% of spouses reported sexual intercourse 1-3 times per week. Ratings of satisfaction reflected these diverse experiences as well, with average satisfaction ratings higher among sexual minorities than among heterosexual spouses. A similar range of experiences were noted in the use of same-sex fantasy to achieve arousal; that is, some respondents reported the use of such fantasy, while about half indicated that that was not necessary.

When we look at the sexual minorities specifically, it is noteworthy that the findings from the Kinsey scale suggest that they did report significant behavioral change. This likely reflected the commitment to their heterosexual marriage and the decrease in frequency of same-sex behavior. However, when the Kinsey expanded scale was administered, sexual minorities did

not report a statistically significant change in the combination of behaviors, attraction, fantasy, and emotional attachment – the combination meant to convey sexual orientation rather than just behavior. This is not to say that orientation cannot change (see Jones & Yarhouse, 2007). Rather, the behavioral changes in a mixed orientation marriage should not be taken to signal orientation change as such. This is important to the Christian interested in applied psychology who might be more inclined to view behavioral change as signaling orientation change. These should be understood as separate considerations.

The milestone events in sexual identity formation are interesting to compare to milestone events studied in mainstream GLB studies. For example, the average age of awareness of same-sex attraction (at about age 14) is comparable to other studies (Savin-Williams, 2005); however, the decision to adopt a gay identity label occurred much later in life in this sample (about age 33). This is over twice as old as what most gay and lesbian adults are reporting from their adolescence (in which the average age of labeling self as gay or lesbian is around 15 or 16 years of age; Savin-Williams; Yarhouse, Stratton, Dean & Brooke, 2009), although it is more in keeping with what has been reported in studies of Christian sexual minorities who do not adopt a gay identity (e.g., Yarhouse & Tan, 2004). In our sample, only 65% reported taking on a gay identity label despite 84% of our sample initially attributing their same-sex attractions to a gay identity. Indeed, most of our sample privately thought of themselves as either bisexual or gay/lesbian (a combined 66.3%), while the majority shared that their public identity was straight/heterosexual (64.4%). Future research could look at both public and private sexual identity and how the decision to choose one identity over others is shaped by how a person makes meaning out of their same-sex attractions. Indeed, some research suggests that the beliefs a person holds (their meaning and attributions) may shape their choice of identity label (Wolkomir, 2006; Yarhouse, 2001; Yarhouse & Tan, 2004; Yarhouse et al., 2009).

While a diverse number of experiences, interests, and values were represented, a high number of participants identified as Christian (approximately 50%), and many individuals cited their faith and religious coping activities as important factors in their relationship. Previous research has also highlighted this area as being salient for some couples (Brownfain, 1985; Yarhouse et al., 2009; Yarhouse et al., 2003; Yarhouse & Seymore, 2006). Considering this, it is important to be sensitive to the role that faith may play in some mixed orientation relationships, particularly for individuals who are religious. Clinicians working with mixed orientation couples may want to specifically

consider religion and faith in their assessment of diversity variables and incorporate the couple's values into the treatment plan as indicated. Furthermore, this discussion may be of interest to Christian as well as other faith communities, as they have a special role to play in the service and support of the mixed orientation couples in their communities.

To the readership of *Edification*, it might be noted that Christians are at a unique position at this point in time regarding developing Christian responses to sexual identity concerns. The experience of sexual minorities and heterosexual spouses in mixed orientation marriages is but one expression of sexual identity concerns. Very little has actually been produced for people in mixed orientation relationships that is Christian, psychologically-informed, and culturally competent. While there are some voices in ministry circles discussing sanctification and Christ-likeness (e.g., Comiskey, 2003), there are unique ways in which such concepts might be understood and applied in a mixed orientation marriage, and the issues facing such couples need to be further understood to help make meaningful connections for clinical services and ministry (see Yarhouse & Kays, 2010). While this is admittedly a small sample of the population, research on such couples can provide much needed information that can then be translated into Christian applied psychology, counseling and pastoral care, as it is a unique topic of interest that touches on themes of sexuality, love and sacrifice, marital vows and values, and Christian community response.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In particular, we would like to acknowledge the assistance of the Straight Spouse Network as one of many organizations that posted information about our study. <sup>2</sup>Respondents who indicated 500, 100, 30, and 40 extra-marital relationships were deleted based on z-scores.

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# Grace and Christian Psychology - Part 1: Preliminary Measurement, Relationships, and Implications for Practice

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*A Christian Psychology approach to psychotherapy takes seriously biblical teachings and the Christian tradition. Part of this approach involves using uniquely Christian constructs that secular approaches eschew. The concept of God's grace is one of these. Two studies provide initial validation for a preliminary, new scale to measure grace. A first study demonstrates that this Richmont Grace Scale has solid internal consistency and relates strongly to an intrinsic religious orientation and to healthy views of sin. A second study finds that stronger views of grace correlate negatively with poorer general mental health, depression, and anxiety in a sample of southeastern U.S. Christians. Christians in counseling also display lower levels of grace and greater psychological distress than those not in counseling. These findings support the validity of grace as a vital concept for Christian counseling and of the Richmont Grace Scale as a measure of it. Implications for further research on how grace might be addressed in Christian counseling are presented.*

The practice of Christian psychology and counseling is burgeoning. Yet, for all its success, Christian Psychology is an area that is hazy in understanding exactly what it is. As Christian researchers and psychological practitioners struggle to relate faith to psychology, they have little grasp of exactly what makes Christian counseling "Christian." Efforts have run the gamut, from almost blindly accepting secular therapies in efforts to integrate aspects of psychology and theology, to the flat rejection of modern scientific psychology as having anything to offer.

A Christian Psychology approach honors the contributions of psychological science while endeavoring to work from an explicitly Christian worldview (Johnson, 2007). This includes valuing biblical terms and constructs that aid in soul care. A model for the recovery of such constructs is the recent work on forgiveness (e.g., McCullough, Pargament, & Thoreson, 2000;

Worthington, 2005), which has claimed the biblical idea of forgiving one another as relevant to psychotherapy and has taken this claim into the secular psychological literature. This is commendable, although it neglects the vital idea that, for Christians, such forgiveness is rooted in being forgiven by God.

A major theme of the Bible is the importance of God's grace in the life of the believer (e.g., Calvin, 1559/1960). This theme would appear to be a vital resource for the Christian psychologist, but one that has not been often discussed. A search of the term "grace" in databases of the American Psychological Association revealed almost nothing on the concept of grace, but a number of studies examining the television program "Will and Grace" (with the recent work of McMinn, Ruiz, Marx, Wright, and Gilbert [2006] being a refreshing exception). There is thus a need for research on the importance of grace in Christian mental health. The

present work presents two initial studies that develop a measurement tool for grace and explore its relation to religious and mental health variables. Before describing this research, we will develop a case for the importance of this work.

### **Defining Grace**

The term “grace” has carried much freight in the Christian tradition; so, it is pivotal to specify what it is about grace that is to be considered important in Christian counseling. Common grace is the idea that God shows favor to all people causing the sun to shine on the just and unjust equally (Matthew 5:45). This belief implies, “God’s goodness and redemptive presence are evident in all creation, even those persons outside the Christian faith” (McMinn *et al.*, 2006, p. 299). While this belief is a resource as Christians minister to those outside the faith, there is also a special grace given to God’s people that saves from sin and empowers for daily life (Calvin, 1559/1960).

Most central to the biblical usage of the term, therefore, is the notion of saving grace (e.g., Ephesians 2:8-9), referring to the conferring of forgiveness of sins on those who believe in Christ. This grace is unmerited and frees the believer of the objective guilt of sin, offering hope for eternal life. Stating that we are saved by faith is a predictable tenet of the confession of almost all who say they are Christians; yet, in practice, many struggle to grasp the impact of such unconditional favor, clinging to subjective feelings of ongoing guilt. In discussing the relevance of grace to addictions, May (1988) exposes this problem, arguing, “We *all* have trouble accepting the radical giftedness of God’s grace, no matter what our childhood experience. God’s grace is simply not part of our conditioning” (p. 126).

But beyond this, grace is something upon which the believer depends daily for physical, psychological, and spiritual well-being. As such, it became the common greeting in the Apostle Paul’s letters as he asked for God’s grace to be with his readers (Romans 1:7, 1 Corinthians 1:3, 2 Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:3, etc.). Grace is the spiritual resource for coping with life’s daily struggles and sins, and thus, it is a potentially vital element in a Christian psychotherapy and counseling that endeavors to help persons master the challenges of life.

May (1988) has stated cogently, “Grace seeks us but will not control us” (p. 17), citing Augustine’s observation that God is always trying to give us good things, but our hands are too full to receive them. Many Christians either do not realize the immensity of God’s grace offered to us, or actively reject it by holding on to habits or thoughts that resist it. Such failures to appreciate grace make consideration of grace even more crucial for the Christian counselor.

Yet, seeing grace only as a general outpouring of God might lend itself to an erroneous view that God simply showers grace on us without our bearing any responsibility, a position suggested in some forms of therapy where unconditional positive regard is carried to the extreme. Bonhoeffer’s (1937/2001) classic work cautions against the notion of a “cheap grace” that requires little or nothing of the believer. He notes that Jesus’ first call to Peter was to follow him, explaining, “Whenever Christ calls us, his call leads us to death” (p. 81). God’s grace is supplied to empower the Christian life, not to excuse us from obedience. Thus, grace is not just for comfort, but provides a divine energy for following Christ. Both of these are central goals of Christian counseling.

### **Therapy as Grace**

Traditional psychotherapies in a sense offer a “secular grace” that replaces sin with sickness, and virtue with health. “The attractiveness of the psychotherapist’s guide to grace,” observes Makay (1979), “is in part the secular freedom for changing a lifestyle, without the conditions and commitment necessary for Christian salvation” (p. 10). Huber (1987) goes so far as to see therapy as sacramental, advocating for an Adlerian approach that encourages the client to show grace to him or herself and to others. This harks back to how forgiveness has become a topic in the literature after being uprooted from its foundation in God’s forgiveness of our sin.

Christians may follow a similar route, wanting therapy to mediate the love and unconditional acceptance of Christ while avoiding the shame of sin (Reisner & Lawson, 1992). Tournier (1962/1958) concurs, noting that “it is through fear of being judged that so many people today go to the doctor or the psychotherapist rather than to the clergyman [sic]” (p. 102). Such therapy may offer grace, but it may be the “cheap grace” of which Bonhoeffer warned. Grace first requires an awareness of sin, a need for forgiveness, and the need for God’s strength in the midst of our weakness. Christian leaders want psychologists to understand the importance of sin and the concomitant role of grace (McMinn *et al.*, 2006). Truly graceful therapy will require an admission of personal weakness and a dependence on God’s grace.

### **Grace as Therapy**

Christian counseling cannot allow itself to fall into the dispensing of cheap grace; it must incorporate a consciousness of sin. Conversely, many believers are all too aware of their sin and in need of a more profound understanding of the richness of God’s grace. Grace has been seen as the curative for problems of the soul by Christians through the ages. Snee and Zinck (2005)

demonstrate this in reviewing the life of John Bunyan, whose struggles with mental illness found their answer in the hope provided by accepting God's grace. Davies (2001), a psychiatrist, offers an assortment of similar examples that illustrate how God's grace was manifested in noted Christians coping with and overcoming the adversities of life. Properly understood, exploring God's grace is actually a central concept in what makes Christian counseling "Christian."

Tournier (1962) also observed that those who know themselves to be sinners are ready to receive grace, while those who consider themselves to be righteous have repressed true guilt and are not yet ready for the remedy. Menninger (1978) later reminded the broader community of the importance of sin, but Tournier was clearly the pioneer, arguing that the Bible seeks to arouse true guilt to move us toward grace. Seeing our sin properly opens the way to grasping the role of grace in alleviating guilt, and thereby encouraging and sustaining the believer in the path of obedience. A healthy understanding of grace is necessarily coupled with an honest appraisal of sin and need.

Writing from a Lutheran perspective, Tjeltveit (2004) sets the table for formally examining grace in therapy. He draws from the theological notion of *simul justus et peccator* to show that while Christians are justified, we still face ongoing sin. We need God's grace as found in the sacraments and in Christian community. He sees grace as effecting profound changes in the lives of human beings who take the faith seriously. In doing so, he calls for the use of scientific methods to understand this impact, observing that "although we can't measure the reality of grace, we can measure people's experience of, and beliefs about, grace, and then empirically establish what other measurable dimensions of human life correspond to those experience and beliefs" (p. 110). The studies of grace reported in this project are in large part a response to this call.

Specifically, the present work involved two studies that sought to construct and to validate an initial measure of Christian appreciations of God's grace as saving and sustaining, and then to show the relationship of these understandings to mental health.

### GRACE, SIN, AND RELIGIOUS ORIENTATION

The first step in examining the role of grace in Christian counseling and psychotherapy is to develop an instrument to measure it. This first study details the development of the Richmond Grace Scale (named for Richmond Graduate University) and its initial validation. We sought to develop a scale that would demonstrate good internal reliability. Furthermore, we hypothesized that the Richmond Grace Scale would show concurrent validity in correlations with measures that were relevant

to Christian commitments.

To test the hypothesis about concurrent validity, we chose two measures. First, based on the description of grace presented above, one's views of grace should correlate highly with one's beliefs about sin. Watson, Morris, Loy, Hamrick, and Grizzle (2007) developed a set of scales to measure healthy views of sin. Healthy beliefs about sin, they argued, include ideas that promote self-improvement, foster a healthy humility, avoid tendencies toward perfectionism, and encourage self-reflective functioning. These aspects of the Beliefs about Sin Scale correlated positively with an intrinsic faith and inversely with an extrinsic religious orientation. The four subscales of this measure demonstrated internal reliabilities ranging from .67 to .76, which are acceptable for research purposes. Watson et al. also established that these Beliefs about Sin measures had adaptive mental health implications by reporting positive linkages with self-esteem and negative correlations with narcissism, depression, and anxiety.

Given that openness to grace assumes a deeper, more genuine faith, we also hypothesized that stronger views of grace would correlate positively with an intrinsic faith and negatively with an extrinsic faith. As originally conceived by Allport and Ross (1967), an intrinsic religious orientation is a sincere and largely adaptive form of religious commitment whereas an extrinsic religious orientation is a more maladaptive use of religion as a means to sometimes selfish ends. The Allport and Ross Intrinsic and Extrinsic Scales are well-established measures of religious orientation that have a long tradition of being useful in clarifying the religious motivations of individuals (Donahue, 1985).

## METHOD

### Participants

A sample was obtained by surveying 219 subjects drawn predominantly from three evangelical Christian colleges in the Southeastern United States, one of these being a graduate school and the other two being undergraduate institutions. A few subjects came from attendees at evangelical churches. The age distribution reflected these sources, with 90% of the subjects being between the ages of 18 and 26, and only 1% over 40 years of age. Sex was more evenly distributed, with 56% males and 44% females. Ethnicity was predominantly Caucasian (84%), with 7% African-American, 3% Latino, and 6% other. Asked to identify the Christian tradition with which they were most closely associated, 48% said Protestant followed by 21% Charismatic, 14% Evangelical, 3% Catholic, and 12% not stating an affiliation.

### Procedure

The first step in the research procedures involved efforts to create a scale measuring grace. Students enrolled in a research class in two Christian schools, one graduate

and one undergraduate, were asked to submit three items each that would reflect an aspect of his or her understanding of God's grace. Items that were essentially duplications were eliminated, yielding a preliminary item pool of 50. From these, 35 were selected based on clarity and diversity of aspects of grace. Expressions of some beliefs about grace were altered so that the scoring direction of some items could control for acquiescence response sets. Positively worded items expressed orthodox beliefs about grace (e.g., "grace is a gift of God all I have to do is ask"), personal experiences of grace (e.g., "I accept my shortcomings"), and the positive consequences of grace (e.g., "my acceptance of God's grace has helped me love others more effectively"). Negatively worded items expressed difficulties in experiencing grace (e.g., "it is hard to forgive myself of the sin in my life even after giving it to God"), beliefs that emphasize the role of works over grace (e.g., "the harder I work, the more I earn God's favor"), and failures to understand the necessary linkage between grace and personal responsibility (e.g., "my behavior does not matter since I am forgiven").

After giving informed consent, all subjects completed the Richmond Grace Scale, the Beliefs about Sin Scale (Watson, Morris, Loy, Hamrick, & Grizzle, 2007), and the Allport and Ross (1967) Intrinsic and Extrinsic Religious Orientation Scales. Generally, these measures were completed in the classroom as a group, although some students completed them individually outside of class. Subjects from churches completed the surveys while at church, between meetings. During all procedures, one of the researchers was always available to answer any questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Scales were scored based on average response per item. In assessing internal reliability, all but one Grace Scale item showed a positive item-to-total correlation. This item was removed from the data analysis, resulting in a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of .87, which was quite satisfactory in showing that the Richmond Grace Scale was internally reliable.

A second goal of the study was to demonstrate construct validity as the authors hypothesized that the Richmond Grace Scale would correlate positively with Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Religious Orientation and negatively with the Extrinsic Religious Orientation. The data supported each of these hypotheses. The strongest relationship was that of the Grace Scale with the Intrinsic and Extrinsic measures, with the Intrinsic Religious Orientation being strongly positively correlated with Grace (.61,  $p < .001$ ), whereas the relationship with the Extrinsic Religious Orientation was equally strong in the opposite direction (-.62,  $p < .001$ ). Grace therefore appeared to be associated with persons'

having sincere religious motivation and not seeing their faith as an extrinsic means to some other end. The Richmond Grace Scale also correlated positively with all four aspects of healthy Beliefs about Sin, including Self-Improvement (.58), Perfectionism Avoidance (.72), Healthy Humility (.54), and Self-Reflective Functioning (.60,  $ps < .001$ ). These initial data, therefore, suggested that the Richmond Grace Scale had satisfactory convergent validity in addition to internal reliability.

## GRACE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Having reliably and validly measured Christians' understanding of grace, we next determined whether a person's subjective grasp of grace is associated with mental health. We hypothesized that stronger views of grace would correlate negatively with measures of mental distress. We explored this hypothesis first with a broad screener for mental health problems. Knowing that God has saved us from sin and will provide for our daily needs through his grace would appear to insulate us against uncertainties in life and a sense of hopelessness and despair. We therefore further related Christians' views of grace with measures of anxiety and depression.

## METHOD

### Participants

Instruments were administered to consenting individuals sampled from two groups. The clinical group consisted of 57 individuals currently in counseling with a Christian therapist. These individuals were asked to participate by their therapists with it being made clear that such participation was voluntary and that their choice had no impact on their counseling. Those who consented to participate completed the surveys in the waiting area of the counseling center.

The non-counseling group consisted of 55 persons attending several different Christian churches who responded to the invitation to participate while attending a function at their church. Consenting subjects completed the surveys individually while in the church building. All subjects were drawn from the southeastern United States.

Each group was fairly evenly distributed across the adult age range. As might be expected given the sex disparity in counselees (e.g., see Rhodes & Goering, 1994), the clinical group was largely female (46 females; 11 males), a trend that was not as notable in the non-counseling group (32 females; 23 males). Both groups were predominantly Caucasian, with the clinical group including only 2 African-Americans and 1 Asian-American while the non-counseling group had 3 African-Americans and 2 Asian-Americans. All participants described themselves as evangelical/Protestant with the exception of one non-counseling group participant identified as Catholic. Ten in the clinical group and

2 in the non-counseling group described themselves as Christian but not being involved with a particular church.

### Measures

The Richmond Grace Scale used in this project dropped the internally unreliable item noted in the first study. The three comparison measures chosen for examination were a global screener for mental health, the Personality Assessment Screener (PAS; Morey, 1997); the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1997); and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Beck, 1993).

The PAS ( $\alpha = .76$ ,  $M = 0.87$ ,  $SD = .36$ ) is a brief 22-item device for screening general mental health concerns derived from the Personality Assessment Inventory. Respondents reacted to the items on a 0 to 3 Likert type scale including the options of “False,” “Slightly True,” “Mainly True,” to “Very True.” Items include statements such as “I have a bad temper” and “I’m a very sociable person.” Though it has ten subscales, only the overall score was used

as the individual scales are comprised of only a very few items each. Previous research has demonstrated the adequate reliability and validity of this instrument.

The CES-D ( $\alpha = .91$ ,  $M = .76$ ,  $SD = .54$ ) is a 20-item scale used to assess depressive symptomatology in both the general and clinical population. It uses a Likert type assessment where respondents note the frequency of symptoms during the past week, ranging from rarely to most of the time. Higher scores indicate greater depressive symptomatology; conversely, lower scores represent lower depressive symptoms. Items include “I felt depressed” and “I had crying spells.”

The BAI ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $M = .57$ ,  $SD = .36$ ) is a widely-used, brief 20-item list of symptoms associated with anxiety to which the respondent responds with 0 to 3 response options of “not at all,” “mild,” “moderate,” or “severe.” Illustrative items include “numbness or tingling” and “unable to relax.”

The Richmond Grace Scale ( $M = 3.11$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ) again demonstrated satisfactory internal reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .87. This figure identical to that obtained in the initial development study.

Correlations among the measures for the combined groups are presented in Table 1. The Richmond Grace Scale, as predicted, correlated negatively with all three measures of mental distress. The relationships with general mental distress and depression were particularly pronounced at  $-.41$  and  $-.45$  respectively ( $p < .001$ ).

Table 1

*Correlations among Richmond Grace Scale, Personality Assessment Screener (PAS), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), and Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D)*

Measures	1.	2.	3.	4.
1. Grace Scale	-	-.41***	-.26**	-.45***
2. PAS		-	.49***	.64***
3. BAI			-	.63***
4. CES-D				-

\*  $p < .05$       \*\*  $p < .01$       \*\*\*  $p < .001$

In comparing the clinical and non-counseling groups, a statistically significant difference was found in the number of males and females in each group (Chi-Square of 6.715), with the clinical group having a higher proportion of females, as mentioned earlier. While this is not surprising in a clinical population, it meant that sex could not be ruled out as explaining differences between the groups. Thus, a MANCOVA was performed to analyze group effects while controlling for sex. Wilk’s Lambda was .815,  $F(4/106) = 5.98$ ,  $p < .001$ . Table 2 presents the means, standard error of the means, and F values for the specific group comparisons. In general, these data supported the hypothesis that Christians with less of a sense of grace would also be more likely to display unhealthy psychological characteristics. Conversely stated, higher levels of grace were associated with greater mental health. These results are, of course, pre-experimental, and thus do not imply cause and effect. This raises the question of whether persons who are less graceful and also forgiving to others are more likely to

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

be in counseling because of this attitude, or whether they have experienced more hurt at the hands of others and thus struggle to be graceful, leading to counseling.

lack of ethnic and sex diversity.

These findings demonstrate the vital role that understanding and receiving God's grace plays in the lives of Christian. They offer empirical support for what has been assumed for centuries, answering Tjelveit's (2004) challenge to do so. These data substantiate the important place grace should play in Christian counseling, arguing that grace is indeed an essential element in Christian counseling. While Christian psychologists and therapists admit the general need for grace to do their work, relying on common grace and God's special grace to believers, these studies make clear that Christian counselors should consider a more explicit consideration of grace in clinical work. This effort will require more use of specifically Christian terms and concepts than many Christian therapists are accustomed to, but the prospective good is considerable. Tapping into such a rich resource of understanding, and breaking down barriers to this kind of approach, are certainly viable strategies for Christian counseling.

This research lays a foundation for many directions that might be taken in future research. The Richmond Grace Scale will be strengthened by further studies on more diverse populations. One wonders whether persons of various Christian traditions might show differences in their understanding of grace. Would one's view of grace correspond in a similar manner with lower levels of other mental disorders such as PTSD, personality disorders, or anorexia nervosa? Would scores on the Richmond Grace Scale vary inversely with experience of divorce, or child abuse, or work satisfaction? Does grasping grace insulate against tragedies such as chronic illness or the death of loved ones?

But the most promising direction seems to be to develop a "grace intervention" designed to deepen in-

Table 2

*Comparisons of Richmond Grace Scale, Personality Assessment Screener (PAS), Beck Anxiety Scale (BAI), and Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD) between Clinical (N = 57) and Control (N = 55) Groups*<sup>1</sup>

Measure	Clinical		Control		F
	M	SEM	M	SEM	
Grace Scale	3.99	.05	3.22	.05	8.82**
PAS	.98	.05	.74	.05	16.27***
BAI	.72	.06	.41	.06	12.42***
CES-D	.98	.07	.54	.07	19.79***

\*\*p<.01      \*\*\*p<.001

<sup>1</sup> Descriptive statistics include the mean (M) and the standard error of the mean (SEM), and data analyses are based upon a MANCOVA controlling for sex.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

These studies endeavored to develop a valid measure of Christians' understanding of grace and to determine relationships with measures of mental health. A preliminary Richmond Grace Scale demonstrated satisfactory internal reliability and strong positive correlations with healthy views of sin and intrinsic religiosity while varying inversely with extrinsic religiosity, all of these outcomes being in the predicted directions. Moreover, Christians who better understand and appreciate grace were shown to be less anxious, less depressed, and generally in better mental health than those who show less understanding.

The current research had several weaknesses. These data were essentially correlational and thus did not clearly demonstrate that one's view of grace caused variation in mental health. The sample was also limited in generalizability by its geographical homogeneity and

dividuals' appreciation and application of the construct of God's grace. This might be a therapeutic technique, or a training program, or a seminar. The application of grace is relevant in many realms of life (Zahl, 2007), and helping persons employ the hope of God's grace would appear to have a potential to promote greater spiritual and psychological well-being. Such an intervention would lend itself to purer experimental designs and would thus provide further data on the importance of grace in the life of Christians and in their mental health.

Christian counseling would seem most "Christian" when it takes greatest advantage of biblical and time-honored truths from the tradition to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Recovering the importance of grace in the Christian life as the cure for sin and the power of God in our daily lives is critical in equipping Christians to function optimally, both spiritually and psychologically. After all, these are the goals that make Christian counseling "Christian."

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# Grace and Christian Psychology - Part 2: Psychometric Refinements and Relationships with Self-Compassion, Depression, Beliefs about Sin, and Religious Orientation

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*In recent research, the Richmont Grace Scale offered a preliminary operationalization of centrally important beliefs for understanding Christian psychology. This investigation explored the possibility of making psychometric refinements in this instrument by analyzing the responses of 356 undergraduates to this and a number of additional scales. A final 27-item Grace Scale contained four factors and displayed expected correlations with Self-Compassion, Depression, Beliefs about Sin, and the Intrinsic Religious Orientation. Use of this Grace Scale in combination with the Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Religious Orientation Scales made it possible to examine theoretically meaningful questions about the dynamics of Christian psychology. A 9-item Graceful Forgiveness Orientation factor seemed as internally reliable and as valid as the longer full scale. These data confirmed that the psychometrically refined Richmont Grace Scale and its factors deserve additional research attention.*

Progress in using empirical methods to explore Christian psychology requires the development of measures that operationalize the tradition (Roberts & Watson, 2010). Among other things, such scales make it possible to test hypotheses about the psychological dynamics of Christian faith. An earlier series of studies, for example, challenged the claim of some psychological theory (e.g., Branden, 1969; Ellis, 1980; Wallach & Wallach, 1983) that traditional beliefs about sin necessarily produce psychopathology (e.g., Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1988a,b; 1989). A preliminary four-item measure of sin-related beliefs sought to demonstrate that at least some Christian understandings of sin can encourage adjustment. Creation of another brief measure made it possible to examine the further hypothesis that the psychological benefits of sin-related beliefs are explained, at least in part, by variance associated with faith in God's grace. The overall assumption was that Christian psychological functioning is defined by a confidence in God's grace that liberates the self

to honestly confront and adaptively critique its own sinfulness. Support for this model appeared when the sin measure tended to predict greater adjustment and when partial correlations controlling for grace reduced these effects.

Further explorations of this model clearly required development of more psychometrically sophisticated instruments. The Beliefs about Sin Scale recently accomplished that purpose with regard to adaptive Christian beliefs about sin (Watson, Morris, Loy, Hamrick, & Grizzle, 2007). This instrument included 28 items recording four themes that seemed relevant to the psychological benefits of Christian beliefs about sin. Expressing the theme of self-improvement were statements that said, for example, "Beliefs about sin help me see my faults so I can correct them and become a better person." Perfectionism avoidance appeared in such assertions as, "Knowledge of my personal sinfulness has lifted the burden from my shoulders of trying to be perfect." Illustrating healthy humility was the



self-report, "Knowing that I am sinful helps keep me from being arrogant." A healthy form of self-reflective functioning was obvious, for instance, in the claim, "My understanding of sin helps me achieve true self-insight." Correlational evidence clearly supported the validity of this overall scale and its four separate themes as measures of adaptive sin-related beliefs (Watson et al., 2007; Watson & Morris, 2008).

More recently, Sisemore and his colleague (2010) reported the preliminary development of a more sophisticated measure of grace-related beliefs. Their Richmond Grace Scale included 35 statements that operationalized orthodox assumptions about the free gift of God's grace. Some items made it clear that grace overcomes the legalism of a works orientation in which a Christian wrongly assumes that God's love must be earned (e.g., "I must work hard to experience God's grace and forgiveness" [reverse scored]). Other items expressed the rejection of a "cheap grace" (Bonhoeffer, 1937/2001) that makes no demands for obedience or repentance (e.g., "knowing God will forgive lets me do anything I want" [reverse scored]). Still other statements made it clear that receiving grace from God makes it possible to be more loving and forgiving toward others (e.g., "because of grace bestowed to me, I am able to forgive others"). Correlations from two samples supported the validity of this preliminary measure, as did the finding that Christians in counseling reported lower grace and greater psychological disturbance than those not in counseling.

The present project sought to further develop the Richmond Grace Scale by accomplishing three broad objectives. The first goal was to maximize the psychometric properties of the Grace Scale. Procedures examined whether the internal reliability of this instrument might be increased. Use of a larger sample than those employed by Sisemore et al. (2010) also made it possible to assess its factor structure.

Second, administration of additional psychological and religious measures permitted the examination of a number of validity related issues. Correlations with the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b) were of special interest. Self-compassion has been proposed as a more valid index of adjustment than self-esteem, which may record "an over-emphasis on evaluating and liking the self" with the result of nurturing "narcissism, self-absorption, self-centeredness, and a lack of concern for others" (Neff, 2003a, p. 86). Self-compassion is a Buddhist concept and "involves being touched by and open to one's own suffering, not avoiding or disconnecting from it, generating the desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal one's pain with kindness" (Neff, 2003b, p. 87). Grace represents a kindness toward the self, albeit from God rather than from the self itself, suggesting that the Richmond Grace Scale and its factors might correlate positively with Self-Compassion.

Self-compassion also involves "acknowledging that suffering, failure, and inadequacies are part of the human condition" (Neff, 2003b, p. 87). This element of Self-Compassion suggested a positive correlation with Beliefs about Sin as well. The administration of trait measures of depression and anxiety (Costello & Comrey, 1967) made it possible to test the further expectation that Grace, Beliefs about Sin, and Self-Compassion would all predict greater mental health.

The Intrinsic, Extrinsic Personal, and Extrinsic Social Religious Orientation Scales of Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) assessed basic religious motivations. With an intrinsic orientation, religion defines the ultimate end in a believer's life. These extrinsic motivations involve instead the use of religion as a means to other ends associated with psychological and social well-being. As originally conceptualized, the intrinsic orientation describes more adaptive and the extrinsic motivations more maladaptive forms of faith (Allport & Ross, 1967). Considerable evidence supports this characterization (Donahue, 1985), but especially with instruments developed after the original Allport and Ross scales, empirical findings and conceptual clarifications have suggested that extrinsic motivations can have positive as well as negative implications for adjustment (e.g., Pargament, 1997).

With regard to these religious orientations, a first hypothesis was that Grace, Beliefs about Sin, and Self-Compassion would all correlate positively with especially the Intrinsic, but perhaps with the other religious orientations as well. This suggestion rested upon the assumption that Christians have adaptive understandings of "suffering, failure, and inadequacies" and of the availability of forgiveness for these problems of the "human condition" (Neff, 2003b, p. 87). A second hypothesis was that the Intrinsic Scale, as a rough marker of sincere Christian commitments, would correlate more strongly with the Grace Scale as a Christian measure of self-forgiveness than with Self-Compassion as a Buddhist index of a similar, though not identical process. A third hypothesis was that Beliefs about Sin and the Grace Scale would make independent contributions to the prediction of Christian motivations. A Christian rejection of "cheap grace" (Bonhoeffer, 1937/2001) presumably means that the ongoing problems of sin are acknowledged even when God's grace is experienced. In other words, grace does not make sin disappear as a separate reality that Christians must continue to address through obedience and repentance (e.g., 1 John 1: 8-10). Awareness of both sin and grace should therefore combine to predict Christian motivations.

Third, this study made it possible to use psychometrically more sophisticated measures to test the model that Christian faith in God's grace supports the development of psychologically adaptive beliefs about

sin (Watson et al., 1989a). Again, the hypothesis was that Beliefs about Sin and Grace would both correlate positively with Self-Compassion. If so, then the previously proposed model suggests that the Grace Scale should at least partially mediate the ability of Beliefs about Sin to predict greater Self-Compassion (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Further tests of this model would be possible if Beliefs about Sin and the Grace scales also both displayed negative correlations with Depression and/or Anxiety.

In summary, this project attempted to make psychometric refinements in the Richmond Grace Scale and tested five most important sets of hypotheses:

First, Richmond Grace and Belief about Sin scales should correlate positively with Self-Compassion, and these three measures should also display negative linkages with Depression and/or Anxiety.

Second, Richmond Grace, Beliefs about Sin, and Self-Compassion scales should all correlate positively with especially the Intrinsic Religious Orientation, and perhaps with the Extrinsic Personal and Social motivations as well.

Third, a positive association of the Intrinsic Religious Orientation with the Grace Scale should be stronger than with Self-Compassion.

Fourth, the Beliefs about Sin and the Grace scales should make independent contributions to the prediction of religious motivations.

Finally, Grace should at least partially mediate relationships of Beliefs about Sin with the more adaptive functioning of greater Self-Compassion and of lower Depression and/or Anxiety.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 356 undergraduates enrolled in Introductory Psychology classes. Of these, 111 were men, 244 were women, and 1 failed to indicate sex. Average age was 18.7 years ( $SD = 2.8$ ). The sample was 75.1% Caucasian and 20.1% African-American, with the remainder belonging to various other groups or failing to signify race.

### Measures

All psychological scales appeared in a single questionnaire booklet. Presented first was the Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003b), followed by Religious Orientation (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989), Richmond Grace (Sisemore et al., 2010), Depression and Anxiety (Costello & Comrey, 1967), and Beliefs about Sin (Watson, Morris, Loy, Hamrick, & Grizzle, 2007) measures. All instruments used a 5-point “strongly disagree” (0) to “strongly agree” (4) Likert scale.

*Self-Compassion.* Twenty-six items recorded six dimensions of Self-Compassion (Neff, 2003b). Preliminary analysis revealed that in comparison to its factors,

the full scale ( $\alpha = .90$ ,  $M$  response per item = 1.64,  $SD = 0.41$ ) generally correlated more consistently and strongly with other variables. For the sake of brevity, therefore, data for these factors will not be reported. Self-Compassion items express, for example, kindness toward the self (e.g., “when I’m going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need”), avoidance of self-judgment (e.g., “when I see aspects of myself that I do not like, I get down on myself” [reverse scored]), and awareness that personal shortcomings are common to the human condition (e.g., “when I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people”). Numerous studies have documented the validity of this instrument (e.g., Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005; Neff, Kirkpatrick, & Rude, 2007; Neff, Pisitsungkagarn, & Hsieh, 2008.)

*Religious Orientation.* The well-established Gorsuch and McPherson (1989) Religious Orientation Scales recorded Intrinsic ( $\alpha = .83$ ,  $M = 1.86$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ), Extrinsic Personal ( $\alpha = .72$ ,  $M = 1.64$ ,  $SD = 0.66$ ), and Extrinsic Social ( $\alpha = .76$ ,  $M = 0.81$ ,  $SD = 0.57$ ) reasons for being religious. Eight items defined the Intrinsic Scale (e.g., “my whole approach to life is based on my religion”) with 3 each for the Extrinsic Personal (e.g., “what religion offers me most is comfort in times of trouble and sorrow”) and the Extrinsic Social (e.g., “I go to church mostly to spend time with my friends”) motivations.

*Grace.* Through oversight, one of the 34 items used by Sisemore et al. to create the final Richmond Grace Scale was not administered. Computation of descriptive statistics and internal reliabilities occurred after psychometric refinement and factor analysis of this scale.

*Depression and Anxiety.* Costello and Comrey (1967) scales assessed dispositional depression and anxiety. The Depression Scale ( $\alpha = .87$ ,  $M = 0.72$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ) included 14 items that said, for example, “I feel that life is drudgery and boredom.” Representative of the 9-item Anxiety Scale ( $\alpha = .74$ ,  $M = 1.68$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ) was the statement that “I am a tense and ‘high strung’ person.” In numerous previous studies, these scales usefully clarified Christian psychological functioning (e.g., Watson, Morris, & Hood, 1989).

*Sin.* The Beliefs about Sin Scale contained 28 items ( $\alpha = .92$ ,  $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ). Seven items measured each of the four themes of sin-related beliefs. Data for these themes largely mirrored those observed for the full scale, and so will not be presented.

### Procedure

Each participant volunteered and received extra course credit for taking part in the study. All procedures occurred in a large classroom setting. After signing consent forms, students entered responses to all question-

Table 1

*Correlations among Self-Compassion, Beliefs in Sin, Religious Orientation, Depression, and Anxiety*

Measures	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Self-Compassion	.16**	.17**	.03	.07	-.56***	-.55***
2. Beliefs about Sin	-	.66***	.24***	.15**	-.27***	-.01
3. Intrinsic		-	.19***	.09	-.27***	-.06
4. Extrinsic Personal			-	.14**	-.04	.21***
5. Extrinsic Social				-	-.05	.05
6. Depression					-	.45***
7. Anxiety						-

\*  $p < .05$ \*\*  $p < .01$ \*\*\*  $p < .001$ 

naire items on standardized answer sheets that were subsequently read by optical scanning equipment into a computer data file. Data analysis began with procedures designed to maximize the internal reliability and factor clarity of the final Richmond Grace Scale. A principal axis factor analysis with a varimax rotation examined the factor structure of this instrument. Inferential statistical tests followed empirical definition of the final scale and its factors.

## RESULTS

Preliminary analyses identified three items that reduced the internal reliability of the Richmond Grace Scale. These were eliminated. An initial factor analysis also uncovered a 3-item dimension that displayed conceptually problematic negative correlations with one other Grace factor, Beliefs about Sin, and the Intrinsic Scale. These items were removed as well. The final Richmond Grace Scale, therefore, contained 27 statements ( $\alpha = .84$ ,  $M = 2.93$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ).

In an initial analysis of these items, seven factors had eigenvalues greater than 1.0, but the clearest structure appeared with the data forced into the four factors presented in the appendix. Nine items defined the first

factor (eigenvalue = 6.07; % variance = 22.5%). This Graceful Forgiveness Orientation factor ( $\alpha = .86$ ,  $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 0.73$ ) operationalized an intimate connection between God's forgiveness of the self (e.g., "grace is a gift of God; all I have to do is ask") and the self's love and forgiveness of others (e.g., "my acceptance of God's grace has helped me love others more effectively"). The second factor included 10 items (eigenvalue = 3.07, % variance = 11.4%). This Grace and Responsibility measure ( $\alpha = .81$ ,  $M = 3.46$ ,  $SD = 0.50$ ) assessed a rejection of both cheap grace (e.g., "I can sin knowing God has to forgive me if I ask" [reverse scored]) and legalism (e.g., "if I work harder, I need less grace" [reverse scored]). Four statements made up the third factor (eigenvalue = 1.98; % variance = 7.3%). This measure described a Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism ( $\alpha = .61$ ,  $M = 2.46$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ) which was expressed, for example, in the reverse scored belief that "I must work hard to experience God's grace and forgiveness." The last factor also included four statements (eigenvalue = 1.59; % variance = 5.9%). Illustrating this Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism ( $\alpha = .64$ ,  $M = 2.42$ ,  $SD = 0.76$ ) was the reverse scored claim that "others must earn my forgiveness."

Table 2

*Correlations of Richmont Grace Scale with Factors and Other Measure*

Measures	Grace Scale Measures				
	GS	GFO	GAR	GAPL	GAIL
<b><u>Richmont Grace Scale and Factors</u></b>					
Grace Scale (GS)	-	.74***	.75***	.42***	.58***
Graceful Forgiveness Orientation (GFO)		-	.31***	-.01	.22***
Grace and Responsibility (GAR)			-	.25***	.33***
Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism (GPPL)				-	.20***
Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism (GAIL)					-
<b><u>Additional Scales</u></b>					
Self-Compassion	.22***	.23***	.05	.04	.23***
Beliefs in Sin	.67***	.61***	.52***	.15**	.27***
Intrinsic	.69***	.61***	.49***	.20***	.31***
Extrinsic Personal	.13*	.32***	.10	-.27***	-.03
Extrinsic Social	.12	.14**	-.10	-.01	-.05
Depression	-.29***	-.35***	-.12	-.03	-.17**
Anxiety	-.07	.04	-.02	.06	-.25*

\*  $p < .05$       \*\*  $p < .01$       \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 1 presents the correlations among all but the Richmont Grace Scale measures. Perhaps most noteworthy among these results were observations that Self-Compassion correlated positively with Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Religious Orientation and negatively with Depression and Anxiety. Beliefs about Sin predicted higher levels of all three religious orientations and lower Depression. The Intrinsic Scale was associated with lower Depression, and the Extrinsic Personal motivation correlated positively with Anxiety.

Correlations of the Richmont Grace measures with all other variables appear in Table 2. Among the Grace Scale and factors, only Grace and Responsibility and Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism failed to display a direct relationship. The full Grace Scale correlated negatively with Depression and positively with Self-Compassion, Beliefs about Sin, and the Intrinsic and Extrinsic Personal Orientations. The Graceful Forgiveness Orientation displayed the same pattern of results along with a direct association with the Extrinsic

Social Orientation. The other three factors correlated positively with Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Orientation. Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism also correlated negatively with the Extrinsic Personal motivation. Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism correlated positively with Self-Compassion and negatively with both Depression and Anxiety. Again, the hypothesis was that the Intrinsic Scale would correlate more positively with Grace than with Self-Compassion. This difference did in fact appear,  $t(353) = 9.08$ ,  $p < .001$ .

In these correlational results, one unexpected outcome was that Self-Compassion seemed to display more robust negative correlations with Depression and Anxiety than did any of the religious variables. For example, the linkage of Self-Compassion with lower Depression was stronger than the same relationships observed for the Intrinsic Orientation, Beliefs about Sin, and Grace,  $t(353) > 4.85$ ,  $p < .001$ .

Multiple regression procedures first examined whether Beliefs about Sin and Richmond Grace Scales would make independent contributions to the prediction of religious motivation. Beliefs about Sin ( $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and Richmond Grace ( $\beta = .44$ ,  $p < .001$ ) Scales both predicted higher levels of the Intrinsic Orientation (Multiple  $R = .74$ ,  $F(2,353) = 210.55$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Beliefs about Sin ( $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but not Grace ( $\beta = -.06$ ,  $p > .40$ ) was associated with a greater Extrinsic Personal motivation. Beliefs about Sin displayed a positive ( $\beta = .26$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and the Richmond Grace Scale a negative ( $\beta = -.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ) linkage with Extrinsic Social scores (Multiple  $R = .19$ ,  $F(2,353) = 6.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Again, Beliefs about Sin displayed a positive relationship with Self-Compassion and a negative association with Depression. Did the Richmond Grace Scale mediate these apparent psychological effects of Beliefs about Sin? Attempts to answer that question followed the multiple regression procedures recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). For mediation to occur, the presumed independent variable must first display a significant association with the possible mediator. Beliefs about Sin did in fact predict Grace Scale scores ( $\beta = .50$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The independent variable must also display a connection with the dependent variable in the first step of a multiple regression, and then on the second step, adding the mediator to the regression equation should increase the overall variance explained and eliminate or significantly reduce the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Beliefs about Sin did predict Self-Compassion as the dependent variable ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the Richmond Grace Scale did increase the variance explained ( $\Delta F(1,353) = 8.83$ ,  $p < .01$ ). On the second step of this analysis, Beliefs about Sin no longer predicted Self-Compassion ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $p >$

$.50$ ), but the Grace Scale did ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Hence, Grace fully mediated the relationship of Beliefs about Sin with Self-Compassion.

Beliefs about Sin also displayed a significant association when Depression was the dependent variable ( $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ). In the significant second step of a multiple regression ( $\Delta F(1,353) = 18.44$ ,  $p < .001$ ), Richmond Grace served as a significant predictor ( $\beta = -.20$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and the effect for Beliefs about Sin was reduced but not eliminated ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). A Sobel Test revealed that the Grace Scale served as a significant mediator ( $z = -2.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In other words, Grace partially mediated the relationship of Beliefs about Sin with Depression.

Of special interest in these results were data for the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation. The internal reliability of and correlations for this 9-item factor were roughly comparable to those observed for the full 27-item instrument. The question, therefore, was whether this shorter factor could serve as more convenient and equally effective measure of grace. Further explorations of that possibility began with the demonstration that this factor was indeed like the full scale in correlating more strongly than Self-Compassion with the Intrinsic Religious Orientation,  $t(353) = 8.18$ ,  $p < .001$ .

With regard to the multiple regression analysis of religious motivations, the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) also combined with Beliefs about Sin ( $\beta = .46$ ,  $p < .001$ ) to predict higher Intrinsic scores (Multiple  $R = .71$ ,  $F(2,353) = 179.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ). This time, Graceful Forgiveness ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) rather than Beliefs about Sin ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $p > .20$ ) displayed a reliable association with the Extrinsic Personal motivation. Both measures together predicted the Extrinsic Social Orientation (Multiple  $R = .16$ ,  $F(2,353) = 4.88$ ,  $p < .01$ ), but the contributions of neither Graceful Forgiveness ( $\beta = .07$ ,  $p > .25$ ) nor Beliefs about Sin Scale ( $\beta = .11$ ,  $p < .10$ ) reached conventional levels of significance.

Relative to the issue of mediation, Beliefs about Sin did in fact predict the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation ( $\beta = .61$ ,  $p < .001$ ). On the second step of multiple regression procedures, the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation did increase the variance explained in Self-Compassion ( $\Delta F(1,353) = 9.86$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Beliefs about Sin no longer predicted Self-Compassion ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p > .50$ ), whereas the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation did ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). In the analysis of Depression, Graceful Forgiveness Orientation increased the variance explained on the second step ( $\Delta F(1,353) = 18.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and this factor ( $\beta = -.27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) but no longer Beliefs about Sin ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p > .10$ ) served as a reliable predictor. In short, the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation fully mediated the relationships of Beliefs about Sin with both Self-Compassion and Depression.

## DISCUSSION

Empirical research has an important potential to encourage deeper articulations and understandings of Christian psychology. Sisemore and his colleagues (2010) illustrated this possibility with the recent development of a Richmond Grace Scale that displayed expected associations with an array of religious and mental health variables. In the present project, psychometric refinements in this measure produced a final instrument that exhibited clear validity in operationalizing a construct that should be central to Christian psychosocial adjustment. In terms of psychological functioning, the psychometrically refined Grace Scale and its factors displayed hypothesized linkages with greater Self-Compassion and lower Depression. In line with expectations about religious implications, the Grace measures also exhibited robust positive correlations with both Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Religious Orientation.

Especially useful was the opportunity to combine the Grace Scale with other instruments to explore theoretically meaningful questions about Christian psychology. First, Self-Compassion is a measure that in a very general way points toward the Christian idea of grace, but reflects Buddhist traditions. In Christians, therefore, an Intrinsic Religious Orientation should correlate positively with Self-Compassion, but even more strongly with an explicitly Christian expression of grace. The availability of the Richmond Grace Scale made it possible to confirm this hypothesis.

Second, Christian thought rejects a cheap grace that makes no demands on the individual for obedience and repentance (Bonhoeffer, 1937/2001). A proper as opposed to a “cheap” sense of grace presumably requires acknowledgment of the ongoing and independent reality of sin (e.g., 1 John 1: 8-10). In other words, Christian understandings of grace might partially but should not completely account for variance in religious functioning that is associated with a believer’s awareness of sin. The empirical implication, therefore, was that Beliefs about Sin and the Grace Scale should combine in multiple regression procedures to both predict higher levels of an Intrinsic Religious Orientation. This outcome was observed.

Third, the argument of a previously developed model was that Christian beliefs about sin can have positive psychological consequences due to a person’s experience of God’s grace (Watson et al., 1988a,b). Again, the suggestion was that a Christian confidence in the free availability of God’s grace liberates the self to honestly admit and repentantly address the failures and inadequacies of its own sinfulness. The specific empirical suggestion, therefore, was that the Richmond Grace Scale should mediate the relationship of Beliefs about Sin with psychological adjustment. In this study, the Grace Scale did fully mediate the positive relationship

of Beliefs about Sin with Self-Compassion and partially mediated its negative association with Depression. This model received support.

Examination of factors within the Richmond Grace Scale yielded numerous insights. The 9-item Graceful Forgiveness Orientation factor displayed an internal reliability and correlations with other variables that roughly mirrored those obtained with the full 27-item instrument. As with the full scale, the Intrinsic Orientation correlated more strongly with Graceful Forgiveness than with Self-Compassion. Graceful Forgiveness, like the full scale, combined with Beliefs about Sin to predict higher scores on the Intrinsic Scale. This factor but not Beliefs about Sin served as a positive predictor of Extrinsic Personal scores, whereas an opposite pattern appeared with the full scale. The full Grace Scale was an inverse whereas Beliefs about Sin was a direct predictor of the Extrinsic Social Orientation, a surprising outcome that perhaps reflected ambiguities associated with this particular measure of religious motivation (see e.g., Ghorbani, Watson, & Khan, 2007). In a less ambiguous result, Graceful Forgiveness combined with Beliefs about Sin to predict a higher Extrinsic Social motivation, although neither measure alone served as a statistically significant predictor. Perhaps most importantly, Graceful Forgiveness fully mediated the relationship of Beliefs about Sin with both Self-Compassion and Depression, whereas the full scale only partially mediated the Depression effect. In short, these data suggested that the shorter 9-item factor may be an equally good and procedurally more convenient measure of grace than the full Richmond Grace Scale.

Each of the other Grace Scale factors correlated positively with Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Orientation. Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism also predicted lower scores on the Extrinsic Personal Scale, which in turn displayed a direct connection with Anxiety. This pattern of relationships seemed in line with previous demonstrations that extrinsic motivations can have problematic implications for religious adjustment (Donahue, 1985). The Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism factor was the only religious variable to correlate negatively with both Depression and Anxiety. Illustrating this aspect of grace was a rejection of the assertions that “if someone wrongs me, they need to make it right” and “I need to see remorse before I offer forgiveness.” The requirement that an offender repent before receiving forgiveness is an important question that has at least some theological and philosophical support (Maier, 2006). For a Christian, however, the motivation underlying the demand for repentance presumably should have ultimate foundations in a love for the offender. Data for Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism suggested that the motivation might instead reflect efforts to cope with depression and anxiety.

ety. Future research might need to explore whether it is possible to operationalize a love-based demand for repentance by an offender.

Unexpected were findings that Self-Compassion displayed negative correlations with Depression and Anxiety that seemed more robust than those obtained with any of the religious variables. Three considerations may be relevant to this pattern of results. First, the Self-Compassion Scale is a multidimensional measure that includes some factors that are not obviously related to self-forgiveness. Some statements, for example, express Buddhist related notions about the importance of maintaining a state of mindfulness (e.g., “when I’m feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness”). These additional dimensions of Self-Compassion may have contributed to the stronger negative correlations. Second, although based upon Buddhist traditions, the Neff (2003b) scale expressed self-compassion in contemporary psychological language without any reference at all to religion. A greater compatibility with the basically psychological language of the Depression and Anxiety Scales may have contributed to the stronger relationships. Third, research suggests that empirical procedures can be used to translate psychological constructs into Christian language in order to demonstrate even stronger linkages between Christian commitments and psychological functioning (Watson, 2008). It would be interesting to see if such procedures could produce a Christian Self-Compassion Scale that correlated more strongly with Depression and Anxiety.

With regard to the limitations of this project, undergraduates served as the research participants. Future research will need to determine if the refined Richmond Grace Scale serves as a valid measure of Christian belief in more representative samples. One important suggestion of this study was that the shorter Graceful Forgiveness Orientation factor might be at least as good as the full Grace Scale and also more convenient in efforts to study Christian psychology. However, this conclusion reflected the examination of only a limited number of additional psychological and religious variables. Complete confidence in the psychometric advantages of this factor might need to await the investigation of a broader array of measures.

In summary, this study accomplished a psychometric refinement of the Richmond Grace scale and confirmed its validity in relationships with Self-Compassion, Depression, Beliefs about Sin, and religious orientations. Factors within the scale usefully clarified the complexity of Christian beliefs about grace with the Graceful Forgiveness Orientation factor perhaps being most noteworthy. Especially important was the opportunity to use the Grace Scale in combination with the Beliefs about Sin and the Intrinsic Religious Ori-

entation measures to explore theoretically meaningful questions in Christian psychology. This potential, in particular, revealed that the Richmond Grace Scale and its factors clearly deserve additional research attention.

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## Appendix

Direct and Reverse (\*) Scored Statements of Richmond Grace Scale Factors<sup>1</sup>

### Graceful Forgiveness Orientation

- My beliefs about grace encourage me to be forgiving of others. (.77)
- Grace is a gift of God; all I have to do is ask. (.62)
- I am able to forgive others when they hurt me. (.53)
- My acceptance of God's grace has helped me love others more effectively. (.83)
- I accept my shortcomings. (.39)
- Because of grace bestowed to me, I am able to forgive others. (.76)
- Even when I have wrong attitudes, I feel I can still talk to God. (.45)
- I can be forgiven for all the wrongs I've done. (.59)
- Through God's love, I can forgive others. (.72)

### Grace and Responsibility

- Those who sin less than others require less grace.\* (.36)
- Knowing God will forgive lets me do anything I want.\* (.57)
- My behavior does not matter since I am forgiven.\* (.71)
- Because of God's forgiveness, I am free to live my life as I please.\* (.68)
- I can sin knowing God has to forgive me if I ask.\* (.70)
- I can live life my way as long as I ask forgiveness before I die.\* (.52)
- God's grace is available to others, but I have sinned too much to experience it.\* (.35)
- I do not experience guilt for any of my actions.\* (.35)
- If I work harder, I need less grace.\* (.44)
- God cares more about what I do than who I am.\* (.35)

### Graceful Avoidance of Personal Legalism

- I feel like I need to get things in order before I go to God.\* (.37)
- I must work hard to experience God's grace and forgiveness.\* (.49)
- The harder I work, the more I earn God's favor.\* (.70)
- The more obedient I am, the more God loves me.\* (.46)

### Graceful Avoidance of Interpersonal Legalism

- I need to see remorse before I offer forgiveness.\* (.59)
- If someone wrongs me, they need to make it right.\* (.56)
- I have difficulty accepting forgiveness from others.\* (.32)
- Others must earn my forgiveness.\* (.70)

<sup>1</sup>Factor loadings are in the parenthesis after the Grace Scale item.



# Interview with Nancey Murphy: Constructing an Anabaptist Vision of Ideal Psychological Functioning

Nancey Murphy

*Fuller Theological Seminary*

Charles H. Hackney

*Briarcrest College and Seminary*

*Nancey Murphy is Professor of Christian Philosophy at Fuller Theological Seminary and an ordained minister with the Church of the Brethren. Her first book, Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning, received the American Academy of Religion's Award for Excellence. Among her scholarly interests are areas of interaction between philosophy, theology, and the social sciences. In Why Psychology Needs Theology (Dueck & Lee, 2005), she sets forward an approach to Christian psychology that is grounded in virtue ethics and Christian descriptions of the ideal human life. In this interview, Dr. Murphy (NM) discusses this and other topics with Dr. Charles Hackney (CH), Associate Professor of Psychology at Briarcrest College and Seminary. Correspondence regarding this article should be addressed to Charles H. Hackney, Briarcrest College and Seminary, 510 College Drive, Caronport, Saskatchewan, Canada S0H 0S0. Email: chackney@briarcrest.ca, nmurphy@fuller.edu.*

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**CH:** Your biographical information sketches quite a journey for the reader. Could you tell us a bit about how you came from a Nebraska cattle ranch to Fuller Theological Seminary, how you moved from Roman Catholicism to the Church of the Brethren, and how you came to apply your philosophical and theological training to matters of psychology?

**NM:** Born in the Nebraska Sand Hills, I lived my first eighteen years on the family cattle ranch—a world of sand and grass, livestock, and wildlife. Yet I lived in another world which could hardly have been more different: the world of pre-Vatican-II Catholicism. The devotional practices taught and modeled by the Franciscan sisters were formative; according to tradition going back to Augustine, prayer was turning inward, finding God within one's soul. So I lived in two worlds: my personal version of Teresa of Avila's "interior castle," and our family's parcel of the Wild West.

I stayed in the Catholic school system through college: Creighton, a Jesuit university. My interest in psychology goes back to that time. I intended to pursue a career in therapy; however, an internship in a psychiatric institute changed my plans. It was the era of behavior modification, and I was not impressed by the use of "token economies" to treat psychosis.

Fortunately, at the time of my disillusionment with behaviorism I took a course in philosophy of the behavioral sciences, which convinced me to study phi-

losophy of science; the impact philosophy could have was well illustrated by the way positivist philosophy of science had produced behaviorism in psychology. At Creighton, I read an article by Paul Feyerabend and decided I wanted to study with him. I was accepted to the doctoral program at the University of California, Berkeley, and in fall, 1973, drove my Toyota, with trepidation, across the Continental and cultural divides between Nebraska and Berkeley.

In the philosophy department, I encountered philosophical atheism for the first time; I felt like the last Christian on earth. At the same time, I joined a charismatic prayer group in my Catholic parish. I spent most of my week among those who took religious believers to be (at best) naive, and several nights a week in a form of worship that even many Christians thought to require a high degree of gullibility.

As I neared completion of my degree, I realized that, first, not having a grasp of physics, I would never be a first-rate philosopher of science. Second, the question of the status of religious knowledge was more challenging and more existentially engaging for me than that of scientific knowledge. The philosopher of science must answer the question: "In what does the rationality of science consist?" The philosopher of religion must provide an apologia for the very *possibility* of religious knowledge. I supposed that, if the philosopher of science needs first-hand knowledge of science, the philosopher of religion needs first-hand knowledge

of religion, so I enrolled for a second doctorate, in theology, at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU).

During these years, my thinking was influenced by two scholars. The first was James Wm. McClendon, Jr., a Baptist professor of theology, who was assigned as my advisor. His first advice was that I take his seminar on radical-reformation history and theology. (The radicals or “Anabaptists”—re-baptizers—were sixteenth-century Christians who rejected church-state affiliation.) Reading about the widespread torture and killing of Anabaptists had a profound impact; I felt a claim on my life to join a church in which nonviolence was not an optional extra. It was only when I later moved to Pasadena that I was able to join an explicitly Anabaptist church (Church of the Brethren).

The second influence at the GTU was Robert Russell, a physicist and theologian, who founded the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences (CTNS). Russell invited me to contribute my expertise in both theological and scientific methodology to projects sponsored by the Center, and I have had increasingly frequent invitations to attend conferences and to lecture on relations between theology and science. This interest accounts largely for my attempts to integrate theology and psychology.

When I’d completed my degree at the GTU, I was invited to a conference at Princeton Seminary on teaching philosophy in seminary. I finally knew what I wanted to do when I grew up: teach theology students the philosophy that is most useful to them. Shortly after, there was just such a position advertised at Fuller, and I was delighted to be offered the job, especially in that opportunities to teach and mentor doctoral students in Fuller’s School of Psychology allowed me to use the psychology I’d studied at University.<sup>1</sup>

**CH:** In the chapters that form the core of Dueck and Lee’s (2005) *Why Psychology Needs Theology*, you propose the development of a Christian psychology, drawing from the ideas that you and George Ellis present in *On the Moral Nature of the Universe* (Murphy & Ellis, 1996). For those readers who are not acquainted with your approach, could you describe your ideas about using theology and neo-Aristotelian philosophy to construct a Christian psychology?

**NM:** Among my ventures in relating theology and science, the most exciting project has been a series of conferences, sponsored by CTNS and the Vatican Observatory, examining the consequences of various scientific advances for understanding God’s action in the natural world. The first conference considered issues in cosmology. There I met George Ellis, a mathematician and cosmologist from Cape Town, and also a Quaker, deeply involved in the anti-apartheid struggle. At one point we asked ourselves whether the abstruse physics

with which we were struggling had anything to do with real life. “Real life” for Ellis was the dangerous situation in South Africa; for me it was the build-up to the first Gulf War. In addition, both of us were dissatisfied with the mainline theology that was always assumed in theology-science dialogues. We set out to write a book together, investigating whether the science-theology dialogue and Anabaptist theology had anything to say to one another. The result was our co-authored volume titled *On the Moral Nature of the Universe* (Murphy & Ellis, 1996).

Our work begins with a model Arthur Peacocke had developed for relating theology and the sciences that employs the idea of the “hierarchy of sciences,” from physics—studying the simplest components of the universe—up through chemistry, biology, and so forth, to the most comprehensive systems in the universe. Peacocke argued that theology should be understood as the science at the top of the hierarchy, since it deals with the broadest possible system, God-and-the-world. We developed his proposal, first, by noting that the hierarchy needs to be split at the higher levels into natural- and human-science branches, and, second, that the human-science branch should have at its top the “science” of ethics. It is then possible to see theology as the discipline that completes both branches—answering “boundary questions” which arise in both cosmology and ethics, yet go beyond the scope of those disciplines alone. A single account of the divine purposes in creation, then, drawn largely from the work of John Howard Yoder, provides a bridge between the natural sciences and the human sciences.

We argue that a theistic explanation allows for a more coherent account of reality—as we know it from the perspective of both natural and human sciences and from other spheres of experience such as the moral sphere—than does a non-theistic account. However, not all accounts of divine nature are consistent with the patterns of divine action we perceive in the natural world. God appears to work in concert with nature, never overriding or violating the very processes that God has created. This account of the character of divine action as refusal to do violence to creation, whatever the cost to God, follows from the Anabaptist theology we employ, and also has direct implications for human morality; it implies a “kenotic” or self-renunciatory ethic, according to which one must renounce self-interest for the sake of the other, no matter the cost to oneself.

Such an ethic, however, is very much at variance with ethical presuppositions embedded in current theories of personality and psychotherapy. Hence, in my Integration Lectures, presented at Fuller Seminary in 2003, I developed Ellis’ and my theses further, calling for new research programs in these fields, exploring the possibilities for human development and sociality

in the light of a kenotic ethic, modeled on God's own self-sacrificing love. These lectures are published in the first three chapters of *Why Psychology Needs Theology* (Dueck & Lee, 2005).

**CH:** In *Why Psychology Needs Theology*, you mention there being different "starting points" used by theologians in their systematic theologies. Your approach draws heavily from the work of John Howard Yoder, with kenotic self-emptying as a core concept. How would you see Christians from different theological traditions being involved in this project of constructing a Christian psychology? For example, your kenotic approach involves a renunciation of dominion as a vital component of pursuing the *telos* of human existence. In N. T. Wright's book on Christian virtue ethics, *After You Believe* (Wright, 2010), he argues that a central part of the human *telos* is to rule. Would theological differences such as these result in the creation of multiple Christian psychologies, or would it be possible to present a unified Christian psychology that can encompass divergent descriptions of the *telos*?

**NM:** The question of whether there would or would not be a unified Christian psychology cannot be answered definitively in advance of seeing what psychologists of other sub-traditions might do. Alvin Dueck and Kevin Reimer (2009) have worked out at book length an approach to psychotherapy from an Anabaptist perspective. They are not so much opposing other Christian sub-traditions, but rather the Enlightenment view of universal knowledge and morals that blinded Westerners (including Christians) to cultural differences. They claim that this blindness has resulted in a one-size-fits-all approach to therapy that often has harmful effects on people of different cultures.

The example you offer from Tom Wright's work, the claim that the human *telos* is to rule, shows that, while a Christian research program in psychology does need some central organizing principle, it also needs to be developed by saying what that principle means and implies in a Christian, biblical, context. Stated baldly, as it is here, it suggests favoring, for instance, practitioners who are expert in helping parents conform their children to the trajectory toward Harvard School of Law or the military academy. This is surely not what Wright has in mind, but psychologists need to see what consequences do follow from this "core theory."

Despite my professed open-mindedness at the beginning, however, I expect that there will always be a difference between psychologies that do and do not accept nonviolence as an integral part of Christian teaching. Training one to live in a vicious world without physical weapons, but also without tacitly condoning evil done to others, requires a lifetime of training and support in order to develop a very different psychologi-

cal profile from those who see themselves as meant "to rule."

**CH:** In a way, your work already involves the question of dealing with multiple theological traditions, given your strong reliance on Alasdair MacIntyre (e.g., MacIntyre, 1984). While MacIntyre embraces Aquinas as the best approach to an Aristotelian Christianity (MacIntyre, 1990), you employ his conceptual structure while drawing from Anabaptist theological resources. How do you do that? Is there a conceptually-coherent way to be an Aristotelian Christian without being a Thomist?

**NM:** MacIntyre's work on tradition-constituted rationality is essentially abstracted from the Aristotelian-Thomist tradition. It is a second-order theory in philosophy, just as philosophy of science is second order and abstracted from what are judged to be the best developments in science. However, in neither case is the first-level theorizing irrelevant. In both cases we are talking about theories (first- and second-order) and about what counts as the best sort. So if the second-order theory does not apply to other exemplary first-order theories, it fails in its task.

Thus, if MacIntyre's concept of tradition-constituted rationality is intuitively attractive, it makes sense to test it by seeing whether it applies to other traditions besides Thomism. If it does not, then it has failed at the second-order task. If it does apply, then it is possible to ask whether the second-order theory can be used, as he says it can, to adjudicate between rival traditions. I claim that it can, and that the Anabaptist tradition stands up better in the contest. In particular, MacIntyre sees the Continental postmodernists, who claim that the will to power thwarts the will to truth, as a major contemporary rival, yet he says he is not certain that he has the resources to defeat them. However, the Anabaptists have known from the beginning about the threats of power to truthfulness. Hence we Anabaptists today are in position to acknowledge the postmodernists' claim, but also to respond to it by showing that many of our communal practices, from the beginning, have been aimed at reducing or eliminating the will to power.

So the question is not whether it is possible to be an Aristotelian without being a Thomist. It is whether one can accept the concept of rationality that originated in Thomas' appropriation of Aristotle, and then go on to use that concept to evaluate the Anabaptist tradition in relation to others.

**CH:** Speaking of rival approaches to the *telos*, how would you respond to scholars who want to be neo-Aristotelian without imposing an *a priori* moral vision on humanity at all? One example would be Martin

Seligman, who argues that psychologists (being scientific researchers and practitioners rather than moralists) should not couch their approaches to flourishing in any transcendent description of humanity's purpose, and so should restrict themselves to describing flourishing without prescribing development toward a specific teleological goal (e.g., Seligman, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Another example would be Martha Nussbaum (2000), who argues that we can establish a universal description of human flourishing through cross-cultural research. Can the goal of human flourishing be established empirically? How would you counsel Christian psychologists in our interactions with our peers who argue that there is no moral order to the universe?

**NM:** Let me answer this by using as an example the work of Owen Flanagan. I've studied his ethics carefully because he and I have so much in common—both former Catholics, both influenced by MacIntyre. He's particularly relevant here in that his claim is precisely that we *can* determine empirically what constitutes human flourishing. His purpose in his recent book, *The Really Hard Problem* (Flanagan, 2007), as well as a previous volume titled *The Problem of the Soul* (Flanagan, 2002), is to show that the pursuit of the good life in *this* life is enough to make it meaningful, without any concept of life after death. The good life essentially involves moral development, and even spiritual practices, but without any form of deity.

The moral code that Flanagan endorses is not at all out of the ordinary. He argues for the value of friendship, love, kindness, and compassion; for cultivating the virtues of courage, fidelity, honesty. Flanagan argues that we could develop a science that might be called "eudaimonics," taken from Aristotle's term *eudaimonia*, which means something like flourishing while enjoying one's own flourishing. This would be the science that employs empirical evidence to describe the environments and patterns of behavior that are most conducive to human flourishing. He emphasizes the fact that humans come into the world with some basic moral equipment in the form of emotions and desires that predispose them to social behavior.

The difficulty Flanagan sees is that two quests are often in tension: the quest to be moral and the quest for a meaningful life. His example of such tension is that between, on the one hand, doing philosophy and spending one's salary on living well (which he calls "meaning"), and on the other hand, taking a second job or turning over half of one's salary to help others in need (which he calls morals).

His analysis of what is necessary for a meaningful life begins with morality itself: ". . . across cultures one finds that being moral, that is, being a good person, is

considered a necessary condition of living a meaningful life. As far as I can tell, it is the only absolutely necessary condition" (Flanagan, 2002, p. 281-2). Good candidates for further conditions are true friendship and what John Rawls calls the Aristotelian Principle: "Other things being equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate and trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity" (p. 284). The fact, then, that humans have natural dispositions toward morality means that the quest for higher forms of morality is essential to our human flourishing.

We are conscious beings on a quest, a quest that achieves its aims when we use our minds to flourish and to be good. These are our most noble aims. They involve striving to become better, individually and collectively, than we are. Insofar as we aim to realize ideals that are possible but not yet real, the quest can be legitimately described as spiritual. (p. 319)

I find Flanagan's arguments unexceptionable so far. Where we part company is his assumption that, even with his empirical studies and his review of the literature of some of the great religious systems such as Buddhism, we could all come to agree on what counts as being moral. However, I can easily demonstrate the lack of agreement by means of a Christian critique of Flanagan's account of moral development. His morality is strongly individualistic: he focuses on *self*-development. It is true that he sees this self-development to involve the increasing of one's capacity for compassion for others. But the question is whether he would countenance social practices that do much for those in need *and at the same time* require one to sacrifice one's own chance to flourish in the manner he describes. Clearly he would not: one of his examples of a person who is unable to pursue the talents and interests that constitute flourishing is a woman who devotes "all of her energies to . . . caring for others" (Flanagan, 2007, p. 58, my emphasis). In Flanagan's account of the good life there is no paradoxical twist such that she who pursues her own flourishing will lose it, and she who renounces her own flourishing for Christ's sake will find it.

This last sentence, of course, is a paraphrase of Jesus. In our *Moral Nature of the Universe*, George Ellis writes: "The paradoxical nature of an ethic of self-sacrifice or renunciation is captured in Jesus' saying that those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it (Lk. 17:33)" (Murphy & Ellis, 1996, p. 121).

So how do we adjudicate between an ethic that focuses exclusively on flourishing in this life, and recommends exercising compassion for others *only so long* as it also contributes to one's own well-being, versus one

that calls for self-sacrifice, even to the point of death, for those in need? The judgment will necessarily depend on whether one believes that this life is all there is, or not. And on whether there is a God who will cherish in the future those who sacrifice themselves in the present. Is there a divine reality beyond this physical world, or is the world itself the Ultimate Existent? My point is that whether or not one takes an account of the human *telos* from a concept of transcendence, there will come a point where ethical justification imports, either explicitly or implicitly, some account of ultimate reality.

I'm going to beg off on that last tricky little question at the end. There are so many different sorts of thinkers—different in both theoretical standpoint and personal characteristics—that it would be impossible, I think, to say in advance how Christian psychologists ought to interact with them. Some initial guidance would come from Dueck and Reimer's (2009) *Peaceable Psychology*, with its emphasis on how to approach different cultures (or traditions, in MacIntyre's terms).

**CH:** Many elements of your approach can also be found in the "positive psychology" movement, including an emphasis on flourishing and a reliance on Alasdair MacIntyre. In my own scholarly work (Hackney, 2007, 2010), I have commented on this connection, to the degree that I describe your work as a foundation for a Christian positive psychology. What are your thoughts on the positive psychology movement, and would you agree with your ideas being described in these terms?

**NM:** My work is certainly not foundational for this new field in the sense that I have influenced its development (as far as I know, and apart from your own work). I certainly see connections—just as you've stated in your question—a shared concern for human flourishing. There are definite areas of overlap such as in the topics of altruistic love and forgiveness.

The difficult issue, though, is that of suffering for the sake of others, as described above in my response to Flanagan. I do not know the field of positive psychology well, but I suspect that there will be theorists and practitioners whose positions would come closer to Flanagan's than to mine and even see self-sacrifice and suffering as purely negative.

Yet, even among those who agree on some role for self-sacrifice, there is the great difficulty in practice to decide how to teach sacrifice, and to whom, without reinforcing the hold of powerful people on those with less power. The influence of Christian communities where the use of self-sacrifice for *undermining* social hierarchies is very important, and may be hard to reproduce in a therapy setting.

**CH:** Christian psychologists often face the difficult question of how to interact and collaborate with our secular peers in a way that embodies the principle of being "in the world but not of it." Some, especially within the Reformed stream of Christian thought, recoil at the idea of constructing a uniquely Christian psychology (or any other scholarly area), describing it as a withdrawal into an academic "ghetto" or encapsulated "Christian bubble." In *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition* (Murphy, Kallenberg, & Nation, 1997), however, you praise Stanley Hauerwas' "sectarianism" in his approach to the issue of abortion, connecting it to MacIntyre's description of all intellectual analysis and rhetoric as being tradition-bound. Would you argue, then, that Christian and non-Christian approaches to psychology are incommensurable, and so Christian psychologists should embrace "ghettoization" as an inevitability?

**NM:** I want to respond to this question by rejecting its terms. You have subtly reproduced a dichotomy between universalizability and complete cultural relativism. I would say that the options are not restricted to either embracing the mainstream of psychology or living within one's own ghetto. In practice, I find it fairly easy to converse across the boundaries of traditions, so long as we are aware of the different presuppositions each tradition brings. So, for instance, I can teach philosophical theology at Fuller Seminary to its largely Reformed student body. Most of the time, I can say that we Christians have all thought *x* rather than *y*. But there come times when I need to say that we are discussing a topic where different traditions (especially different ecclesiologies) make a difference. Most recently, an argument erupted over James McClendon's approach to ethics. Jim took Scripture to have precedence over creeds and later church pronouncements. A student objected that one cannot properly interpret Scripture except through the lenses of later creedal developments. My response was something like: "Aha! What tradition do you belong to? Recall that Jim is consciously writing *as* a baptist *for* baptists (the lowercase "b" in "baptist" is his device for referring not only to denominational Baptists, but also to a wide variety of "baptistic" churches). This tradition has its position on the use of Scripture, and it need not be justified before the process of doing ethics can begin."

I have also found it possible to speak with people of radically different religions, as well as atheists. We can see how far agreement goes, and then the interesting conversation occurs when we begin to sort out the background assumptions that create our differences. So my conclusion is that Christian psychologists of different sub-traditions can have the same sorts of con-

versations among themselves. They should be equally capable of pursuing the limits of agreement with secular psychologists, and tracing the largely unspoken assumptions that lead to disagreements.

\* \* \*

I would like to end by saying thanks to you, Charles, for presenting me with such penetrating questions. It has been a challenge answering them, and I've developed my own intellectual position as a result.

**CH:** And I want to thank you for your continuing work in this area. Your willingness to cross disciplinary boundaries and tackle big questions has been an inspiration to me, and I look forward to seeing your next contribution to the development of a Christian psychology.

#### Note

<sup>1</sup>I have written a much longer account of my intellectual development in "Wind and Spirit: A Theological Autobiography," in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 46, no. 3 (fall, 2007): 301-310; some lines have been excerpted from that article.

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## Review of Marin (2009)

### *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*

Philip D. Jamieson, *Edification* Book Review Editor, University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, Dubuque, IA

**Invitation:** Readers of *Edification* are invited to submit reviews of books that they have found stimulating and that fit into the discussion of Christian Psychology. Please contact the book review editor to explore this possibility. The new book review editor of *Edification* is Phil Jamieson, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Theology The University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. His email address is [pjamieso@dbq.edu](mailto:pjamieso@dbq.edu).

**Marin, Andrew.** (2009). *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. Pp. 204, \$15.00.

Reviewed by **Robert L. Kay**, M.A. Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA. He can be contacted at [robekay@regent.edu](mailto:robekay@regent.edu).

Andrew Marin's *Love is an Orientation* opens with a salient account of the personal relevance that the polarized issue of sexual orientation and conservative Christianity has for him. Largely uninterested in the gay community early in his career, Marin categorized himself as a "straight, white, conservative, Bible-believing, evangelical male" from the Midwest (p. 16). His life was forever changed when three of his closest friends disclosed their same-sex preferences to him within a three-month period. Since then, Marin has developed a significant compassion for the GLBT population and devotes his life to establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships that transcend the moral debate concerning same-sex attractions, behaviors, and lifestyles with those who identify as being gay.

*Love is an Orientation* offers a realistic, ground zero approach aimed at reducing the gap between the gay and evangelical Christian communities. Choosing to immerse himself and his family in a predominantly gay community in the greater Chicago area, Marin has an authentically unique perspective of, and feeling for, the pulse of the gay community that many in the Christian community might never come to fully understand. Drawing from his personal experiences and his distinctive viewpoint, he outlines the ineffective and sometimes harmful nature of the traditional methods used by Christians to reach the gay community. In doing so, he highlights the need for an authentic, relationship-driven approach designed to love instead of isolate and condemn.

Marin's message is not one of shame toward evangeli-

cal Christians and their history of outreach toward gay persons, but rather a pragmatic appraisal of the results and a call to relational reformation. His approach to working with the gay community can be summed up in a quote that he offers by the Reverend Billy Graham: "It is the Holy Spirit's job to convict, God's job to judge, and my job to love" (p. 108). Marin's hope is that the Christian community will cease being the judge, jury, and executioner of gay persons and fulfill its biblical call to love instead. The need for a less defensive stance against GLBT lifestyles in favor of a more inclusive dialogue with GLBT people is a central tenant in the author's approach to relating to the gay community. Marin believes a critical first step toward an inclusive dialogue begins with a perspective adjustment concerning responsibility.

Marin maintains throughout his text that Christians have no final, ultimate authority over the condition of one's soul—such a responsibility is relegated to God and God alone. Even so, he writes that Christians can often assume the mantle of responsibility for soul judgment with gay people when in relationship with them. In essence, he argues there is a sense within the gay community that evangelical Christians are willing to establish meaningful relationships *only* if both parties are consistently working toward the goal of change of orientation and behavior, which the author believes is diametrically opposed to the type of unconditional love God demonstrates to humanity. The relational contrast is sharp and painful, and frequently does little more than contribute to the distance between both sides. Marin invites his readers to begin to think differently about relationships with same-sex attracted people by stating:

First we have to start moving past our default responses toward the GLBT community. I am not asking Christians to change their beliefs, nor am I asking them to change their foundational understanding of Scripture. We must, how-

ever, acknowledge how our three traditional options—heterosexuality, celibacy, or a life of sin—are received by GLBT people. We have been too wrapped up in planning the communication of our truth by cooking up contingency plans for potential rebuttals that we have forgotten to think relationally (p. 44).

Meaningful, genuine relationship is the foundation of building a bridge between the evangelical Christian and gay communities in *Love is an Orientation*. Marin's model to relationship building with the GLBT community does not hinge upon a predetermined pursuit of change in orientation or behavior. Instead, a case is made for allowing the responsibility for *any* type of change, whatever it may be in either person, to rest solely upon God. The idea of change within this context is not limited to or focused on sexuality or sexual expression. Marin writes that only when released from the responsibility of overseeing orientation change or sexual expression modification can relationships between conservative Christians and GLBT people be allowed to redefine themselves by moving beyond the gay/straight concern and experience meaningful growth.

Marin realizes that his approach is a significant departure from more traditional, apologetics-based methods that have been the mainstay manners in relating to the GLBT community—even going so far as to label his approach as being counter-cultural to the established norm. As such, the author draws upon the inclusion of personal narratives from people that he has encountered and built relationships with during his time working and living within a gay community to demonstrate the relevance of his work with GLBT persons in creating meaningful dialogue. Marin acknowledges that not every account described within his text results in salvation or change of orientation and behaviors from gay to straight, which many with a more traditional approach to the issue might emphasize and pursue. However, these criteria are not a part of Marin's relationship-driven style. What can be seen in each and every account is a genuine appeal for, and demonstration of, relationship where respect and value are communicated and equally observable across the spectrum of individuals he has encountered.

What might be lost on some as Marin makes his case for inclusive dialogue and bridge-building is that he is not asking evangelical Christian readers to abandon their biblical beliefs regarding sexuality—that practicing inclusion somehow equates to an acceptance and approval of the gay lifestyle and denial of traditional Christian sexual ideals. Instead, he is offering that Christians critically examine and evaluate the impact of the traditional means of communicating the Christian sexual ethic to gay people through the eyes of the GLBT community. In doing so, Marin believes that the utility of highlighting and solely focusing upon the gay/straight issue as a means of reducing the distance between both communities is of little value, and he therefore asks his readers to elevate the conversation beyond the moral debate. Elevating the conversation with the gay community involves a commitment by Christians to avoid the appeal of the moral argument that it has participated in for years, and a dedication to looking for and building

upon commonalities that both communities share.

Within *Love is an Orientation*, Marin lays the foundation for evangelical Christians to better understand the worldview of the gay community, ranging from their perceptions of Christians in general to an excellent and concise account of gay apologetics. In doing so he assists his readers in laying down their traditional defensive stances against GLBT people by allowing them to see the impact they have had on the gay community through his first-hand perspective. The information he provides may be a turning point for some Christians in how they begin to formulate sincerity in their efforts to build collaborative relationships with the GLBT community.

Marin closes his text with 16 essential “commitments” that Christians can accept to effectively relate to the GLBT community. The commitments are not radically new concepts that represent a departure from traditionally understood Christian principles, but rather serve as a map that delineates a return to the biblical nature of Christ and the relational model he exemplified to all persons as illustrated in the New Testament. In Marin's eyes, the gay community deserves nothing less than godly love.

Not all will embrace Marin's approach for constructive and meaningful dialogue that promotes relationship building between the evangelical Christian and gay communities. Some on the conservative Christian side might disagree with Marin's theological interpretations of scriptural passages addressing same-sex related behaviors. Others may likely find that it fails to fully address ecclesiastical concerns, such as the number of denominations recognizing and accepting gay clergy or appointing lay-leadership positions to actively gay people. Certain members of the gay community might express concern that it falls short of complete acceptance of the gay lifestyle, failing to recognize it as an equally respectable form of sexual expression. However, *Love is an Orientation* does not present itself as being an authority on such issues and other related concerns involved in the moral debate, but rather draws its strengths from elevating the conversation beyond non-agreeable topics. As a result, Andrew Marin's work establishes itself as a middle ground and invites people from both the evangelical Christian and gay communities to engage in more purposeful and less destructive dialogue—to be counter-cultural to the relational norm.

In a time when society is witnessing increased publicity of prejudicial behaviors, such as bullying directed toward same-sex attracted people and religious protests at funerals for gay soldiers, Marin's *Love is an Orientation* is a necessary and highly relevant assessment of the current state of relationship between the gay and conservative Christian communities and a needed voice calling for change. His daily, collaborative work with gay persons affords him a unique understanding of, and compassion for, this severely underserved population. He offers his perspective in hopes that both communities can begin to turn toward each other instead of furthering the divide between them. Marin's work continues to pave the way for a critical Christian understanding of the nature of the issue, and is a significant step forward in building a humble, sincere, and meaningful bridge into the heart of the GLBT population.