

GAY MEN'S AND THEIR RELIGIOUS RELATIVES' NEGOTIATION OF SEXUAL
ORIENTATION, RELIGION, FAMILY VALUES, AND HOMOPHOBIA

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2013

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

GAY MEN'S AND THEIR RELIGIOUS RELATIVES' NEGOTIATION OF SEXUAL
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By

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Building upon recent work studying how people use cultural tools and strategies to mediate conflicts (Daiute, 2010; Etengoff & Daiute, Forthcoming; Vygotsky 1934/1978), this dissertation explores systematically how gay men, their religious relatives, and therapists negotiate conflicts around religious, sexual, and familial issues. In addition, the dissertation studies how gay men and their allies use and modify religious and secular objects and systems, such as biblical text and therapy, to address the often conflicting demands of sexuality and religion. This dissertation analyzes the conflicts and negotiational efforts that emerge within intrapersonal, interpersonal, metaphysical and intersystem contexts for gay men and their religious families. Therefore, the principal research questions guiding this study are: How is the process of sexual orientation and sexual orientation disclosure negotiated within a religious, familial, and societal system?; What are the salient conflicts that emerge in religious families of gay men who have recently disclosed their sexual orientation?; How does one's own or a relatives' sexual orientation mediate religious orientation and activities such as bible study?; What religious and secular objects and activities do actors across the activity-meaning system use to negotiate conflicts? In contrast to much scholarship on gay men from religious backgrounds that focuses only on the negative impacts of institutionalized homophobia, this work focuses on how inter-group and inter-personal relations can be improved for gay men and their religious family allies.

Due to the unique socio-religious context of the participants in this study, this dissertation employs an applied activity-meaning system framework to explore how individuals and their socio-religious contexts are reciprocal agents of construction and human development. Therefore, the theoretical bases of this dissertation are Vygotsky's (1934/1978) cultural historical activity theory and relational complexity theory (Daiute, 2012). In addition, mediational strategies in this study are defined within the relationally complex framework of humanization (Bell & Khoury, 2011). These developmental theories are particularly relevant to gay men and their religious families due to their multifaceted interactions within relational, familial, religious and social contexts.

Fifty participants comprised of gay men (n=23), their key religious family member (n=15), and clinicians (n=12) were sampled to give voice to the multiple social relationships of gay men brought up in very religious Jewish and Christian families. All participants completed semi-structured interviews and gay men and their family allies were also asked to write a letter to a religious figure. Multiple forms of narrative construction were used to expand the unit of analysis to include the study of how families make-meaning of the interactions between their sociocultural and sociorelational experiences. In addition, the letter writing task was designed to empower participants to engage the power-laden contexts of religion and sexuality as participant-activists as opposed to only participant-observers.

Narrative analyses began with the following four process steps: (a) identification of conflict(s) and difficulties present within narrative, (b) identification of family and individual negotiation efforts, (c) Identification of cultural tool use such as religious texts, (d) characterization of the mediational strategies. This coding system was inductively derived from the narratives and informed by cultural historical activity theory.

Analyses of participants' relational uses of religious and popular objects support the argument that development is a meaning-making process occurring within sociocultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, results indicate that participants' use of religious and popular objects was often a goal directed and aimed at affecting sociorelational and sociocultural change within their activity system. In addition, findings indicate that gay men's *and* their religious family allies' awareness of the sociocultural contexts of each other's lived experience is an important component in the successful negotiation of post-disclosure conflicts within religious and familial contexts. Moreover, analyses suggest that both gay men and their religious family allies successfully negotiated the conflicts between their family system, religious values, and social stigma experiences by focusing on humanization strategies such as recognizing the shared human experience and the diversity of the gay community. This investigation also illustrates that exploratory semi-structured interviews engaging participants in such acts of humanization can potentially yield substantial improvement in family dynamics. While prior research indicates that sexual minorities can overcome the negative romantic effects of social stigma by engaging in meaning-making activities (Frost 2011), the present results suggest that this meaning-making intervention paradigm can be expanded to include other familial relationships and systems as well.

Acknowledgments

This body of work would not have been possible without the participants' support and trust. I would therefore like to begin this dissertation by acknowledging their courage to share their experiences and struggles with me. I would also like to thank my dear friend Jeff for incorporating me into his life and by so doing, inspiring this research. Throughout the writing process I strived to present the larger research findings while respecting the depth of each individual narrative and family system. However, finding this balance was often challenging, especially in the case of identifying participant subgroups. While all participants self-identified as belonging to 'their subgroup', many participants shared more complex discussions of how they perceive themselves. It is my sincerest hope that the multi-faceted nature of these discussions is given voice throughout. If I have succeeded in this endeavor, it is largely due to Colette Daiute's guidance.

Working with Colette has been a true privilege as she has mastered the gift of producing stellar research that provides the foundation for ongoing development for individuals, relational systems, and communities. Colette helped me integrate the social value of developmental research from the time of this project's inception and research design to its final compilation. In addition, Colette's tremendous attention to detail and sentence structure was invaluable. I am also grateful to Colette for introducing me to her theory of relational complexity, narrative sense-making, and stakeholder document analysis. Each of these approaches provided another facet to this dissertation and expanded the unit of analysis to include the cultural-historical and relational contexts of development. I look forward to continuing to utilize these cornerstones of developmental research for many years to come.

In addition, both the content and tone of this dissertation benefited tremendously from the guidance of my committee members, Martin Ruck and Herbert Saltzstein. However, I would be remiss if I only thanked them for their time as committee members, as both Martin and Herb provided me with invaluable guidance throughout my doctoral years. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Joseph Glick and Eric Rodriguez for their tremendous contributions as outside reviewers. Each committee member and reviewer shared their unique perspectives and expertise in the hopes that this body of research could reach new heights. Thank you for propelling me forward with your enthusiasm and wisdom.

I would also like to thank the research assistants contributing to the Family, Religion, and Sexuality Lab for their work on this project. Thank you for transcribing and coding with respect and sensitivity for the participants.

Finally, I would like to thank Asher for all of his ongoing support to help me reach my professional and personal goals. I could not have written this dissertation without Asher's enthusiastic embrace of our growing family and the place that each of our careers has within it. Asher's love of knowledge and its applicability to our daily life helped me find meaning in every hour devoted to this project. I hope that our shared journey to this milestone will help us forge new paths for our own and Levi's development.

This work is dedicated to all those families that struggle to include and love every member and to all those that wish it were so.

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Chapter I: Rational and Framework

Research Aims and Terms

Religion has been a major organizing system of cultural practice, meaning-making and development throughout human history. Religion can create meaning for relationships and interpersonal activities as individuals and societies interact and mutually develop (Etengoff & Daiute, 2012). Over history and in times of acute change, some religious structures and communities evolved in response to the contexts of modernity. For example, the Union of Reform Judaism issued a statement in 2000 stating that “the relationship of a Jewish, same gender couple is worthy of affirmation through appropriate Jewish ritual” (Union for Reform Judaism, 2000). However, the course of change for some people who practice Judaism and Christianity has been limited even as specific relational practices such as sexuality and love become redefined in contemporary societies and the lived experience of individuals.

This research study is a systematic inquiry of individual and family development around issues of sexual orientation within the mediated contexts of religious culture and contemporary practice. This study specifically aims to understand how gay men and their religious relatives negotiate the contexts of modernity and sexuality, religion, and family. Orthodox Jewish and conventionally religious Christian families were specifically selected as research has shown that more highly conventionally religious groups often encounter more difficulty reconciling religion and homosexuality than less conventionally religious groups (Kirby & Michaelson, 2008; Schnoor, 2003). Prior research suggests that more conventionally religious groups are those that focus on organized rituals in both private and social contexts within defined religious structures and texts (Schnoor, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, mediation is understood to be “the use of language and other symbol systems to perceive, manage, and develop self-society relations” and meaning (Daiute, 2010, p. 48). Utilizing this framework, the process of mediation is studied by defining the unit of analysis as goal-directed activities facilitated by individuals’ uses of cultural tools related to their understanding of sexual practice in religious tradition. Cultural tools are the socially constructed, historically situated, and individually adapted physical, symbolic, or abstract means by which we accomplish specific socio-relational goals (Etengoff & Daiute, Forthcoming; Vygotsky 1978). Applying this framework, my unit of analysis is the activity-meaning system of gay men and their religious family members. Activity-meaning systems are defined as the cross-context environments of everyday life that include interactions and relationships across different actors and their points of view (Daiute, 2012). This activity-meaning system design provides a temporal, cultural, sociopolitical, relational, and inter-group relations framework for understanding the negotiations of various stakeholder positions occupying different structural locations within the same activity system.

The present study focuses on the activity-system of gay men and their religious relatives by engaging in a systematic inquiry of the mutually interacting daily life experiences, cultural tool use, and meaning-making processes of religious communities, gay individuals, and religious families. Some of the cultural tools that will be considered in this dissertation are religious texts (e.g., Bible), religious rituals (e.g., prayer), religious or clinical counseling, humanization, and reading and writing activities as used in meaning-making processes. Meaning-making is the process by which meditational strategies are developed to address the relations and possible conflicts between people, practices, experiences, and cultural scripts (Daiute, 2010, see Appendix A: Glossary, p. 164). For example, a number of gay participants explained their

relatives' post-disclosure reactions by focusing on the impact of their relative's community context (e.g., "*she's [mother] probably having the hardest time I think, just kind of wrapping her head around what would be worth leaving the church for*").

This dissertation aims to research the intersection of individual and family development as a process of mediation during an acute period of change. Within this framework, mediation is viewed as a personal process of meaning-making that contributes to the individual's use of and interactions with activities, culture, and tools. This process of mediation is systematically studied by the deliberate inclusion of the various stakeholders in the research design. Stakeholders are "people or institutions whose perspectives (interests, experience, and knowledge) play out in relevant activities and interact across the activity-meaning system" (Daiute, 2012, p.50). Therefore, gay men and their familial allies from religious Christian and Orthodox Jewish backgrounds and clinicians were sampled to study religious, secular, and secular-religious mediator stakeholder positions (see Table 1: Activity-Meaning System Design, p. 181). One of the major aims of this design is to answer the question of how sexual orientation and religious practices and beliefs interact and mediate each other within individual, familial, and sociocultural contexts.

My rationale begins with a discussion of human development in terms of contemporary integrations of socio-cultural and cultural historical activity theory as applied to a study with gay men and their religious relatives' post-disclosure activity-meaning system. I then introduce the specific research questions and methods guiding this inquiry. After which, I contrast prior research and my present systematic approach to studying the various stakeholders of this activity-meaning system: religion, family, gay men, and clinicians.

Unique Research Contributions

Socio-historical developmental theory was introduced during a period of sociopolitical revolution in an effort to make meaning of different stakeholders' reactions to major class changes at the turn of the 21st century (Daiute, 2012, 2010). During the 20th century, scholars extended this theory into what became cultural-historical activity theory (Leont'ev, 1978; Engestrom, 1995). This approach to human development uniquely focuses on the relations amongst intersecting societies, individual development and their use of cultural tools. Applying this theory to the study of individual and familial development is both relevant and meaningful given the current period of sociopolitical change regarding gay rights. Contemporary extensions of this broader line of theory have accounted for the increasingly complex environments relevant to the development of individuals and society, as I explain below.

American politics are at a crossroads in terms of the campaign for sexual minority legal rights. While there have been many recent changes expanding sexual minority rights, such as the 2011 repeal of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell Policy" and the legalization of gay marriage in a number of States, many issues continue to be debated. This sociopolitical context is embedded within a religious one, as the majority of Americans are raised in families in which religious beliefs are present and specific aspects of religiosity have been inversely correlated with sexual minority acceptance (Adamczyk, & Pitt, 2009; Fisher, Derison, Polley, & Cadman, 1994; Hooghe, Claes, Harell, Quintelier, & Dejaeghere, 2010; Lease & Shulman, 2003; Oldmixon, & Calfano, 2007).

Moreover, the extant research has indicated that the majority of sexual and gender minority persons from religious backgrounds experience a level of conflict between their sexual orientation and religion. For example, Dahl & Galliher (2009) found that 60% of disclosed

lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, and questioning¹ participants (18-24 years) reported some degree of religious conflict and 40% of all participants reported that they were unable to integrate their sexual and religious identities (Dahl, & Galliher, 2009). Similar results were found for an older population as well (18-65 years, *M Age*=35), with 64% of lesbian, gay, bisexual participants indicating that they experienced a conflict between their sexual orientation and religion (Schuck & Liddle, 2001). In addition, religious parents have reported varying levels of difficulty in their journey towards accepting their lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer child (Conley, 2011; Freedman, 2008). In light of this context, there has been a burgeoning effort to research the strategies that sexual minority individuals and their parents use to address the conflicts they experience between religion and sexuality (Freedman, 2008; Kubicek, McDavitt, Carpineto, Weiss, Iverson, & Kipke, 2009; Schuck, & Liddle, 2001).

However, prior research efforts addressing the religious diversities of the gay community have often only sampled gay and lesbian individuals' perspectives without including the familial and cultural scripts that they refer to as being significant in their development of a compatible integration of their religious and sexual life (Borgman, 2009; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Glassgold, 2008; Levy, 2008; Mark, 2008). This inclusion of only the perspectives of gay individuals' and not their religious families' is a problematic omission as the multiple standpoints within the activity-meaning system are not included in the unit of analyses although they are contributors to the lived experience (Heatherington & Lavner, 2008). In addition, the assumption that gay men and their religious families reference and develop absolute or dualistic scripts regarding religion or sexuality obscures the possible complexities of negotiating family relationships. Furthermore, prior research does not specify whether the

¹ Research that groups sexual and gender minorities together has recently been critiqued for superficially homogenizing many diverse subgroups (see Stone, 2009). However, it was necessary to cite this body of literature due to the lack of current research focusing exclusively on gay men from religious backgrounds.

difficulties encountered and solutions developed by gay men and religious family members are specific to individual religious groups (Rodriguez, 2010).

In light of these limitations, it is important to develop a body of research that focuses on the diverse experiences of gay men and their religious relatives within the complexities and interactions of different religious and familial activity systems. Moreover, within a cultural-historical activity framework, individuals' developmental processes are viewed as being situated within their sociocultural and sociorelational meaning-making processes. Given this perspective, conflicts within and between activity systems can often become an opportunity for development as individuals navigate relationships and cultural artifacts in their efforts to mediate conflicts (Daiute, 2010). Therefore, the research design of the current study was guided by an inquiry framework focused on how cultural tools and values are used to negotiate conflicts embedded within diverse, interacting activity systems.

Research Questions

This study therefore aims to address the following research questions:

- 1) How is the process of sexual orientation and sexual orientation disclosure negotiated within a religious, familial, and societal system?
- 2) What are the salient conflicts that emerge in religious families of gay men who have recently disclosed their sexual orientation?
- 3) How does one's own or a relatives' sexual orientation mediate religious orientation and activities such as bible study?
- 4) Which cultural tools do actors across the activity-meaning system use to negotiate conflicts?

Rationale and Foundation

From a theoretical standpoint, individual actors/agents, familial, cultural, and historical systems of development must be addressed by social scientists in a comprehensive and ecologically valid manner. Cultural historical activity theory provides a lens for such an analysis of the development of individuals in society by focusing upon social-relational dynamics as well as individual subjectivities and capacities (Daiute, 2006). Within this framework, human development is an activity mediated by cultural tools and artifacts (e.g., religious texts and rituals), cultural and individual histories (e.g., sexual and religious development within a socio-historical context), and multiple practices (e.g., familial and religious). Individual development is thus a “meditational process, not primarily an unfolding of the inevitable” (Daiute, 2010, p.222).

The process of individual development is inseparable from familial, religious, and cultural-historical contexts (Bronfenbrenner 1979; Engstrom, 2009; Stetsenko & Arieivitch, 2004; Vygotsky 1978). The study of individual and family development therefore needs to focus on the multiple social structures interacting with social-relational dynamics and individual subjectivities (Daiute, 2006). Therefore, multiple stakeholder perspectives must be included when studying complex relationships between gay men, their religious families, and their socio-religious historical contexts. Furthermore, a multidimensional understanding of the social relations and conflicts between the many stakeholders (e.g., individual and family members) and social systems (e.g., religious community, gay community, family) is essential if conflict resolution or acceptance is to be achieved at the community and family systems level (Daiute, 2006). This study’s research design therefore focuses upon the relational processes of family and individual development within the religious and communal frameworks of Orthodox Judaism

and the many subgroups within Christianity. This research design applies the extended theory that social interactions within daily life activity systems are formative meaning-making tools that contribute to human development (Etengoff & Daiute, Forthcoming). This sociocultural approach to human development focuses on relationally goal-directed activities of multiple actors within the system allowing for the study of diverse relational processes and outcomes.

Activity Systems and Family Processes Post Sexual Orientation Disclosure

Disclosing one's sexual orientation to family has repeatedly been reported as a troubling and anxiety provoking experience for gay youth due to their fear of rejection and abuse (LaSala, 2000; Saltzburg, 2007; Savin-Williams, 2001). Alternatively, research indicates that positive family disclosure experiences can be associated with a number of benefits, including improved self-esteem and a more positive sense of well-being (Boxer, Cook, & Herdt, 1999; Elizur & Ziv, 2001; Goldfried & Goldfried, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1989). A number of factors has been reported to be associated with parental acceptance post-disclosure, including traditional sex-role perspectives, authoritarianism, age of parent and gay youth, parents' previous exposure to gay culture, education, being raised in an urban or rural setting, family values and religious fundamentalism (Ben-Ari, 1995a; Cramer & Roach, 1988; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Savin-Williams, 2010; Willoughby et al., 2006).

This dissertation focuses on how the family unit and individuals perceive and negotiate conflicts around the tensions between religious and sexual issues. In light of this framework, this dissertation aims to understand how religious practices and lifestyles mediate sexuality as well as how sexual orientation may mediate the meaning-making functions of religious texts, practices, and activity systems. Religion plays a pivotal role in this process of mediation as it can serve as a

system to organize symbolic and physical life, a foundation for potential ideological and relational conflict, as well as a foothold for potential familial reconciliation.

For example, prior research has indicated that religious values are used in both adaptive and maladaptive ways by parents' fighting with their emerging adult children (Brelsford, 2011; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2009). Maladaptive relational uses of religion have been described as using religious tools "to shift the balance of power, rather than welcoming divine facilitation of problem resolution" (Butler & Harper, 1994, p. 282). Efforts to restructure familial power dynamics are often focused on assigning blame, guilt, and, sin through the invocation of God or claims of personal revelation (Butler & Harper, 1994). Such relational uses of religion have been labeled as maladaptive as they often result in an increase in the likelihood of verbal aggression and stonewalling of both parties (Brelsford, 2011; Brelsford & Mahoney, 2009). Researchers have suggested that these negative relational outcomes may result from family members' diverse and subjective interpretations of God's presence and actions (Butler & Harper, 1994).

Alternatively, clinical case studies of familial disputes have suggested that conflicts can be successfully mediated by one or both parties' focusing on God's goals for familial harmony (Butler & Harper, 1994). Mediation uses of religious tools are therefore understood to be filtered through specific belief systems and interacting relational goals (Butler & Harper, 1994).

The following section will expand upon this discussion of the relational and sociocultural contexts of gay men and their families by exploring the extant literature regarding the interactions of families in religious, sexual and secular contexts and the application of these findings to the current research design.

Interacting Stakeholder Positions in the Activity-Meaning System

Religion & Sexuality

Based on Vygotsky's original theoretical formulations, religion could be viewed as a cultural phenomenon that is mediated by individuals in response to new life experiences, social interactions, and changing sociopolitical contexts (Belzen, 1997, 1999). This is because "culturally different settings require different activities, leading to different (cognitive) abilities" that then modify religious practice (Belzen, 1999, p. 239). Similarly, the self can be understood as a cultural tool (Daiute, 2010), "a process of real-life activity that most explicitly positions individuals to meaningfully contribute to the ongoing social collaborative practices in the world" (Stetsenko & Arieviditch, 2004, p. 493). Thus, in this study, religious development is operationalized as people's (individuals and relevant others') proactive construction process to meaningfully mediate the often conflicting demands of changing contexts and sociocultural environments via cultural tool use. A discussion of the history of religious textual tools is thoroughly explored in Chapter 2 as well as in Table 3: Historical Religious Stakeholder Documents (p.183).

Religious orthodoxy is a particularly important factor in Judeo-Christian parental and family post-disclosure processes (Ben-Ari, 1995; Cramer & Roach, 1988). Scriptural passages proscribing homosexuality are largely viewed by the greater religious Christian and Orthodox Jewish communities as being relevant cultural scripts for today's generation (Greenberg, 2004), although there are also many individual and communal variations regarding these sentiments. Therefore, the contemporary socio-religious meaning of being gay for fundamentally religious communities is often constructed within the framework of a moral disorder as well as the abandonment of valued heteronormative family processes such as procreation (Greenberg, 2004;

Ratzinger & Bovone, 1986). In addition, an autonomous deviation from a time-honored heteronormative tradition is often viewed by the Orthodox Jewish community as being antithetical to core community solidarity values on a social-interactionist level (Mark, 2008). Religious texts relating to the issue of homosexuality therefore represent more than religious beliefs. Religious texts are an inherently social discourse as they put forth a code of cultural norms that provide a social and community structure of inclusion and exclusion that needs to be mediated by both the individual and their family. In light of this complex socio-religious framework, some gay and lesbian individuals within or from Orthodox Jewish communities have reported their fear that they and their families will be ostracized by their community and extended family (Mark, 2008).

However, given the complexity of contemporary globalization, many religious communities are increasingly permeable to diverse ways of life and individuals may cross traditional cultural boundaries and transform cultural scripts. For example, a minority of individuals who identify as both gay/lesbian and Christian have reported that they never experienced a conflict between these two aspects of the self (Mahaffy, 1996; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Therefore, this research study does not assume that all individuals or religious families will experience conflicts related to sexuality and religion.

Family, Sexuality & Religion

Religious and familial activity subsystems are often highly interrelated and as such religious orthodoxy is likely to play a significant role in familial responses to a relative's sexual orientation disclosure. This interrelation between the activity subsystems of religion and family occurs in daily practices and value systems via religious artifacts (the Bible/Old Testament) and cultural tool use (e.g., life cycle practices). For example, the Bible/Old Testament demands that

children both honor and revere their parents even under difficult circumstances (Walsh, 2008). Furthermore, in the Jewish tradition, the act of respecting one's parents is linked to the level of divine presence experienced by the family system (Walsh, 2008). Thus, the act of honoring one's parents represents a divine conduit and the cohesiveness of the family unit becomes of paramount spiritual concern.

In addition, these socio-religious family values are reinforced by life cycle practices within the Jewish and Christian traditions. From birth until death, the religious family unit joins together to celebrate and acknowledge life cycle activities such as birth ceremonies (e.g., baptism/christening or circumcision), coming of age ceremonies (e.g., confirmation or Bar/Bat Mitzvah), marriage ceremonies (e.g, the seventh sacrament of matrimony or *Chuppah* and *Kiddushin* service), and illness and loss rituals (e.g., anointing of the sick sacrament or the family distribution of the Book of Psalms). Yearly holidays and weekly or even daily prayer services are also experienced within the context of the family activity system (e.g., family pews, traditional feasts). Moreover, in the case of Jewish religious families, the post-holocaust historical narrative of persecution and genocide, assimilation and intermarriage, and ethnic continuity provides an additional dimension to the importance placed on the perpetuation of both family and religious activity systems (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Schnoor, 2003).

This relation between religious and family values is supported by research indicating that more religious groups place a higher value on the importance of family than less religious groups (Jensen & Jensen, 1993; Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993). However, research has also indicated that more religious families encounter greater difficulty in accepting their gay relative. For example, Newman & Muzzonigro's (1993) analysis of 27 gay adolescents and emerging adults' questionnaire data indicated that gay youth from more traditional and religious families felt less

accepted during their disclosure process than gay youth from more secular families. The study of individual and family development around issues of sexual and religious lifestyle practices should therefore be approached from a sociocultural perspective that includes the interaction of familial and religious contexts. This is particularly relevant as the religious family system's conflict resolution strategies may often be motivated by the importance placed on family cohesion and the perpetuation of the family and their shared religious activities (Schnoor, 2003).

A variety of family system models concerning gay individuals and their relatives suggest that families progress through fixed and sequential stages to cope with systemic post-disclosure changes (DeVine, 1984; Kubler-Ross, 1969; Phillips, 2007). However, the extant models do not clearly focus on the mutual interactions between individuals, family units, and sociocultural activity systems (Martin, Hutson, Kazyak, & Scherrer, 2010). For example, families are often presented as being unilaterally affected by contexts instead of dynamically interacting in and modifying contexts (e.g., Heatherington and Lavner, 2008). In addition, many 'family systems models' have been suggested in regards to sexual minority individuals without empirical evidence (Savin-Williams, 2001). Moreover, empirical studies typically interview only one family member (e.g., parents *or* gay individual) regarding their post-disclosure perceptions and experiences (e.g., Phillips, 2008). This section expands upon each of these limitations in further detail and concludes with a discussion of how this research study differs from extant research.

A. Dialogical vs. unilateral processes.

Given the complex web of sociocultural factors that can influence parental and familial post-disclosure reactions, family processes need to be viewed as an interactive developmental experience. Family process paradigms need to recognize the mutually interactive relation between the gay individual, his family, and the various communities they all value. However,

many extant family process paradigms posit a unidirectional process in which family members are not active agents in their process. Family systems are instead often presented as being influenced *by* a number of variables and institutional systems, including religion, without exploring strategies that individuals and families may employ to modify those contexts (e.g., Harrison, 2003; Heatherington and Lavner, 2008).

A primary example of a unilateral family systems paradigm is the Kubler-Ross (1969) model of mourning that has been suggested as a suitable family process model for the issue of sexual orientation disclosure (Bernstein, 1990; Harrison, 2003; Pearlman, 1992). Within this framework, the family of a gay individual will pass through the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, much like a person confronted by death. While many of these stages could in theory be understood as being interactive and multidirectional, much of the current literature has interpreted the Kubler-Ross model (1969) as being a unidirectional process (for a complete review see Martin, Hutson, Kazayak, & Scherrer, 2010). According to this process, the individual attempts to cope with conflict ridden circumstances without engaging in a strategy to mediate the context of those conflicts. An additional concern with the Kubler-Ross model (1969) is that the acceptance stage is often presented as an outcome rather than a process in which and by which various cognitive structures and contexts are proactively modified in an effort to help mediate conflicts. This is particularly problematic when studying religious family systems, as disclosure may often be introduced prior to religious beliefs regarding homosexuality being questioned, confronted, or altered. A son's or brother's sexual disclosure is therefore likely to demand that their religious relatives begin to engage, question, or mediate their religious beliefs, practices, and communal interactions. Given the complexity of such socioreligious contexts and their interaction with familial relations, 'acceptance' needs to be studied as a

meditational process involving diverse relevant participants (defined as activity-meaning stakeholders in this approach).

B. Lack of empirical evidence.

In addition to the above concerns regarding the Kubler-Ross family systems model, the validity of its application to families of gay individuals has yet to be empirically explored (Savin-Williams, 2001). Clinical publications reference specific case studies to illustrate the applicability of the theory, however, researchers have not yet determined if this paradigm of mourning and loss is experienced by most of gay men's relatives (e.g., LaSala, 2000). Unfortunately, the application of family systems paradigms without empirical evidence regarding the generalizability or validity of these paradigms is common in the literature concerning gay individuals and their families. For example, DeVine's family systems model (1984) has been suggested as a relevant model across multiple family contexts without citing quantitative or qualitative evidence to support this theory. Similarly, Crosbie-Burnett et al.'s (1996) social-cognitive-behavioral family process theory was developed based on discussions of other studies, clinical experiences, and conceptual articles. However, it should be noted that despite the empirical limitations of Crosbie-Burnett et al.'s (1996) family process theory, the theory highlights the interactive nature of individual, environmental, and relational factors. In conclusion, the concepts researchers use to explain relevant processes of potential family disruptions and the methods they use to study those processes contribute to and often limit their findings.

C. Empirical studies often do not sample multiple members of the same family system.

Empirical studies regarding gay men and their religious families often only focus on one family member's experience (e.g., parent *or* gay individual). For example, although Ben-Ari's (1995a, 1995b) studies included both gay youth and parents, due to recruitment difficulties this research did not include parents and gay youth of the same family unit thus not allowing for a comparative analysis of multiple perspectives of the same experience. In addition, some studies do not even attempt to approach individual members' of family systems and instead focus on one family member's developmental experience (e.g., parents') without acknowledging or including the co-occurring family systems process (e.g., Newman & Muzzonigro, 1993; Phillips 2007, 2008). In conclusion, post-disclosure family conflicts need to be addressed as a multifaceted developmental process that is co-created by individual family members. Sampling only one family member from the family unit is problematic as this method offers only one perspective of a shared activity-meaning system. Therefore, this study includes the perspectives of gay men *and* their religious family ally (see Table 1: Activity-Meaning System Design, p.181). Moreover, this multifaceted family systems approach is essential to exploring the interaction between participants' differing religious perspectives and their attitudes toward sexual orientation.

Gay Men & Religion

The tension between conflicting scripts of mainstream religious institutions and the gay community has most frequently been studied from the perspective of the gay or lesbian individuals' process of self-construction (Levy, 2008; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000), supporting the need for a comprehensive activity-meaning system design. In addition, researchers suggest that individuals who attempt to identify as both religious and gay may encounter both extrinsic (e.g., contradictions with religious institutions, family members and friends) as well as intrinsic (e.g., fear of divine retribution) conflicts (Levy, 2008, 2011; Rodriguez, 2010; Rodriguez &

Ouellette, 2000). This apparent relation between religious attitudes and conflicts highlights the possibility that differing religious attitudes may contribute to diverse meditational processes.

Literature concerning the choices people make when they are faced with two seemingly incompatible constructions of the self are frequently rooted in the theories of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), stigma (Goffman, 1963), identity conflict (Baumeister, 1985), identity integration (Shallenberger, 1996), or the dialogical self (Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992). The primary tension in the literature appears to lie between those theorists that posit that an internal conflict and resulting cognitive restructuring are inevitable (Cass, 1979; Festinger, 1957; Goffman, 1963; Baumeister, 1985) and those who argue for an organic, dialogical synthesis in which conflict could be present although not necessarily so (Shallenberg, 1996; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Rodriguez, 2010). Building on the latter perspective, this dissertation understands the developmental process of gay men and their religious relatives to be a non-unitary process involving the negotiation and mediation of multiple stakeholders within individuals' activity-meaning systems.

Researchers studying the personal conflicts encountered by gay men from religious backgrounds have discussed a number of different outcomes and resolutions. Some gay men react by rejecting their "religious identity" (Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Singer & Deschamps, 1994) while others reject their "sexual identity" (Piazza, 1994). Alternatively, some lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and queer participants have discussed their effort to create a "spiritual identity" in the place of a "religious identity" (e.g., "*My spirituality involves accepting and loving everyone who should be loved and accepted...In my former religion I was loved as long as they thought I was straight and chaste*", Dahl & Galliher, 2009, p.102). Gay men have also reported isolating and compartmentalizing their multiple constructions of the self (Baumeister,

Shapiro, Tice, 1985; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Schnoor, 2003) as well as attempting to create a version of the self which includes both sexual and religious aspects of the self (Fine & Gordon, 1992; Halbertal & Koren, 2006; Levy, 2008; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Thuhma, 1991).

Schnoor's (2003) sociological analysis of gay men's construction of Jewish identity illustrates a paradigm that includes both sexual and religious aspects of the self. For example, Schnoor (2003, p. 199) found that gay Jewish participants enacted 5 different strategies: (a) participation in gay Jewish groups or activist causes, (b) adoption of liberal Jewish theological perspectives on homosexuality (as is explored in Chapter 2), (c) emphasizing linkages between Judaism and homosexuality (e.g., both minority groups were persecuted by the Nazis), (d) use of "Jewish values" to guide [them] through the gay world (e.g., seeking monogamous relationships), (e) and the development of integrative gay Jewish rituals (e.g., joining a sexual and gender minority friendly congregation)). For example, gay participants from Orthodox Jewish or religiously homophobic backgrounds often replaced the rejecting religious community of their youth with inclusive cultural affiliations and rituals. Schnoor's (2003) analysis is particularly informative as he focuses upon the activities that gay men engage in to make meaning of the conflicting facets of their constructed selves. In addition, Levy (2008) developed a model of how lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Christians "work through" the conflict between religion and sexual orientation. Levy (2008) suggests a process of transformation whereby individuals seek information and comes to realize "that their religious doctrine or their upbringing may not be completely true" (p. 141) and then engage in a process of reflection, discussion, and new behaviors.

The potential conflict and synthesis between one's religious life style practices and sexual orientation has also been researched within the context of integrating Christian and sexual minority ally constructions of the self (Borgman, 2009). Although Borgman's (2009) research did not specifically focus on religious family allies, parallels may exist between sympathetic religious parents' and religious sexual minority allies' processes. For example, Borgman (2009) reported that Christian sexual minority allies first experienced an increased awareness of their "identity conflict", eventually transitioning into a sense of confusion and dissonance. This process then continued with a questioning and searching stage followed by engaging in a process of challenging and redefining the self. Finally, the process concludes with setting a long term goal of achieving identity integration. For many participants "identity integration" was viewed as a continuing process within itself as opposed to a readily attainable outcome of the previous stages, a statement that illustrates the difficulty of the experience. Perhaps young adults' are not focusing on 'identity', but rather on the task of integrating their views of their own or others' sexual orientation with other important aspects of their life, such as family and religious relations, as explored herein.

Nevertheless, the theories and research efforts discussed above do not specifically address family systems, their conflicts, and mediational strategies in detail. It seems as though no theory regarding the development of the self for this population deliberately frames identity as an ongoing activity process co-constructed alongside many different cultural activities, contexts, and interrelated activity systems, otherwise known as the constructed self. This study is unusual in that it approaches the relation between religious lifestyle practices and sexual orientation from the perspective that the self is constructed and mediated within communities and families. This approach is particularly important as prior research has indicated that sexual minorities'

communal experiences of social stigma and conflict are likely to negatively impact their relational fulfillment and mental health unless active efforts to make-meaning of these experience and conflicts is pursued (Frost, 2011). This study therefore explores individual and family development around issues of religious lifestyle practices and sexual orientation by analyzing individual and family meaning-making practices across a variety of stakeholder positions. Some of the stakeholder positions that are included in the research design of this study are the religious Christian and Orthodox Jewish religious systems, mediating systems (e.g., therapy and support groups), and family activity systems.

Interacting Systems: Sexuality, Family, Religion, and the Therapeutic System.

This study includes clinicians' perspectives regarding the conflicts negotiated by gay men and religious family allies as clinicians are often in the unique position to mediate secular and religious contexts within the activity-meaning system. However, clinicians are not simply a tool used by gay men and religious relatives to accomplish mediational goals. Rather, clinicians are important stakeholders that deliberately negotiate power relations, sociopolitical contexts, and social relations alongside their clients.

Although clinical recommendations regarding gay men from religious backgrounds are often provided, few studies include clinicians' perspectives regarding their role in the therapeutic process (e.g., Phillips & Ancis, 2008). Those studies that do include clinicians' perspectives are often quantitatively focused on how clinicians' religious and sexual attitudes influence the therapeutic process and client relationship (e.g., Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009; Green, Murphy, & Blumer, 2010; Stracuzzi, Mohr, & Fuertes, 2011). Few studies have presented a pragmatic discussion of the conflicts encountered around issues of religious involvement and the

methods and strategies that counselors employ when working with sexual and gender minority clients (Bozard & Sanders, 2011).

In addition, the extant literature that does include clinical perspectives is often limited to case studies (e.g., Glassgold, 2008; Haldeman, 2004, Tan, & Yarhouse, 2010), individual therapists' perspectives (e.g., Mark, 2008; Paul, 2008), discussions of non-empirically tested methods of intervention (e.g., Bozard & Sanders, 2011; McGrady, & McDonnell, 2006), clinical populations of a single faith (e.g., Mark, 2008; Pope, Mobley, & Myers, 2010), and brief references to therapeutic engagement as a demographic variable. For example, although Dahl & Galliher (2009) reported that 13% of the 63 LGBQQ participants that integrated their sexual and (primarily Christian) religious identities found counselor support to be beneficial, there was no discussion as to how those issues were navigated during the course of therapy. Moreover, most studies on religion and psychotherapy focus exclusively on issues of Christian religiosity, limiting their generalizability (Worthington, Kuru, McCullough, & Sandage, 1996; Rodriguez, 2010). In addition, much of the prior research focuses on specific, segmented aspects of the difficulties encountered by gay men from religious backgrounds without necessarily including a simultaneous discussion of the multiple stakeholders involved (e.g., Dahl & Galliher, 2009; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). However, given the complex interrelationship between religion, family, and sexuality, studies should be designed to include both interpersonal and inter-cultural dynamics.

An additional concern is that limited empirical information is available to help counselors pragmatically address religious and sexual development with LGBTQ clients (Bozard & Sanders, 2011; Schuck & Liddle, 2001). This gap is particularly problematic as research indicates that LGB mental health is enhanced by the ability to integrate spirituality and sexuality

(Lease, Horne, & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005; Wagner, Serafini, Rabkin, Remien, & Williams, 1994). Moreover, researchers have reported that the majority of clients in general would like to discuss spiritual and religious issues in counseling (Quackenbos, Privette, & Klentz, 1985; Rose, Westefeld, & Ansley, 2008). In addition, it appears as though these needs are not currently being addressed as prior literature indicates that counselor-client value dissonance is particularly powerful regarding issues of spirituality and sexuality (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). Furthermore, recent reports by the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy indicate that only 46% of their clinical members received clinical training in graduate school regarding LGBTQ client needs (Green, Murphy, Blumer, & Palmanteer, 2009). Clearly, the current body of clinical literature must be expanded to include a more applied focus that can assist in narrowing the gap between client and therapist as well as research and practice (Sherry, Whilde, & Quick, 2010).

An alternative approach to the study of gay men and their religious families.

The practical implications of research designs that focus only on gay individuals' *or* their family members' experiences of familial and cultural reactions are limited (Savin-Williams, 2001). If broader community and individual developmental concerns are to be addressed via family therapy settings, clergy, and parental support groups, then it the nuances of the social relations and possible conflicts between the individual, their family, and their socio-religious history must be addressed. Sampling multiple stakeholder positions and studying their interactions within this activity-meaning system is essential as prior research has indicated that the anxiety provoking conflict between religious values and sexual orientation is experienced and influenced by family members as well as gay men (Thomas, 2002).

In this dissertation, I explore the application of relational complexity theory (Daiute, 2012), an extension of perspective-taking theory (Davis, 1983) to the question of how gay men and their religious relatives negotiate conflicts around sexuality and religion. While the theory of perspective-taking “allows an individual to anticipate the behavior and reactions of others, therefore facilitating smoother and more rewarding interpersonal relationships” (Davis, 1983, p.115), the theory of relational complexity is understood to account for “the ability to interact meaningfully and flexibly with diverse others, in terms of their differing understandings, influence (power), expectations, and to adjust one’s expression with them in terms of goals and needs” (Daiute, 2012, p. 6). In summary, relational complexity “extends perspective-taking and perspective-coordination beyond interpersonal relations and intergroup relations to relations with social dimensions of power and practice” (Daiute, 2012, p. 9). The theory of relational complexity is particularly relevant to gay men and their religious families due to their multifaceted interactions within relational, familial, religious and social contexts.

In conclusion, a theoretical shift to studying individual conflict and change as related to sexual, familial, religious and secular stakeholders is essential. Toward that end, this dissertation focuses upon the following: (a) The family as an interactive, relationally complex system; (b) People’s need to integrate diverse and conflicting relationships/systems into their lives; (c) How gay men and religious family members interact with community and religious values; (d) The goals and conflicts of the individuals involved; (e) The secular and religious methods and tools that are used to mediate conflicts and achieve goals. This dissertation systematically studies the conflicts that may emerge within intrapersonal, interpersonal, metaphysical (e.g., between God/morality and man), and intersystem contexts for gay men and their religious families and the cultural tools that they use to mediate conflicts.

To that aim, the next chapter discusses the study's theory-based design and process of analysis (Chapter 2) leading to an analysis of the socioreligious stakeholder documents of this activity-meaning system (Chapter 3). I then present an analysis of the interpersonal conflicts and sociocultural difficulties experienced and discussed across stakeholder positions (Chapter 4). The conflict analysis chapter is then followed by an analysis of the mediational strategies developed by stakeholders to navigate these conflicts, such as humanization (Chapter 5). In addition, Chapter 6 presents a comprehensive analysis of the diverse cultural tools used to make sense of the often conflicting demands of religion, family, and sexuality, such as pastoral counseling and blogging (Chapter 6). Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the limitations and implication of these findings (Chapter 7).

Chapter II: Designing the study of sexual orientation as an interactive development in human cultural systems

Theory of Method

Due to the complex socio-religious context of gay individuals and their religious families, this dissertation utilizes an applied activity-meaning system framework to study how individuals and their socio-religious contexts are reciprocal agents of construction. Furthermore, given this lens of human development, the unit of analysis expands to include families' meaning-making processes (e.g., mediational strategies) and how these social-religious processes intersect or do not. Therefore, the research design and analysis of this dissertation are theoretically grounded in cultural historical activity theory which focuses on the interactive development of individuals in society, as defined above.

Within this framework, the subject of analysis broadens from interpersonal conflicts and meaning-making processes to socio-religious conflicts, goals, activity systems, and scripts (Daiute, 2006). In addition, Engestrom's (2009) theory that society is a network of interacting activity systems is enacted precisely with the design concept of practice based activity-meaning systems. Within this perspective, the religious activity systems of the Orthodox Jewish and religious Christian communities are viewed as a significant component of the family activity system via life cycle practices (e.g., circumcision, baptism) and weekly rituals (e.g., Sabbath meals, Sunday Services, Monday Family Night). This theoretical foundation regarding the interacting systems of development translates into a research design that focuses on interpreting gay individuals' and their religious families' development around issues of sexual orientation and religious lifestyle practices in terms of social-relational dynamics in addition to individual subjectivities and capacities (Daiute, 2006).

The contexts that are specifically focused upon include the participants' daily community life (e.g., social and institutional interactions), socio-religious scripts and metaphysical reflections, and the interaction between these subsystems (e.g., individual, family, community, clinical, religious institutions). This chapter therefore presents the theory-based research design, selection of participants/stakeholders, and methods of narrative inquiry used to study individual and sociorelational development post sexual disclosure within religious and familial contexts. The research design of this study was guided by an inquiry framework focused on how individuals and family systems use cultural values and artifacts to negotiate relational and cultural conflicts around issues of sexuality and religion. Given this framework, the unit of analysis is the family and its interactions with secular and religious subsystems.

Research Design

This dissertation addresses the issue of family and individual development in relation to issues of sexual orientation and religious lifestyle practices by focusing on the family as a unit that mutually interacts with socio-religious subsystems. In light of this framework, the following research questions are addressed: How is the process of sexual orientation and sexual orientation disclosure negotiated within a religious, familial, and societal system?; What are the salient conflicts that emerge in religious families of gay men who have recently disclosed their sexual orientation?; How does one's own or a relatives' sexual orientation mediate religious lifestyle practices and the interpretation of ancient religious texts for individuals and family units?; Which cultural tools do actors across the activity-meaning system use to mediate conflicts?

The selected sampling strategy therefore focused upon the multiple stakeholders within this activity-meaning system; clinicians, gay men, religious texts, and religious family allies. Allies were identified by gay participants as the family member with whom they have confided

in about conflicts related to sexual orientation and religious lifestyle practices (see Table 1: Activity-Meaning System Design, p. 181).

The units of analysis for this study are the family systems' development in relation to members' interactions and conflicts with the religious system and its subsystems as mediated by cultural scripts, values, and practices. The family system is represented via the recruitment of both gay men and their family ally as well as their discussions of their experiences within the family system. The interactive relation between these different stakeholders and the mediational strategies that are employed to make sense of these interactions are approached from multiple perspectives via the recruitment of multiple stakeholders as well as the implementation of diverse narrative collection methods.

In addition, this dissertation explores the relational uses of cultural tools in terms of both positive and negative interpersonal outcomes. For example, textual interpretation and religious values can be used to support efforts to reconcile familial relationships or to defend one's position in argument, leading to further estrangement. Prior research suggests that negative relational uses of religion are common amongst religious parent-child and spousal dyads' arguing about non-religious issues, suggesting that arguments centering upon the religious context of sexual orientation are likely to be sources of tension as well (e.g., Brelsford, 2011). Therefore, Chapter 3 will present a cultural-historical analysis of the stakeholder documents that are involved in this lived experience of relational and religious conflict and mediation.

Participants engaged the highly scripted and contested issues of sexuality, conflict, and religion, within the relational nature of conversation (autobiographical interviews) and letter writing tasks (realistic activities). For example, a 28 year-old gay participant from a Mormon background wrote a letter protesting the Church of Latter Day Saint's policy to exclude gay

members from church activities by identifying them with a permanent asterisk next to their name on the church roster with the following impassioned statement:

I am reminded of The Scarlett Letter, a novel written for what seems to me to be the very same reasons for your asterisk. The church, I hope, will eventually learn the lessons found in this book. Until then, you have stopped being there for me... So instead of continuing to strive to be an outstanding member of the church, I will try to be an outstanding member of humanity.

Due to such contentious issues, the letter writing task was designed to empower participants to engage the power-laden contexts of religion and sexuality as participant-activists as opposed to only participant-observers. In the case of the above example, the participant utilized the letter writing task as an opportunity to protest current church policy, redefine his community, and develop new standards of morality. Furthermore, writing has been described as an interpretive and transformational process. Although a retelling of a story cannot alter events, it can transform the associated meaning of those events and possibly modify the course of future social-relations (Daiute, 2006). For example, the 28 year-old participant from a Mormon background concluded his letter by stating

Maybe one day, my record will be uncovered, complete with the little asterisk, and someone, instead of knowing what the brand truly means, will recognize my name and think that the asterisk must have meant dedication to good, to God, and to the world.

An additional relational activity that contributed to the symbolic development of participants was the very act of the research interview itself. The interview requested that participants developed a relationship with me as a researcher, as they made meaning of their experiences and conflicts post the disclosure process. In this way, I as a researcher was indirectly mediating participants' symbolic development by sitting as an interpreter across the positions in the system. In some cases my role as a mediator and interpreter across stakeholder groups was directly recognized by the participants. For example, a 25 year-old gay participant that self-identified as being from an Evangelical background shared that after participating he and his mother *“ended up having some really good conversations and I talked about my change in religious beliefs. I even found out some things about her beliefs that I didn't know before!”*

Another context in which gay men and religious relatives often narrate the disclosure experience and its aftermath is within the therapeutic system. The clinical context can therefore become a place in which conflicts are mediated, meaning is made, and social-relations are altered as clinicians assist their clients in navigating both secular and religious worlds. This study therefore sampled clinicians as ecologically relevant stakeholders in the activity meaning-system of gay men and their religious relatives. Clinicians were asked to share their impressions of the salient conflicts and mediational strategies that gay men and their religious families addressed during the therapeutic activity process. This design represents the application of cultural historical activity theory as it focuses upon how *“activities embody relationships”* (Daiute, 2010, p.16) within the context of societal structures (e.g., the therapeutic context).

Participants

Fifty participants comprised of gay men (n = 23), their key religious family member (n = 15), and clinicians (n = 12) were sampled to give voice to the multiple stakeholders within the post disclosure activity-meaning system.

Demographic Information

Ten gay men that self-identified as having Orthodox Jewish backgrounds and seven of their key family members participated in the interview portion of the study (4 sisters, 1 brother, 2 mothers), eight of these men and three of their key family members (2 mothers, 1 sister) additionally wrote letters. Although there are many subgroups within the Orthodox Jewish community, 9 of the participants identified as having relatives, social, or educational experiences within the Modern-Orthodox Jewish community. The American Modern-Orthodox Jewish community is a unique minority population characterized by their devotion to the achievement of a bicultural identity as a religious ideal and as such, the community often struggles with finding a balance between secular and religious values (Etengoff, 2011). In addition, one participant self-identified as growing up within a more Ultra-Orthodox “*yeshivish*” community that had a more ambivalent relationship with secular media and values. However, none of the Jewish participants self-identified as having a *Chassidic* or *Charedi* background that is usually associated with intentional efforts to segregate one’s self from the secular world (i.e., Barzilai-Nahon & Barzilai, 2005).

Thirteen gay men that self-identified as having religious Christian backgrounds and eight of their key family members participated in the interview portion of the study (1 sister, 6 mothers, 1 father), eight of these men and six religious family allies (mothers) additionally wrote letters. Although there is no one singular, monolithic Christian experience, the general term

Christian is used to describe this sample as this term was used in all participants' self-identifications. Original recruitment efforts focused on specifically recruiting Christian participants from the Catholic subgroup due to the Catholic Church's recent statements regarding homosexuality. However, due to recruitment difficulty, recruitment criteria expanded to include gay men that self-identified as having any type of religious Christian background. One of the premises of this study is that participants are knowledgeable narrators of their own experience. Therefore, participants from a variety of religious subgroups (e.g., Mormon) were included under the umbrella of Christian if that was their reported self-identification. The following Christian backgrounds are therefore included in the sample of gay men based upon the participants' independent self-identifications: 7 Mormon, 2 Catholic, 2 Methodist, 1 Evangelical, and 1 Seventh Day Adventist. Religious family members from Christian backgrounds identified with the following subgroups: 4 Mormon, 1 Catholic, 1 Methodist, 1 Evangelical, and 1 Seventh Day Adventist. Although gay friendly organizations and networks from a variety of denominations were contacted, the greatest number of self-identified Christian participants responded to recruitment requests through the *MoHo* gay Mormon blogging network, possibly due to their unique organizational directory system (see p. 138 for further information).

Thirty percent of gay participants from Jewish backgrounds identified as currently Orthodox/religiously observant, 10% as agnostic, and 60% as non-practicing although still believing in God and/or some major tenets of faith. Similarly to gay men from Jewish backgrounds, 38% of gay men from Christian backgrounds identified as practicing and observant (see Figure 1: Gay Men's Religious Identification, p.194). However, a greater percentage of gay men from Christian backgrounds identified as agnostic or atheist (38%) and a lower percentage reported being non-practicing believers (23%). Eighty-six percent of Jewish family allies and

75% of Christian family allies reported being strictly observant. Fifty-seven percent of Jewish family allies attended services weekly, 29% monthly, and 14% for High Holidays and celebratory events. Eight-eight percent of Christian family allies reported that they attended services weekly and 12% did not attend services at all due to a lack of availability.

All gay men from Orthodox Jewish backgrounds and 86% of their family members identified as currently living in the North Eastern region of the United States (see Table 2: Jewish and Christian Stakeholders' Demographic Information, p. 182). Forty-six percent of gay men from Christian backgrounds identified as currently living in the Western region of the US and 50% percent of Christian family members identified as currently living in the Midwestern region (see Table 2: Jewish and Christian Stakeholders' Demographic Information for additional details, p. 182). Although many of the men and their Christian family members are currently living in different regions, this was not viewed as a confounding variable, but, rather as an important data point regarding gay men's post-disclosure residential and religious choices. Moreover, data collection methods were largely similar for the men and their participating Christian ally, with 92% of men and 100% of Christian allies participating via phone.

All gay men and their family allies identified as White, although this was not a criterion for inclusion. In addition, none of the gay participants was married or identified as partnered. However, three Jewish participants identified as being involved in a serious and committed relationship. Gay men from Jewish backgrounds participated on average five years since their first familial disclosure ($SD=4$). This is similar to gay men from Christian backgrounds who participated on average four years since their first familial disclosure ($SD= 2.5$). The rate of family member participation was similar for the two groups at 70% for the Jewish sample and 62% for the Christian sample.

The minimum age for all participants during the time of recruitment was specified to be 18 years. In addition, due to the concern of possible cohort effects related to changing sociopolitical attitudes regarding homosexuality, the gay male participants were required to be within the age range of 18-35 years of age. The average age for participating gay men from Jewish and Christian backgrounds is 25 (*Jewish Age, SD = 5; Christian Age, SD, = 3*). The average age for participating Jewish family members is 42 (*SD= 17*) and the average age for participating Christian family members is 52 (*SD = 12*).

The majority of gay participants demonstrated demographic characteristics typical of emerging adulthood, with the majority of participants earning \$60,000 or below (69% Christian, 90% Jewish) and having some college experience or only a college degree (85% Christian, 60% Jewish). This slight difference in education level across the two groups was consistent in terms of family allies as well. The majority of Christian family allies reported having completed some college or only a college degree (75%) as compared to the majority of Jewish family allies reporting that they were working on or had attained a Masters or doctorate (57%). This is in contrast to income, as both the majority of Christian family allies (63%) and Jewish family allies (71%) reported that they earned below \$100,000 annually.

Participants from religious Christian and Orthodox Jewish backgrounds were selected as prior research has indicated that family members from these religious subgroups often experience difficulties post disclosure and the purpose of this study was to study how these conflicts are mediated (Kirby & Michaelson, 2008; Schnoor, 2003). In addition, by sampling two religious groups that share versions of the same original artifact (*Torah/Bible/Old Testament*) and not the contemporary discourse mediating those artifacts, the ongoing process of stakeholder development within historically and temporally situated contexts can be studied.

Other sexual minority participants and their families were not recruited as prior research has indicated that the processes of sexual orientation disclosure and identity conflict frequently differ for various sexual minority groups (see Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000; Rodriguez, 2006). In addition, men and women often occupy different roles from each other within Christian and Jewish communities, religious institutions, and biblical prohibitions, suggesting that the cultural context of gender may contribute to variations within the sexual minority experience (Galssgold, 2008; Greenberg, 2004; Helminiak, 2000; Ozorak, 1996; Rapoport, 2004). Furthermore, a considerable amount of prior research focusing on sexual orientation and the Jewish population has concentrated on the lesbian experience exclusively (Schnoor, 2003). Therefore, this research study will address the gap in the literature concerning the experience of gay men.

In addition, 12 clinicians from the New York State area participated in the study as mediators of secular and religious stakeholder positions (*Age, M = 53, SD = 17, 92% White*). The only eligibility criteria for participation were that they had worked with gay clients from religious families within the past 5 years, that they be located in the Tri-State Area, and that they self-identified as a clinician. Of the clinicians recruited, 8 (67%) self-identified as male, 3 as female (25%), and one as a Transsexual man (8%). Nine participants identified as being members of either a sexual or gender minority community, 1 participant identified as being heterosexual and connected to sexual and gender minority communities, and 2 participants identified as being heterosexual and not connected to sexual and gender minority communities. Eight clinicians reported not being currently religious (although 3 identified as having a Jewish background and 1 as having a Catholic background), 2 clinicians identified as religious Orthodox Jews, and 2 clinicians identified as actively involved religious Catholics. Of the clinicians that

currently identified as religious Catholics, one participant is currently a Catholic Priest and one participant currently gives sermons at a gay affirmative church.

Eight clinicians had attained a Master's Degree in Counseling or Social Work, 3 had attained a PsyD, and 1 had attained a PhD in Clinical Psychology. Eighty-three percent (10) of participants identified as gay affirmative. The average number of years of participants' reported clinical experience is 20.6 with a standard deviation of 14.7 years. Eighty-three percent (10) of participants currently work with gay clients from religious backgrounds and 17% (2) of participants had worked with such clients within the past 3 years. Clinicians reported that they worked with clients from Christian, (Baptist, Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Lutheran, Methodist, Mormon, Pentecostal, Protestant) Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim backgrounds.

Recruitment

The recruitment of gay men and religious family allies initially focused upon gay individuals with the hopes that this would result in a snowball sampling of their key family members. Ninety-two percent of all family unit dyads were recruited this way. During the interview, gay participants were asked to discuss their family relationships and identify their key family members (e.g., "Is there someone in your family who is your key ally? If so, can you describe your relationship with them? Is this the person in your family with whom you have most frequently confided in about family reactions and the tension between religion and sexual orientation? If not, than whom?", Appendix D: Measures, p. 176). At the conclusion of the session with the gay participant, I asked if they felt comfortable either encouraging their key family member to participate or providing their family members' contact information.

Gay participants were recruited either by participant referral or by being contacted directly based on organizational membership and blogs, or via organizations (e.g., Dignity,

Welcoming and Affirming Baptists, Seventh Day Adventist Kinship International, SoulForce, Jewish Queer Youth, Nihirm, [Gay and Lesbian Yeshiva Day School Alumni](#)), list serves or clinicians' referrals. This sampling technique is only representative of gay men already involved in organizational support systems or blogging activities. However, this sampling strategy was a deliberate aspect of the research design as it focuses upon gay men who are actively engaged in at least one form of a mediational strategy and are therefore likely to be engaging in other mediational activities as well.

About 30 recruitment emails were sent out to targeted individuals and about 25 organizations were contacted. Thirteen gay men reported being recruited directly, 6 were recruited via snowball methods, and 4 contacted the PI based on organizational emails and endorsements (1 via Jewish Queer Youth, 1 via Nihirim, 1 via Seventh Day Adventist Kinship International, and 1 via Dignity).

Due to HIPPA regulations, the clinicians included in this study did not directly work with the gay men and religious relatives included in this study. All clinicians were recruited via email with the same IRB approved recruitment text asking them to complete a semi-structured interview. The interview focused on clinicians' thoughts and experiences regarding the tension between religion and sexuality that may be experienced at both the family systems and individual level. I obtained email addresses by conducting internet searches for clinicians in the Tri-State area that specialized in gay issues, by contacting community organizations and list serves, and via the Psychology Today database. In addition, contacted clinicians may have forwarded on the call for participation to colleagues with similar areas of expertise. Forty-eight recruitment emails were sent out with a 25% recruitment rate, which is fairly typical for the social sciences. No incentives were offered for participation other than participants' potential contributions to social

science. I then interviewed recruited participants either in-person at a location of their choosing or via phone after informed consent had been obtained.

Stakeholder (system actor) Experiences

This research design focuses on how families mediate sociorelational and sociocultural conflicts between religion and sexuality. In light of the complex socio-religious context of the gay participants and their religious family members, semi-structured interviews were conducted to enable participants to fluidly and comfortably discuss their thoughts. Semi-structured individual interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. The average time for the semi-structured interview was an hour and 14 minutes ($SD = 20$ minutes). Interviews were conducted over a period of eight months and 82% of total interviews were conducted over the phone. However, 60% of interviews with gay men from Jewish backgrounds were conducted in person as compared to 1% of interviews with gay men from Christian backgrounds. This difference in interview medium is largely due to the difference in residence regions of the two groups. Recruitment efforts for both religious groups originally focused on the Metropolitan Area and were only expanded for the Christian population due to recruitment difficulties.

Gay men and family ally interviews were comprised of 21 questions that addressed the participants' demographic information, socio-religious activities and practices, family system dynamics, and related experiential history (e.g., "How would you describe your feelings and thoughts about religion?; How old were you at the time of your/his sexual orientation disclosure to the family?; How would you describe that event and time period in your life?; Do you believe that your relationship with your family has changed over time? If so, how?", Appendix D: Measures, p. 176).

In addition to the autobiographical interview questions, gay men and family allies were asked to write a letter to a religious figure regarding their thoughts about how their religious community should be addressing the issue of sexual orientation and disclosure (see Appendix D: Measures, p. 176). The goal of requesting participants to complete different narratives genres was to elicit variations in the social-relational elements of participants' experiences (Daiute, 2004). In this way, participants' narratives were "troubled" to provide a more complete picture of individual-context positioning as letters are cultural tools that shift author-audience relations to allow for some non-normative expressions (Daiute, 2004). This symbolic and realistic activity was therefore designed to enable participants to imagine diverse audiences, purposes, and contexts and thereby address intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intersystem dimensions of conflict and mediation.

The average time of completion for the letter writing task could not be determined due to inconsistencies in participants' method of timing. All letters were typed utilizing a computer. Participants were encouraged to write their letters within a week after the interview. However, the length of time between the interview and letter submission varied considerably, with some participants submitting letters hours after the interview and others submitting their letters only within two months after the interview.

In addition, clinicians were asked to answer 13 questions regarding the salient and significant issues that emerged in their clinical work with gay men and their religious family systems (see Appendix D: Measures, p. 176). Semi-structured follow-up questions focusing on religious texts within the therapeutic context and additional demographic questions concerning age and gender were included as well. Clinicians were not asked to share specific details of their clinical practice that are protected by HIPAA. Rather, clinicians were asked to discuss in general

terms the most frequently occurring conflicts and most powerful mediational strategies that emerged during therapy sessions. The average interview length for the clinicians was 31 minutes ($SD = 9$ minutes). Nine interviews were conducted in-person and 3 were conducted over the phone, as per the participants' preference. Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed, and de-identified.

In summary, the research design of this dissertation includes the multiple stakeholders that mediate conflicts within the activity-meaning system of gay men and their religious families. This dissertation is therefore an applied study of a system with positions and interactions (literal and symbolic) relevant to individual and sociorelational development. By studying the sociorelational and cultural context of the sexual disclosure experience, the multiple facets of human development are accounted for in a meaningful way. The following section will therefore focus on the religious, familial, and societal contexts and data points included in this applied theory of analysis.

Method of Analysis

The theoretical framework employed by this study provides a lens for analysis that focuses upon human development within a socio-relational context. By utilizing such a framework, the analysis is comprehensive enough to address the activities and mediational strategies that are employed by both gay individuals and their families within a variety of activity systems. In addition, this approach is not limited to a discussion of coherence alone and allows for the complexity of intrapersonal perspectives to emerge (Daiute, 2011).

Below, I describe the method of analysis across stakeholders and stakeholder experiences. Stakeholders referenced in this chapter are gay men, family allies, and clinicians. The experiences included in the analyses are interviews and letters. In addition, the main data

points included across stakeholders are conflicts, mediational strategies, and religious and secular cultural tool use.

Method of Analysis across Stakeholders

Narratives were transcribed by research associates and then checked and read again by myself prior to coding. All narratives were read through at least once prior to coding to help the researchers gain familiarity with the narrative. I coded all interviews and clinician interviews were additionally coded by a trained research associate. Two clinicians' narratives were used for training purposes and 10 were then double coded. Inter-rater reliability for the identification of conflict and strategy scenarios in clinician interviews was initially 71% and coding was then discussed until an acceptable inter-rater agreement was reached. Discrepancy discussions were initially focused on establishing whether the transcript section was not included in the coding process due to an unintentional oversight or a conceptual position. The majority of discrepancies were due to unintentional oversights. However, in the few cases of different conceptual positions, each rater explained their standpoint while referencing the coding manual. In all cases, agreement was reached soon thereafter.

Data analysis of the interview narratives began with the following four process steps: (a) identification of conflict(s) and difficulties present within narrative, (b) identification of family and individual negotiation efforts, (c) Identification of cultural tool use such as religious texts, (d) characterization of the mediational strategies. The above process steps then led to a listing of the interacting subsystems referenced in the narrative and an analysis of how each subsystem was mediated. This coding system was informed by both participants' narratives and cultural historical activity theory. After this initial coding process, the number of participants in each stakeholder group reporting each conflict, strategy, and tool use was tallied and then compared.

However, due to the limited number of participants and frequency counts less than five, no formal statistical comparisons were made. Therefore, any references to comparative differences are made based on qualitatively observable differences.

Conflicts

Conflicts and difficulties were identified based upon participants' responses to specific questions focusing on possible familial tensions (e.g., is there someone in your family who is experiencing "the most difficulty" in this process? If so, can you describe your relationship with them?, Were there any activities or people that made the disclosure process more difficult for you?) as well as questions that asked participants to reflect upon their experiences with specific stakeholders (e.g., What are your thoughts about the text in Leviticus/ Corinthians that prohibits homosexual activity?; How would you describe your relationship with the gay community?; Do you believe that your relationship with religion has changed over time? If so, how? Why?) and the nature of the difficulty. In addition, the complete interview was read for conflicts and difficulties that participants labeled as being a "*challenge*", "*hard*", "*difficult*", "*upsetting*", "*a fight/battle/argument*", and "*terrible*" etc. Conflicts were operationalized as tension filled interpersonal interactions and power relations between two or more actors within the activity-meaning system. In contrast, difficulties were operationalized as internally focused stressful or tension filled experiences between activity-meaning subsystems (e.g., religion, sexuality) as opposed to between specific actors. After reading all conflict narratives at least twice, the following conflict coding categories emerged from the data: (a) Familial difficulty, (b) Communal Homophobia, (c) Religion, Religious Leader, Religious Community, (d) Adjustment of Expectations, (e) Discomfort with the Gay Community, (f) Anxiety, Depression, Suicide (See

Tables 3.1-3.6 for definitions and examples, p.164-166). Only conflicts that were experienced by two or more participants were coded.

Conflict narratives were additionally coded for intensity based upon Labov's (1984) and Barbaresi's (1996) work. Intensity is viewed as an important component of the narratives as this linguistic feature has been understood to be at "*the heart of social and emotional expression*" (Labov, 1984, p. 43). Although Labov found intensity to be difficult to describe precisely, Barbaresi (1996) postulated that intensity is demonstrated by the repetition of words or ideas. In addition, repetition has been understood to be a linguistic tool that can assist speakers in reinforcing their position in a conflict (Bazzanella, 2011). Bazzanella (2011) has operationalized linguistic repetition as both the repetition of phrases (e.g., "*he said, he said*") as well as the use of qualifiers (e.g., "*the snow falls very slowly*"). Furthermore, Daiute & Nelson (1997) understand qualifiers to be a tool of evaluative sense-making. Therefore, the intensity of participants' conflict narratives was measured by content context, the repetition of phrases, as well as the use of qualifiers. In addition, repetition and the use of qualifiers was often accompanied by forgotten or "filler" phrases such as "*blah, blah, blah.*" Significance was not attached to these "filler" phrases if they were commonly used throughout their narrative and therefore a general stylistic issue.

This method of intensity coding is illustrated by the analysis of the narrative below. A religious Mormon participant shared the following regarding his experience of being bullied by his brothers:

My brothers, when I was in high school, my brothers were kind of making fun of me one time and um. I don't think I'm a particularly effeminate guy at all, but

I'm also not manly, in the traditional sense, you know, none of us are... But they were kind of making fun of me because I had said something about, I had said that I liked the new Beatle; it's a total chick car, and I still do, I see that it's a chick car and I still like it... Everyone makes fun of me and they're like, "Oh man, he's like, he likes the new Beatle, what a queer, blah blah blah" and just kind of making fun of me and like... Weeks had passed and my brothers and I had gotten into an actual fight, like a really big fight, like an actual fight, and words were said and we got so angry at each other...

Although four years had passed since the event and the participant is now on better terms with his brothers, the participant was still visibly upset during this portion of the interview. The participant's heightened emotional state is illustrated by his loss of words (e.g., "*blah, blah, blah*"), his repeated defense of his masculinity and car preference, his repetition of ideas (e.g., "*gotten into an actual fight, like a really big fight, like an actual fight*"), as well as his use of qualifiers (e.g., "*so angry*"). This narrative analysis is largely representative of the other participants' heightened emotional reports of their bullying experiences and is aligned with the extant literature regarding the noted long term emotional effects of homophobic bullying (i.e., Kelleher, 2009).

Negotiation Narratives

Negotiation narratives are operationalized as a process by which an individual actively develops a strategy to manage or settle a conflict between the stakeholders of religious lifestyle, family values, and the issue of sexual orientation. Complete interviews were read to see if participants followed up upon their stated conflicts and difficulties with any thoughts regarding

how they or others addressed these difficulties. Negotiation efforts were additionally identified based on participants' responses to specific complicating action clauses (Labov, 1997) that asked them to reflect on how conflicts and difficulties turned out (e.g., Has your relationship with your family/religion/gay community changed over time?) as well as semi-structured questions focusing on what participants would say to family members initiating conflicts. Narratives related to negotiation efforts were then read again for the identification of specific mediational strategies and cultural tool use.

For example, a clinician shared that he would like to help religious leaders mediate the tensions between religion and sexuality by telling them to

Read it [the Bible] again. Read it again with your heart. Take a breath, read it again, look at your wife, look at your son, look at your daughter, and remember that God is here today. In this generation. Ya. And, to the Jews: God didn't let Abraham kill Isaac. And for the Christians: Jesus was here to love mankind.

Within the above narrative it becomes clear that the therapist is strongly recommending a solution strategy that utilizes religious cultural tools (biblical stories and values) to mediate the tensions between the activity systems of religious, familial, and sexual orientation. Instead of banishing religious values and systems to a place of total irrelevance, the therapist is acknowledging the value that religious individuals place on these cultural tools and how the interaction between these seemingly conflicting systems of family, religion, and sexuality can be mediated by the use of additional social, political, and environmental dimensions. The therapist's recommendation is therefore more multi-faceted than simply directing religious individuals to

become more empathic to the gay experience or perspective. The therapist is very clearly recommending a thoughtful contextualization of the contemporary interpersonal problem within the context of ancient biblical texts and values. This narrative example further supports the need to analyze stakeholders' negotiation efforts within a relationally complex framework that accounts for the intersection between sociocultural and interpersonal systems of development.

Mediational Strategies

Mediational strategies in this study are defined within the relationally complex framework of humanization. Humanization is operationalized as the “experience of having one’s experiences, desires, and feelings recognized” by an empathic audience as falling within the human scope and the “opportunity for personal agency and self-actualization” (Bell & Khoury, 2011, p.168). Given the framework of relational complexity, the definition of humanization can be expanded to include the myriad of social systems and power relations that are inherently embedded in the actualization of humanity (Daiute, 2012). Therefore, for the purpose of this study humanization is understood to be a strategy used to manage the relationally complex power dynamics of religious families’ and their gay family members’ interactions. In addition, sociorelational strategies are understood as occurring in the context of the interacting activity systems of religion, family, and sexuality. Therefore, narratives across stakeholder positions were coded for humanization strategies in relation to family members as well as the gay community. This method of analysis was specifically selected as it offers a systematic exploration of how sexual orientation and its disclosure are negotiated within a religious, familial, and societal system

The research design and data analysis steps of this study are focused upon understanding the conflicts and mediational processes of the family system from multiple perspectives,

ensuring a broader focus than coherence alone. Humanization coding categories were therefore only developed after all negotiation efforts were identified and read at least twice. This method of analysis allowed for different humanization strategy category codes to emerge for gay men and their religious family members. For example, gay men primarily humanized the gay community by recognizing the diversity within the gay community (e.g., “...*If you define it as partying and clubs...I am not associated with it at all...the gay community for me are my gay friends... and... good wholesome fun.*”) and normalizing the gay experience (eg., “...*anyone who knows anything about HIV knows that straight people get it too.*”). Contrastingly, religious allies’ additionally humanized the gay community by understanding and sympathizing with community pain (e.g, “*I think now I, I see beyond, I, I wonder what they’re struggling with and wh-how their feelings are.*”) and seeking integrated interactions with the gay community (e.g., *when I saw people on the beach I would talk to, I would talk to gay couples as well as straight couples.*).

Different humanization category codes are reflective of the different perspectives and experiences that gay men and their religious relatives have in relation to the interacting subsystems of religion and sexuality. For example, while all Jewish family allies identified as observant or attended religious services regularly, 60% of gay men from Jewish backgrounds identified as non-practicing believers. Moreover, all religious family allies identified as heterosexual and most had limited contact with the gay community. In addition to gay men’s and their religious relatives’ varied religious and sexual experiences, their efforts to humanize each other differed as well. For example, gay men’s efforts to humanize their religious relatives are coded for three primary categories: understanding their community context, identifying with their acceptance journey, and understanding personal and demographic factors. This is in

contrast to their religious relatives' humanization efforts which are coded for five salient categories: demonstrating unconditional love, expressing sympathy for the pain of their gay relative, viewing their gay relative as being the same person post-disclosure as they were pre-disclosure, hoping their gay relative will find happiness, and redefining power relations and relational roles. For further definitions and examples across stakeholder positions, see Tables 4 and 5 (p.167).

Developing a coding schema that allowed for the different humanization strategies used by gay men and their family allies was essential given the different roles that gay men and their family allies occupy within the activity-meaning system. For example, an Orthodox Jewish gay man discussed his sister's reaction to his disclosure, by remarking that he

was a little ignorant to the idea that other people need just as much time as I did for the nineteen years that took me to come out. And I was in this idea that if I'm okay with it, then everybody has to. This is my thing, this is my secret. This is dealing about me so if I'm ready to come out with it, then you need to be ready to accept it. And I was a little bit ignorant with that.

Within the context of humanization, we can understand the above narrative as a strategy by which the participant attempted to identify with the acceptance journey process of his religious sister. Alternatively, the participating sister's humanization efforts focused upon the strategies of unconditional love and hoping for happiness for her brother. In her words, *"at the end of the day, I still love him and I'm gonna be there for him. And I just want him to be happy."* In this example, each member of the dyad was responding to the

unique needs of their relative, thereby embodying the very premise of humanization and relational complexity. In addition to utilizing humanization as a mediational strategy, participants also appropriated cultural tools such as religious texts to support their humanization strategies. For example, some religious parents utilizing the humanization strategy of unconditional love also referenced Jesus' unconditional love for all mankind.

Cultural Tools

According to cultural historical activity theory, the context and purpose of cultural tools may differ depending upon the mediational strategies employed. In other words, although the affordances (Heft, 2001) of cultural tools define their use, individuals decide how to make use of these affordances in their daily activities (Daiute, 2010a). This argument has previously been applied to cultural tools such as time (Eisenberg & Nelson, 2010), narrative (Daiute, 2010), history (Daiute, 2010), text messages (Lucic, 2010), visual media (Lightfoot, 2010), and Second Life (Etengoff, 2012; Etengoff, 2011). In this dissertation, I illustrate how mediational strategies and tool use differ in relation to the interacting demands of sexual, secular, and religious subsystems.

Cultural tool categories were developed after transcripts were read twice and all mediational tool use was highlighted. This initial identification of cultural tool use was informed by Vygotsky's theory that tools can be physically or cognitively based and are inherently sociorelational (1978). In addition, tools are theorized to be agentively used to mediate the often conflicting demands of interacting activity systems. Given this framework, the cultural tool categories which emerged and were used for coding are: Support groups and therapy, Television and movies, Reading and writing (books, blogs, letters, Facebook), and Religious tools (biblical exegesis, religious council, and prayer).

In addition, letters to religious leaders were analyzed as cultural tools by two trained research associates and the principal investigator utilizing Daiute's (2010, 2012) theory focused analysis framework. This framework approaches the act of letter writing as a way in which participants can express their living history as they make sense of how their current circumstances interact with their needs and goals. From this perspective, we can interpret that letters to religious leaders are socio-relational behaviors that illustrate the interactions of individuals in society. For example, religious family allies' beliefs regarding the unchanging prohibition against homosexuality did not prevent family allies from using secular cultural tools in their letters to advocate a myriad of social policy changes within their religious communities. As one Mormon mother so clearly discussed in her letter focusing on the need to educate religious leaders to be more sensitive:

I agree with you that God's laws can't be changed and that marriage is a union between a man and a woman and I don't believe it's up to man to change that definition. I don't understand why man can't change governmental laws instead. Why don't they allow partners to receive insurance benefits etc.? These relationships need to be recognized and respected.

In the excerpt above it becomes clear that although the mother does not believe religious law can be modified, she strongly feels that the Mormon community should use civil law as a tool to mediate the tension. In addition, this mother began her letter by advocating additional judicial and legal measures to ensure the safety of the gay community. In her words, "*our children need*

to feel safe to disclose who they really are. There needs to be laws and stiffer penalties for hate crimes. I am appalled that humans can treat each other like that.”

The letter analyses also included the following eight process steps: (a) identification of problems, (b) identification of whether problem was implicitly or explicitly discussed, (c) identification of solution strategies and category context of application (provide relief, change existing religious traditions/texts. change existing religious institution, create new religious institutions, leave religious institution), (d) identification of functional and mediational solutions. Daiute (2012) defines functional solutions as seeking relief from current circumstances by directly addressing specific needs and appealing for alternatives to the past without proposing new systems to do so. This is in contrast to mediational solutions which suggest new systems, institutions, textual interpretations as means to resolution, (e) identification of cultural tools, (f) identification of affective and cognitive words used in problem and solution texts, (g) identification of whether problems and solutions were discussed during the interview as well. This method of letter analysis was selected as it systematically explores the questions of how sexual orientation mediates interactions with religious figures and other religious tool use as well as how different cultural tools are used to mediate conflicts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one of the aims of this method of analysis is to identify the cultural tools and mediational strategies that gay individuals, their key family members, and clinicians use to manage conflicts about religion and sexuality. Mediational strategies are inherently sociorelational and need to be studied across stakeholder positions within a complex activity-

meaning system. Therefore, in this study, religious family systems' conflicts and negotiations with sexual and religious subsystems become the context of studying human development.

In the following chapter I explore how biblical interpretation, contextualization, and criticism can be utilized as tools of cultural mediation. For example, the contemporary interpretation of religious texts allows for the reconstruction of the traditional cultural schema of the sinful homosexual to that of the gay person living "according to the will of God" (McNeill, 1993, p. 196). Within this lens, cultural artifacts (biblical and Talmudic texts) are used to weave together "individual human actions (e.g., sexual orientation) in concert with and as a part of the permeable, changing events of life" (Cole, 1996, p. 137). Given this perspective, cultural and community scripts regarding sexual orientation and religious lifestyle practices are viewed as a form of "living history, evolving in relation to current circumstances" (Daiute, 2010, p. xix). Therefore, the research design of this dissertation focuses upon the context of the meaningful daily life practices and activities of the individual and their religious family within the context of artifacts and history (see Table 3: Historical Religious Stakeholder Documents, p. 183). Chapter 3 therefore presents an analysis of the major stakeholder documents involved in this complex negotiation of historical traditions within contemporary contexts.

Chapter III: Jewish and Christian Sociohistorical Contexts

Families and individuals experiencing conflicting religious and sexual practices are likely to be faced with the task of defining and mediating the relation between these activity subsystems. It therefore becomes important to design studies which focus on situationally specific beliefs, values, rules, and social interactions as related to individual religious development (Belzen, 1999). This research orientation is of particular importance when studying populations in which religiosity is intrinsically a part of cultural traditions (Belzen, 1999). Thus, this study aims to understand the important relational processes that emerge across religious and secular stakeholder positions and how they are mediated. This study particularly focuses upon the mediation of the possibly competing goals of acknowledging and/or accepting both religious beliefs, values, practices and sexual orientation. In this way, the unit of analysis expands to include how the family system interacts with religious, sexual and secular systems of development. Moreover, this system design is focused on examining relationships within meaning systems.

Human development is an interactive process within sociorelational, public and temporal contexts, and history is therefore not “an abstract story from the past, but a meaning-making process in which individuals and groups contend with perceptions and interpretations of events as they participate in public and private life” (Daiute, 2010, p. 40). Therefore, this chapter samples stakeholder positions by studying cultural artifacts such as religious texts, as these historically situated tools are living narratives continuously engaged by multiple stakeholders within the activity-meaning system. For example, although both Christian and Jewish communities focus on many of the same cultural artifacts (e.g., Leviticus), the respective

communities have developed different post-biblical traditions and narrative heritages that contribute to contemporary discourse. The three primary methods of scriptural interpretation are the fundamentalist, historical-contextual (historical-critical) and Living Word traditions. The fundamentalist approach largely focuses on developing commentary based upon textual literalism in contrast to the historical-contextual and Living Word traditions that focus on situating the interpretive meaning of the text within the past or present.

This chapter explores the continuing dialogic discourse of Christian and Orthodox Jewish stakeholder positions by systematically studying the major contemporary public documents engaging the scriptural texts and traditions related to sexual orientation. This process involved identifying the range of documents that address one another and selecting exemplars of each major phase of the interaction. Although the present analysis is by no means exhaustive, it represents the application of sociocultural theory to the analysis of gay men and their religious family allies' activity-meaning system (see Table 3: Historical Religious Stakeholder Documents for additional examples, p. 183).

The documents selected for analysis in this chapter are understood to be mediums of cultural discourse focused on making meaning of religious values and texts that prohibit homosexuality. Contemporary religious texts are therefore positioned as shared cultural tools situated within relational processes aiming to organize people's interactions within secular and religious activity-meaning making systems. Therefore, I begin this chapter with a discussion of ancient Christian and Orthodox Jewish texts related to prohibiting homosexuality and the contemporary discourse which affirms this standpoint. I then present an analysis of contemporary statements which attempt to reinterpret the original ancient text in a contemporary mediational dialogue.

Ancient Texts

Religious texts are cultural tools that provide foundations guiding the practices, values, and cultural scripts of communities and individuals. The primary cultural artifacts of Judeo-Christian influenced religions and cultures are the *Torah* and the Old Testament. Both of which explicitly prohibit homosexual acts, such as in Leviticus 18:22, "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination (*to'evah*)," and Leviticus 20:13, "And if a man lie with mankind, as with womankind, both of them have committed abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them²".

The discussions of homosexual acts in Leviticus are repeatedly presented within the context of gender norms, as homosexual intercourse is viewed as an act that 'confuses' gender roles. For example, transvestitism is forbidden in Deuteronomy 22:5: "A man's item shall not be on a woman, and a man shall not wear a woman's garment; whoever does such a thing is an abhorrence unto *Adonai* [God]". In addition, the proscription of homosexuality in Leviticus is presented within the context of other sexual acts that are constructed as inherently unnatural and inappropriate, such as bestiality and incest (Friedman, 2007; Greenberg, 2004). Furthermore, this prohibition is compounded by the heteronormative commandments to procreate (Genesis 1:28) and establish a heterosexual relationship (Genesis 2:24).

The Jewish Orthodox Tradition & Homosexuality

Both Ultra and Modern Orthodox Jewish communities agree that the Bible was written by God (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Greenberg, 2004) and that studying and observing the Bible and

² It should be noted that contemporary Orthodox Jewish communities do not implement any form of corporal and/or capital punishment today due to the lack of cohesive leadership, spiritual development, and the absence of the Third Temple.

oral traditions is a religious duty (Greenberg, 2004). Thus, within the Orthodox Jewish perspective, the violation of religious sexual purity laws can be viewed as representing a rebellion against the word of God and the abandonment of cultural community values.

In addition, homosexuality is traditionally viewed as a cardinal sin that must be avoided even if the act would save a life (Rapoport, 2004). The cultural importance of heteronormativity is further codified by the public reading of Leviticus 18:22 during *Yom Kippur*³ services in addition to the annual cycle of Bible readings. Thus, the artifacts' (Leviticus') meaning is modified by its tool use in culturally and historically mediated contexts (being read on *Yom Kippur*). As a result, the symbolic meaning of the scriptural text is unique to this socio-religious minority group.

Furthermore, Orthodox Jews view the *Torah* as having been received alongside an inseparable oral tradition that offers additional commentary, exegeses, and guidance. For instance, the Talmud (Nedarim 51A), translates the Hebrew term, "*To'evah*" as an act of "straying from the path" as opposed to the more literal translation of "abomination." Medieval European rabbinic commentaries, such as Rabbi Aharon HaLevi, applied the Talmudic exegesis of the term "*To'evah*" to the text in Leviticus 18:22 and explained that the homosexual is straying from God's plans by failing to populate the earth by wasting semen⁴ and is thereby destroying both the purpose of man and the world (Sefer HaChinuch, Commandment 209).

Such interpretations of the ramifications of homosexuality are widely viewed as being supported by scriptural passages that suggest that reproduction is the very purpose of the world's creation, such as Isaiah 45:18; "For thus the Lord who created the heavens; God himself who

³ *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Final Judgment, is traditionally viewed as being the holiest day of the year.

⁴ However, it should be noted that heterosexual sex that does not result in children either due to a preexisting pregnancy or for menopausal reasons is still viewed as a sanctioned and holy act, as it brings a married couple closer and provides sexual pleasure to the wife (Greenberg, 2004; Friedman, 2007). Yet, the act of sex for reasons other than procreation is only deemed as valuable within the mandated heterosexist context. This implies that the central issue concerning the prohibition is not one of wasting semen, but rather of deviating from heterosexist and gender norms. In fact Novak (as cited by Greenberg, 2004) suggests that this is because gay acts, by design, do not intend children as opposed to sterile couples who have an unintended impediment.

formed the earth and made it; he has established it, he created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited...” In addition, the Talmud suggests that homosexual acts brought about the trans-generational curse of Noah’s son Cham (Genesis 9:22 & Sanhedrin 70A) as well as the destruction of the city of Sodom (Genesis 19:5). Furthermore, the Talmudic sage, Rav Aha suggests that homosexuality causes earthquakes with his statement that if “you shake your organs in a place not fit for you [homogenital intercourse], so I will shake the world” (Buber, *Midrash Tehillim*, 104 as cited in Greenberg, 2004). In addition, Greenberg (2004), a self-identified gay and Orthodox rabbi, expands upon the traditional approach to sins which violate gender norms by emphasizing that the term “*To’evah*” has usually been understood as indicating that the act “is not just hateful, but specifically hateful to God” (p.82). Lamm, a noted rabbinic leader of the American Modern-Orthodox Jewish community and Chancellor of Yeshiva University, suggests that this negative approach continues to be relevant to today’s generation with the statement that,

the very variety of interpretations of to’evah points to a far more fundamental meaning, namely, that an act characterized as an “abomination” is prima facie disgusting and cannot be further defined or explained...It is, as it were a visceral reaction, an intuitive disqualification of the act (Lamm, 1974, p. 198).

This sentiment is further supported by the comments of Moshe Feinstein, a rabbi that is largely viewed as one of the greatest Orthodox scholars of the last century (Greenberg, 2004). In Feinstein’s perspective, “*all understand that the transgressors of this sin [homogenital intercourse] are corrupt and not members of civilization at all*” (Feinstein, 1963). Thus, there is

a strong historical and contemporary tradition within Orthodox Judaism of viewing homosexuality as the ultimate and intuitively unnatural sin against both society and God. Within this perspective, a homosexual relationship is viewed as one which undermines God's goal of inhabiting the earth, ultimately resulting in the destruction of humanity.

Furthermore, some scholars suggest the term "*To'evah*" is used in the Bible only when discussing sins and values that are alien to the Jewish people (Amsel, 2010), such as the prohibition against child sacrifices or seeking a witch or psychic to contact the dead (Deuteronomy 18:9-12). Amsel's contemporary interpretation is further supported by the Talmudic text that suggests that Joseph was enslaved in Egypt for homosexual purposes (Sotah 13B) and the accompanying scriptural text that specifically prohibits the Jewish people from acting in the ways of the Egyptians (Leviticus 18:3). In contemporary times, cultural deviance is viewed as adopting a moral relativist perspective or the lack of values purported by secular hedonistic society (Greenberg, 2004). In which case, homosexuality is constructed as an activity of both cultural and religious rebellion. This concept is further supported by the Talmud's and Maimonides' twelfth century suggestion that homosexuality was so rare amongst the Jewish population that chaperoning sanctions were not required for men, although an unmarried woman and man could not be alone (Kiddushin 82A & Maimonides, Hilchot Issurei Biah 22:2).

The continued rarity of homosexuality within the Orthodox Jewish community and the resultant symbolism of cultural rebellion is a highly debated point. Although there were 16th century prohibitions concerning two men sharing a single bed due to the general licentiousness of the times (Shulchan Aruch, Even HaEzer 24:1), the 18th century religious leader and commentator, Sirkis, revoked this prohibition due to his belief that homosexual feelings and activities were rare within his community (Alpert, 1989). Sirkis' action of altering a legal

precedent to be more moderate due to the contemporary context of the infrequency of homosexuality and hence, the law's irrelevance, is highly unusual within Orthodox Jewish society as religious legal precedence is often viewed as unchangeable (Mark, 2008). Furthermore, Sirkis' leniency is a result of his contextualization of the infrequency of the forbidden act and not a critical historical contextualization of the forbidden act itself. Thus, homosexual prohibitions remain unchanged for most mainstream Orthodox Jewish communities today and attempts to rationalize their purpose or lack thereof are frowned upon (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Rapoport, 2004). However, it should be noted that a number of Orthodox community figures, such as Rapoport (2004), have recently attempted to draw a distinction between scripturally forbidden sexual *acts* and the lack of scriptural discourse concerning sexual *orientation*. Such efforts have attempted to create a space within Judaism for the Orthodox homosexual by suggesting that the religious homosexual can achieve piety through abstinence with the ultimate goal of celibacy (Rapoport, 2004). However, unlike a religious heterosexual couple that must abstain from sexual activity during courtship alone, the religious homosexual couple is asked to abstain permanently.

Some contemporary Orthodox rabbinic authorities have even idealized and codified discriminatory family and community responses to a lack of abstinence. For example, Rosener (1980 cited in Rapoport, 2004) posits that homosexuality is a sin worthy of excommunication, one which voids the individual's participation in a community prayer group (*minyan*) and in a religious court of law. Furthermore, Unterman (1993 cited in Rapoport, 2004) states that although a heterosexual inclination is not demanded by religious law, "it is demanded, that attracted or not, one should still marry and have children" (p. 90). Alternatively, other Orthodox rabbinic authorities, such as Rapoport (2004), have strongly opposed Unterman's heterocentric

approach on the grounds that such a marriage would be psychologically dangerous for both parties involved. Rosener's (1980 cited in Rapoport, 2004) approach has additionally been criticized as being an unfortunate simplification of a complex and highly subjective religious discussion of the criteria for excommunication. Others even suggest that Orthodox Jewish communities must accept those with a homosexual inclination or those who are actively homosexual, just as they would accept violators of other religious laws (Bleich, as cited in Rapoport, 2004). These debates are largely centered on the question of whether people engaged in same-sex intercourse are defined as transgressors for their acts or deviants for their character.

Recently, as the issue of gay rights and the constitutional right to be married has received much public attention on a national level, the issue of homosexuality within the Orthodox Jewish community has received more public attention than in the past. The award winning documentary "Trembling before God" raised community awareness of the issue in 2001 and Yeshiva University's public "Being Gay in the Orthodox World" 2009 panel have demanded that the issues receive further attention. It was within this context that a group of more moderate Orthodox rabbis composed the "Statement of Principles" (2010, Appendix B: Statement of Principles, p. 166). This statement outlines the need to treat homosexuals with respect and empathy, the distinctions between homosexual thoughts and the prohibition of homosexual acts, as well as the unchangeable institutionalized forms of exclusion from the institution of marriage as well as certain religious and community positions.

The strength of the document is limited as it asks the Orthodox Jewish community to validate and empathize with the gay community while simultaneously disapproving and possibly excluding homosexuals from some forms of community leadership and involvement. In addition, many Orthodox Jewish subgroups did not sign or endorse the viewpoints expressed in the

“Statement of Principles” and the document’s status therefore remains controversial (Beckerman, 2010). However, contemporary documents present a codified narrative of conflicts for both the individual and the community. In addition, the “Statement of Principles” represents the process by which cultural artifacts are continuously mediated by the discussions of contemporary cultural values and norms. Thus, an analysis of the religious family’s development around issues of sexual and religious constructions of the self must take into account the significance of cultural artifacts and the contemporary culturally mediated activities that they both effect and are affected by across multiple interconnected activity systems (see Table 3: Historical Religious Stakeholder Documents, p. 183).

The Religious Christian Community & Homosexuality

Gay and lesbian individuals from observant Christian backgrounds have struggled with socio-religious conflicts that are somewhat similar to that of the Orthodox Jewish population. They too confront their families’ efforts to love mankind while viewing homosexuality as a sin (St. Augustine, letter 211; Pope John Paul II, 1983; Greenberg, 2004). Moreover, this process can be compounded by the difficulty of finding a supportive community framework as many Christian religious institutions are likely to be homophobic. In fact, one 1991 study found that 72% of religious Catholic organizations surveyed viewed homosexuality as an abomination, although this percentage may be lower today (Melton, 1991). This sentiment is not surprising given that the New Testament renews the Old Testament’s anti-homosexual attitudes with powerful verses such as;

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

In addition, gay religious Catholics and their families are confronted at the theological and humanitarian level by recent statements issued by the Catholic Church. Although the text in the Old and New Testaments seem to only forbid the act of homosexual relations and not the sexual orientation itself, public statements such as the “Letter to the Bishops of the Christian Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons” have alienated those with homosexual sympathies by stating that

Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder (Ratzinger & Bovone, 1986).

Such statements are difficult for families and individuals to confront as the Church appears to be estranging even those who have not yet committed a ‘sin’ by equating homosexual *thoughts* as being immoral, evil, self-indulgent, and an objective disorder. These statements are made on the basis of a cultural-historical tradition that has viewed homosexual desires as being the pinnacle of lust (McNeill, 1993).

Similarly, The Church of the Latter Day Saints issued a broadcasted and written statement opposing gay marriage and in support of Proposition 8 in 2008, entitled “The Divine Institution of Marriage” (See Appendix C: The Divine Institution of Marriage, p. 169). “The Divine Institution of Marriage” states that “*The Church has a single, undeviating standard of sexual morality: intimate relations are proper only between a husband and a wife united in the bonds of matrimony.*” However, this statement is additionally paired with the seemingly contradicting concept that “*The Church’s opposition to same-sex marriage neither constitutes nor condones any kind of hostility towards homosexual men and women. Protecting marriage between a man and a woman does not affect Church members’ Christian obligations of love, kindness and humanity toward all people.*” However, the Church of the Latter Day Saints has also recently established a policy which calls for a permanent asterisk next to the roster names of self-identified gay men which permanently prohibits them from teaching or participating in any youth programs (Schwimmer, 2012). The intent of the “The Divine Institution of Marriage” is therefore rather difficult to implement. However, Catholic and Latter Day Saint policies regarding homosexuality are not representative of all Christian faiths. For example, the United Church of Christ, a subgroup of the Protestant community, passed a resolution in 2005 to endorse gay marriage (Associated Press, 2005). Although, the United Church of Christ’s resolution was not unanimously accepted by all factions of the Protestant community and other Protestant groups still debate these issues.

In addition to the canonized confusion regarding homosexuality within contemporary texts and policies, many observant Christians are confronted with the task of making meaning of historic religious texts that are seemingly undermined by contemporary texts. For example, although homosexuality is presented as being punishable by death in the Old Testament

(Leviticus 20:13), viewed as preventing ones' passage to the kingdom of God in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Romans 1:26-27, 32), and deemed punishable by a series of Christian councils from the 4th century onward (McNeill, 1993), the Holy See Delegation issued a statement in 2008 at the United Nations declaring that criminal penalties for homosexuals are a violation of human rights (December 18, 2008). Similarly, the Mormon Church has advocated the preservation of housing and employment rights for people of homosexual orientation (2008). Religious Christians are therefore presented with a tension between sacred texts, religious and historical tradition, and contemporary efforts to respect some form of human rights.

The Reinterpretation of Socio-religious Narratives

Individuals that affiliate with gay and religious communities or those who attempt to respect both communities, often struggle with coming to terms with the text in Leviticus that classifies their or their family member's sexual-orientation as punishable by death (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Yip, 1997). It would be simple to ignore the text or "deny the power of Leviticus" (Alpert, 1989, p. 63). However, for those individuals that choose to remain affiliated with religious communities and services, this is often not a satisfying option as the structure of their very faith and practice is based on the Bible itself (Greenberg, 2004). Even for those who do not choose to accept scriptures on literal or authoritative terms, the discourse in Leviticus may still be a powerful contributor to the problems of internalized homophobia (Alpert, 1989).

Some of the ways in which the religiously affiliated gay community has come to terms with this alienating text is by engaging in the meditational activities of reinterpreting the text, viewing it as a historical record or as a text limited by historical context, viewing it as an impersonal discourse with God that is superseded by a personal and authentic discourse with

God, or using it as a call for action for gay rights initiatives (Alpert, 1989; Borgman, 2009; Cloutier, 2008; Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Greenberg, 2004; Helminiak, 2000; McNeill, 1993; Stevenson, 2006). Whatever the form of interpretation, this process of artifact appropriation, in which the individual takes and uses the cultural artifact with “one’s own intention and one’s own accent” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293 as cited in Engestrom, 1995, p. 4), is clearly a significant component of the process by which sexual orientation mediates religious lifestyle practices. Therefore, artifact appropriation strategies (e.g., exegesis) will therefore be further explored in this section and included in the research design of this study.

Twenty-first century scholars have attempted to find meaning in the ancient text by utilizing contemporary views of sexual orientation to mediate their process of meaning-making. Interpreting scriptures as being gay friendly is particularly compelling as this approach utilizes a long standing tradition of scriptural interpretation. Scriptural interpretation can be focused on understanding the text within the context of the author (exegesis) or based upon the perspective and current beliefs of the reader (eisegesis). However, some scholars argue that the lines differentiating the ‘objective’ exegesis from the ‘subjective’ eisegesis are often blurred (e.g., Greenberg, 2004). Although some may suggest that contemporary scriptural interpretations distort the intentions of the literal text, others counter that all discourse is inherently interpreted as “to have meaning, they [texts] have to pass through someone’s mind” (Helminiak, 2005, p. 29), and thus even a literal reading is, in fact, a method of interpretation. Similarly, Greenberg (2004) answers those who undermine gay men’s right to interpret Leviticus due to their “inherent bias”, by highlighting the fact that all readers bring multiple subjectivities to text interpretation. In addition, Helminiak (2005) emphasizes that even those traditional scholars who advocate literal or fundamental interpretations will often support the symbolic interpretative method for

challenging texts, such as Jesus' recommendation to cut off one's hands to ward off temptation (Mathew 5:22-29). In which case, the choice of using a transliteral interpretative method versus a symbolic method of interpretation is influenced by the reader's meaning-making process in which they must determine which texts would be difficult to implement on a practical level without symbolic interpretation. Such historical-contextual and Living Word approaches to the subjective and dialogical nature of text and discourse echo Bakhtin's (1987, p. 124) statement that "there is no voiceless word that belongs to no one. Each word contains voices that are sometimes distant, unnamed, almost impersonal, and voices resounding nearby and simultaneously".

Some contemporary scriptural scholars also argue that the transliterated text in Leviticus referring to homosexuals inherently contradicts the text in Genesis that describes all of mankind as created in God's image, and thus an interpretation of Leviticus is both intended and demanded (Alpert, 1989). In light of this discourse, Jewish and Christian scholars have interpreted and thereby limited the scope of Leviticus utilizing a variety of interpretive strategies. For example, some scholars view the text as prohibiting sexual activity in the absence of same-sex *love* relationships (Alpert, 1989; McNeill, 1993) while other scholars suggest that the text aims to prohibit the perception that gay and straight love is identical (Waskow as cited by Alpert, 1989). Alternatively, some scholars have suggested that the prohibition is focused on rape and forced sexual activity (Greenberg, 2004; Helminiak, 2000; Scroggs, 1983), homogenital acts such as anal intercourse (Greenberg, 2004; Helminiak, 2000), or homosexual idolatrous rituals (Shinnick, 1997). In addition, some Christian scholars, such as Helminiak (2000), have argued that the text in Leviticus regarding homosexuality is a part of the general Holiness Code (e.g., the

kosher dietary laws) that applied exclusively to the Jewish nation and was not accepted as a part of the living Christian tradition.

Furthermore, some Jewish and Christian scholars have moved beyond the reinterpretation of Leviticus and have created gay narratives for ambiguous biblical relationships that have traditionally been viewed as platonic (Grippe, 1988; Helminiak, 2000; Hirsh, 1989; Horner, 1978; Rogow, 1989), such as the story of Ruth and Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17) and David and Jonathan (1 Samuel, 18: 1-4, 20:30, 20:40-41; 2 Samuel 1:26). Alternatively, ministries to LGBT Christians such as Dignity, have attempted to historically contextualize homophobic and heteronormative passages in the Old and New Testaments (Helminiak, 2010). For example, it has been suggested that the true sin that destroyed the biblical town of Sodom was the citizens' inhospitality as opposed to their homosexuality (Bailey, 1955; Helminiak, 2000; McNeill, 1993). This interpretation minimizes the destructive caricature of homosexuality. Another possible interpretation that has been suggested is that the people of Sodom were faulted for wanting to rape visiting *angels* as opposed to being punished for having a desire to engage in homosexual intercourse (Helminiak, 2000). Furthermore, it has been suggested that the ban against homosexuality was in fact an "anti-Egyptian polemic" (McNeill, 1993, p. 58), as the ancient Egyptians were known for raping their male enemies to symbolize their enemies' defeat and their own domination. In which case, one could argue that when the context of the act changes, both the symbolic meaning of the act and the associated cultural taboos are changed as well. Meaning that, scholars are utilizing contemporary social scripts to mediate cultural tools and artifacts in an effort to relate to changing life contexts.

However, little is known about how gay men and their religious family allies mediate religious texts within their daily lived experience. While gay men and familial allies are likely to

engage questions of Leviticus' meaning, ir/relevance, and its applicability given the religious values of love, these frameworks of mediation are not likely to be used by religious family members maintaining their belief in textual literalism. Therefore, gay men and their religious relatives are likely to experience tension and conflicts if they utilize different mediating scripts. Chapter 4 will therefore explore the familial, social, and religious conflicts and difficulties that both gay men and their religious relatives experience.

Chapter IV: Conflicts and Difficulties across Stakeholders

This chapter explores gay men's and their religious relatives' perspectives of the conflicts and difficulties they encountered within their interacting familial, communal, religious, social, and self subsystems. Within the framework of cultural historical activity theory, conflicts and difficulties are viewed as a developmental process embedded within historical, temporal, and sociorelational contexts (Daiute, 2010). For the purposes of this chapter, conflicts are understood to be largely interpersonal in focus and difficulties are related to subsystems, as opposed to specific actors within those subsystems. For example, while some participants spoke of having directly experienced conflicts with religious leaders, others did not have such interpersonal conflicts and alternatively highlighted their general religious difficulties focused on scriptural concerns. Conflicts and difficulties are identified based upon participants' responses to direct questioning as well as their explicit discussion of heightened points of tension.

Twenty-two participating gay men (96%), 15 religious relatives (100%), and 12 clinicians (100%) discussed sources of pain, conflicts, or points of difficulty in the disclosure and post disclosure process. The general contexts of conflicts and difficulty that are explored below are those that were discussed by three or more participants. The following contexts are elaborated upon in this chapter: family, communal homophobia, religious activity system, adjustments of expectations, discomfort with the gay community or segments of, and depression and suicide (See Table 4.1-4.6 for further information, p.180). The specific analyses and results for each context are individually introduced below.

Family Difficulties:

In this section, I first analyze the number of participants in each stakeholder position that discussed the issue of family conflicts. I then present findings that indicate that family conflicts and difficulties are occurring within socioreligious contexts, supporting an activity-meaning system design and analyses. In addition, I present narrative analyses that illustrate that stakeholder experiences within activity-meaning systems often differ and therefore require a system of analysis that allows for more than coherence. This will be presented both in terms of the differing family conflicts and difficulties that gay men and family allies experience as well as the presence of familial support even within these contexts.

Family Conflicts: A Common Stakeholder Experience

Participants across all stakeholder positions discussed family conflicts (See Table 4.1: Percentage of Participants Reporting Family Conflicts & Difficulties and Examples, p.184). Eight gay men from Christian backgrounds (6 Mormon, 1 Evangelical, 1 Seventh Day Adventist) and all 10 gay men from Orthodox Jewish backgrounds reported encountering familial difficulties during or post disclosure.

Gay men reported difficulties with parents (7 Jewish, 6 Christian), siblings (8 Jewish, 5 Christian), and extended family members (3 Jewish, 1 Christian). Similarly to their gay relatives, eleven of the fifteen (73%) family participants (5 Jewish, 6 Christian) discussed encountering difficult time periods in their relationships with nuclear and extended family during the disclosure period. Thirty-eight percent of Christian dyads and 71% of Jewish dyads reported experiencing family related difficulties, indicating that this experience was shared on the family unit level as well. Furthermore, results indicate that family conflicts can become serious enough

to warrant clinical and therapeutic activities. For example, a content and frequency analysis of all difficulties discussed by clinicians indicates that the greatest number of conflicts emerged in relation to the family system, having been discussed on average within 34% ($SD=11\%$) of the conflicts referenced by each clinician.

Religious Context of Family Difficulties

Analyses indicate that many family conflicts were directly related to stakeholders' interactions with religious subsystems. For example, 40% of family conflicts discussed by clinicians intersected with their clients' religious values, texts, customs, and community experiences. In addition, nine Jewish (90%) and 8 (62%) gay men from Christian backgrounds discussed their religious relatives' use of theistic triangulation (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2009) by highlighting how their relative used God/faith as an ally and tool to support their position. Prior research has indicated that the use of theistic triangulation by spouses and parent-child dyads negatively impacts interpersonal conflicts and increases the likelihood of verbal aggression and stonewalling (Brelsford & Mahoney, 2009). This was additionally supported by clinicians' accounts of their efforts to mediate the negative interpersonal effects of "*religion being co-opted by a parent or family member to serve an agenda.*" Perhaps this helps explain why 62% of the participants who reported that their religious relatives utilized theistic triangulation are no longer religious (6 Jewish, 4 Christian).

Gay participants reported that theistic triangulation was used by four Jewish and five Christian fathers, one Jewish and six Christian mothers, five Jewish (4 brothers, 1 sister) and three Christian siblings (2 brothers, 1 sister), and one Jewish uncle. Gay men's and clinician's narratives indicated that their religious relatives utilized a variety of religious tools to convey

their disapproval. For example, one clinician reported that he was in the process of counseling a young man whose parents hired an exorcist to make him straight (see Table 4.1 for quote, p.180). However, the majority of gay participants focused on their relatives' utilizing theological tools based on concepts from religious doctrine and the bible. For example, a 24 year-old non-active Mormon participant reported that his parents responded to his disclosure by talking about

homosexuality, and how important marriage is in the religion, given the highest level of heaven, and that you need to marry someone of the opposite sex and so forth and so on, and because homosexual relationships do not perpetuate, they do not reproduce, they don't fit God's description of marriage and family.

In the above narrative, the participant distances himself from the emotionally laden event by transitioning the subject of the sentence from himself (e.g., "you need to marry someone of the opposite sex") to the other (e.g., "they do not reproduce, they don't fit G-d's description of marriage and family"). This narrative distance is additionally reflected in both geographic and relational family distance as the participant currently lives in a different country than his parents. Furthermore, his parents have refused to allow any family members to participate in this study. In addition, the participant has not been home or seen his mother in five years "*because it got weird... It [his sexuality] was always the elephant in the room that we didn't want to talk about. It was always an issue but it was an issue that no one wanted to acknowledge.*" The participant further explained that he does not need to talk about his sexual orientation all the time but that he is frustrated by being unable to talk about it at all.

In addition, two gay men from Christian backgrounds highlighted their parents' use of material cultural tools during their theistic triangulation conflicts. A 25 year-old non-religious participant from an Evangelical background shared that upon his disclosure, his parents' provided him with religious "*ex-gay literature*" from Exodus International in addition to his mother telling him that "*gay people are going to hell*" (See Image 1: Exodus International Literature, p. 179). It should be noted that the mother-son relationship has since improved and the mother participated in the study as a key family ally. Alternatively, a 23 year old non-active Mormon participant spoke of how his parents' parked "*in front of the Provo Temple*" and then confronted him about his sexuality (See Image 2: Provo Utah Temple, p. 180 & Appendix A; Glossary, p. 164). The participant was unclear as to what his parents hoped to achieve by this use of the Mormon Temple, however, the religious overtones to their dissatisfaction was apparent. In his words, "*we had a very long, very, very argumentative conversation that got nowhere, and it was honestly probably one of the worst experiences of my life...I don't know if they were sort of hoping that **I'd, I'd**, I don't know, feel the force of it [Provo Temple] or something.*" The participant's heightened emotional state during this portion of the narrative was demonstrated by his statement that this was the "*worst experience of his life*", **repetition of words** (e.g., "*I'd, I'd*), use of qualifiers (e.g., "*very long, very, very argumentative*") as well as his repeated discussion of his confusion (e.g., "*I don't know*"). This heightened emotional state continued as the participant elaborated upon how his relationship with his parents was altered in the two years since his disclosure. As he said,

the next couple months were really rough um, whenever we talk, yeah, I cringe whenever her [mother's] name came on my phone...[parents] they can't handle

*talking about it, so I've, I don't go home much, I don't call a lot, and they just, **it**, **it's** hard but **they, they** just don't know what my life's been like... my mom gets angry and upset when we talk about it... **it's, it's** just that **they, they've**, it's been shown to me that it's [home] not a safe place.*

This narrative is particularly compelling as it highlights the interactive exchange process embedded within the participant's relationship with his family (e.g., "**they can't handle talking about it, so I've, I don't go home much**"). In addition, this dynamic is occurring within the context of the parents forbidding the participant from disclosing to his siblings, extended relatives, and community. Furthermore, the participant's narrative indicated that his father is continuing to use the tools of theistic triangulation as the participant's father recently said "*if it wasn't about it breaking the commandment of God, I would've dropped this long ago.*" However, it appears as though this relationship may improve in the future as the participant concluded his narrative by saying "*I'd like to be able to work towards fixing that [that its not a safe space]*" and later elaborated that "*it hurts that I don't have the close relationship that I hear about with some people, they come out and their parents are really, really good about it. So I wish it were better, because I really do love my parents, and I want a better relationship with them.*"

This desire to improve parental relationships even after extreme relational difficulty was not unique to Christian participants. For example, a 34 year-old Jewish participant shared similar hopes of reconciliation even after experiencing a painful seven year familial estrangement. The participant's mother had attempted to justify her estranged behavior by telling her son that "*the family Rav (Rabbi) said that we need to cut him off, that the whole family needs to cut him off. Because you need to show him tough love and then he'll come back.*" The participant reported

that he responded to his mother by saying *“That Rabbi doesn’t fucking know what he is talking about”*, at which point his mother chastised him for his verbal abuse and reconfirmed her allegiance with the Rabbi’s position. Although the early stages of the post-disclosure process were extraordinarily difficult for this participant, they were not remembered as the most challenging aspect of the experience. As the participant shared, *“what I wasn’t prepared for was that my parents made my siblings do the same thing. Because that is what this Rav [Rabbi] said. And that was what was the most hardest to me.”* This narrative is particularly multifaceted as it clearly highlights the interaction between and the shared responsibility attributed to religious and familial activity systems (e.g., *“my parents made my siblings do the same thing. Because that is what this Rav said”*) while additionally acknowledging the dynamic between multiple members of the family (e.g., parents and siblings).

An additional issue related to family and religion which gay men referenced was the experience of initially finding their relatives’ religious guidance and advice to be helpful and later finding it to be harmful or counterproductive. For example, a 23 year old Orthodox Jewish participant recounted that at the time of his disclosure his father responded with unconditional love and acceptance of his orientation. However, his father additionally asked his son

to um guarantee him that... Just not anal sex. Yeah he said... something along the lines of there’s no problem with two men living together, there’s no problem with two men loving each other. There’s one specific law of which goes back to um, the Oral Tradition... we don’t interpret this to mean a whole lot more. This is what the messorah [tradition] is.

The participant later found this request to be “*frustrating on like somewhat emotional, on my thought process, because it created this um, halachic [Jewish systems of laws and customs] like legal situation where if I did decide to have anal sex, I would not only be over [transgress] on that laav [prohibition] but be over [transgress] on kibbud av viem, the prohibition against um, violating parental will.*” This narrative is particularly illuminating as it clearly discusses the conflicting interrelation between religious and familial subsystems. Indeed, the participant later responded to his father’s religious tool use by utilizing religious tools as well. The participant reported that he mediated his potential violation of his father’s will by making

use of like the legal loophole of Yom Kippur where you say like, you know, we go through the Hataras Nidarim [Annulment of Vows]... where you say like any promise which I made, any oath by any form... if I cant keep it, like, please take me out of uh, or release that bond. So I kind of hope that from that guarantee I’m kinda released that’s just the one um, prohibition, if anything.

In the above narrative, the participant discusses his effort to mediate his conflicting desire to respect his father and be sexually fulfilled. Although the participant attempted to mediate this conflict via vow annulment, the participant closed his narrative by elaborating upon the religious context of his familial conflicts by saying “*I was kind of like frustrated with him, I was like ah look what you’ve done, now it’s two! It’s like there’s two halachas [Jewish laws] that I have to deal with, not just one.*” This conclusion indicates that although attempts were made within the religious activity system to mediate potential family and religious conflicts, on some emotional level these attempts were still unsatisfying six years after the event.

Different Stakeholder Conflicts within the Family System

Although all stakeholders discussed family conflicts, the content and tone of these conflicts differed across stakeholders. For example, while gay men discussed feeling unwelcome at family events, family allies talked about the difficulties they encountered trying to educate family members and differentiating their own acceptance from other family member's difficulties. This is illustrated by the narratives of a 28 year-old non-active Mormon participant and his mother. For example, the gay participant recounted his parents' rejection of him and his sexuality by stating

And then when I was done with the [conversion] counseling and I told my mom that it wasn't working and that I had met somebody, so, I had my bags packed... My mom called my dad home when I told her that I was leaving. And he sat in the rocking chair in the living room and said, "I would rather have you dead," and I told him, "Go get your shotgun." And that was a rather intense moment.

This participant's narrative of the event is multifaceted as it highlights the emotional intensity of the father's difficulty ("I would rather have you dead") as well as the participants' response to the father's rejection ("Go get your shotgun."). The participant later states that his father's intense response was most probably mollified over the two years since the initial disclosure due to the son's efforts to gradually discuss the permanence of his orientation and his parents' efforts to learn and understand the subtiles of church doctrine. However, this highly detailed recounting of the participant's moving out and the father's explicit rejection was not discussed by the participating mother in her interview. Alternatively, the Mormon mother shared

her many efforts to educate and sensitize her husband regarding her son's orientation in the following narrative:

I told my husband, he can't change his any more than we can change ours... I think it took him longer to accept, I, I did a lot of mediation between him and my son, trying to get my husband to the point where he could understand. He grew up a cowboy, and that just was not accepted. And so he is- he's come a really long way... I said if somebody came to you and said you need to be gay today, could you do it? And he said no, and I said, then don't expect our son to be able to change just 'cause somebody tells him he has to.

In addition, this mother reported spending a considerable amount of time recounting her efforts to contact her son via phone, text message, and by visiting his workplace in the days and weeks after his moving out. She also spoke of her frustration that her son did not remember her efforts and shared that she told him to call the phone company for verifying records. The son did in fact recount the post-event differently as he said that it was “*after a few months, that didn't last very long, and my mom called me up and we started talking again.*” However, it should be noted that the son did acknowledge in his interview that he did not “*really remember much about what was going on with my family at that time*” and five years had passed since he moved out. Such results suggest that gay men and their religious family allies may have different experiences of familial difficulties.

The above family dyad experience is representative of other stakeholders' accounts of their different family conflict experiences as described in Table 4.1 (p.180). For example, nine

gay men (5 Jewish, 4 Christian) reported having felt unwelcome at family events or afraid of being kicked-out of their home since their disclosure. In comparison, four mothers (1 Catholic, 1 Seventh Day Adventist, 1 Methodist, 1 Jewish) discussed concerns about being unable to disclose or comfortably discuss their son's sexual orientation with extended family members (grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles) due to their relatives' homophobic and fundamentalist religious attitudes. In addition, family members shared that their interactions across many different family relationships, including nuclear and extended family, were altered post their relatives' disclosure. For example, five Jewish family allies (2 sisters, 3 mothers) and two Mormon family allies (1 sister, 1 mother) discussed how nuclear family system dynamics were affected. Two Jewish participants (1 mother, 1 sister) and one Mormon sister reported encountering anxiety and loneliness due to being the only or first person within a family to know of their relative's orientation. Interestingly, while most participants shared that their familial disclosure process was staggered, only three family members highlighted that this was a source of stress. In addition, one sister (Jewish) reported encountering a tremendous amount of hostility from her father for her support of her brother. As she said, *"My father, got on the phone, and he was yelling at me that I am going to burn in Hell for promoting his [brother's] abomination. He was so angry, he doesn't even remember saying that to me."* Furthermore, this participant's relationship with her mother was additionally affected by her mother's *"snide comments, sarcasm[s]"* that would put her *"in the middle."*

Alternatively, three Jewish and 1 Mormon mothers shared the difficulty that they encountered disclosing their gay child's orientation to their heterosexual children. In one case, the more religious Jewish siblings, although not rejecting of their gay sibling, *"felt that uh we [parents] should be doing something with it. We shouldn't just be 'sitting there' quote unquote,*

watching this quote unquote, 'happen'.” The parents responded by stating that *“there’s really not much we can do other than you know support him and love him and, and let him um, live his own life. Uhm, and hoping that you know uh he will be happy uh that his well-being is not gonna be compromised by it and so it took, we don’t talk much about it now or to our kids.”* This narrative is particularly interesting as it seems as though the taboo of discussing the issue has not changed in the year since the disclosure. Similarly, another Jewish mother discussed that after she shared her gay son’s sexual orientation with her heterosexual teenage son he *“cried and was very upset.”* The mother explained that he probably cried regarding his questions of faith (*“how can God make someone like X and then say, make the prohibition in the, you know, in the Torah?”*) as well as due to the fact that *“he’s homophobic in some ways. He’s uncomfortable with gay people.”* An additional concern regarding parent-child interactions post disclosure was brought up by a third Jewish mother who spoke of her other children feeling resentful that her parenting and moral values had changed. Similarly, a Mormon mother shared that her children were less accepting than she regarding their brother’s sexual orientation and often advocated changes in family policy concerning the acceptance of her son’s partner at family events. In the same vein, a Mormon participant’s sister shared her concerns that she would *“want to support him (participating brother) in the right way, where I’m still being the example to my children, and to him, about what I believe to be right for him but at the same time, I’m doing it in a really charitable and loving and kind like way.”* This participant’s narrative is particularly compelling as she explicitly highlights the interacting demands of the many roles she occupies within multiple family systems and how she hopes to manage them. This was a common theme throughout the narratives, as family dynamics and obligations can be complex and often conflicting.

An additional component of the complexity uniquely encountered by maternal allies was between themselves and their gay sons. For example, two mothers specifically said that they felt as though they could not share all of the layers of their disclosure experience with their son out of fear of how it would impact their son. This was poignantly expressed by an Evangelical mother in the below narrative:

I'm scared to say too many things, 'cause I don't ever want him to feel bad about himself. So it's like, you know, I'll want to talk to him about something, but at the same time I don't want him to think that I would love him less, or not support him, or make him feel less of something, or someone... I think maybe with both of us having done this interview, maybe this'll open the door for us to talk a little bit more.

Based on the mother's concluding statement regarding her hopes for a change in their level of openness, we can understand that the current dynamic is unsatisfactory to her. This mother-son tension was more explicitly discussed by a Mormon mother who felt that her son had dehumanized her after she responded to his disclosure by saying that it was a "a mother's worst nightmare." Unfortunately, her intended meaning that "this was a nightmare for a mother to have a son that would be facing things she could not protect him from" was not understood by her son, who instead interpreted her statement to mean that it was her "worst nightmare to have him gay." Although the mother has repeatedly apologized, this is still a salient narrative in both of their disclosure stories, emphasizing the need for relationally complex interactions. However,

this mother did share that in recent post-participation interactions her son recognized how loving she can be and she felt *“oh, there’s a little glimmer of my mom’s a person.”*

Familial Support amidst Conflict

Family relationships are complex and all familial relationships do not conform to any one pattern. For example, although a Jewish participant reported that his brother was *“angry”* about his sexual orientation from a religious standpoint; his Orthodox father responded to the participant’s communal concerns with the statement *“Fuck the community.”* Furthermore, of the 16 participants that reported negative familial uses of religion, otherwise known as theistic triangulation, 12 (75%) participants additionally had a key family ally participate in the study. In addition, some participants reported that their family members successfully utilized religious precepts to inspire and give strength to their gay relative. For example, a Mormon mother responded to her religious son’s disclosure by saying that *“if it was something that the Lord wanted to change he could change it.”* The participating son elaborated upon this statement by explaining that his mother *“provided me with a lot of confidence so that even if it’s something I had to deal with for the rest of my life, was, that it was something that I could do.”* However, only two years has passed since the participant’s initial disclosure and the participant still identifies as religious and is attempting to live a celibate life. The participant’s perceptions of familial support may alter with time or alongside changes in his religious and sexual attitudes.

A similarly complex story of familial support intertwined with difficulty was reported by participating family allies. For example, although two mothers reported navigating difficulties with their husbands, neither participant stated that this put a strain on their marriage. Moreover, both referenced their spouse as their key support within the family structure.

Communal Homophobia

In this section I first discuss the number of gay participants that reported homophobic experiences and compare these results to the national average. I then present narrative and frequency analyses indicating that communal homophobia is a serious source of difficulty and stress for family allies as well as for their gay relatives. This section then concludes with a discussion of the religious contexts of homophobia and how this affects various stakeholders within the activity-meaning system.

A Serious Issue across Stakeholder Positions

Eleven of the twelve gay men that experienced homophobic teasing discussed it in terms of their early childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood academic and social contexts (see Table 4.2 for description and examples, p. 184). Eight gay men (62%) from Christian backgrounds and four (40%) from Jewish backgrounds reported that they experienced or were afraid of experiencing teasing, bullying, or social exclusion due to their sexual minority status. Moreover, 92% percent of clinicians discussed that clients often came to them to discuss and work through these homophobic experiences.

In addition to gay men reporting their fears and experiences of homophobia, nine family allies (60%) discussed their similarly painful experiences of communal homophobia and dehumanization. For example, one Evangelical mother from the South explained her fear of sharing her son's sexual orientation with community members by stating "*I think that they will think that my son has a demon inside of him... people treat homosexuality different than any other sin.*" In addition she shared that her fear was also for the physical safety of her son as "*many gays getting beat up here.*"

In addition, three Christian mothers (Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist, Mormon) discussed how they had to overcome the homophobic socialization of their youth. In the words of one mother raised in a Seventh Day Adventist community, *“I was basically taught that gays deserve to die. And whatever abuse they got was deserved.”* Similarly, a currently Mormon mother from a Baptist background shared *“I was taught they’re all going to burn in hell.”* Although the Mormon faith does not share the same dehumanizing rhetoric as her experience with the Baptist community, the participant still acknowledged the difficulty encountered with her current faith community by stating that *“When I became LDS [Latter Day Saints], it was, um, the people are loved by our heavenly father, but their actions, you know, were sinful.”*

Religious Contexts of Homophobia

Although homophobia and homophobic bullying is a national problem occurring across a wide variety of contexts and communities, this study found that all stakeholders discussed these experiences within religious contexts. For example, five clinicians (42%) focused their discussions of clients’ conflicts on the *“Anti-homosexual”* messages of the church, religious leaders, and religious texts. In addition, two Jewish mothers from different communities reported that they heard homophobic sermons during Sabbath services. These sermons were viewed as being offensive enough to warrant an extended confrontation with the rabbi via emails in one case and the family changing synagogues in the other. The mothers’ narratives were particularly emotional, as in the case of this mother from the Tri-State area:

It was, it was a Shabbos (Sabbath) morning drasha (sermon)... One of the rabbis was speaking about, it’s a, it’s a phrase that rings uhm, rings for me for, probably

will ring for me for a long time. He was talking about the gay pride uhm in Israel, I think. There was a whole conflict about marching in Jerusalem or marching in Tel-Aviv. And he, from the pulpit said, uhm, some phrase about the deviants. The deviants...for somebody to be so insensitive, you know, in a shul (synagogue) setting, when he doesn't know everything that goes on in any of his uhm congregants, was in such poor taste, that ultimately it was not difficult for us to leave that shul (synagogue) and join a different one.

The above narrative is particularly compelling as it clearly illuminates the pain this mother experienced and experiences both in terms of the content (e.g., “*probably will ring for me a long time*”) as well as the repetition of articles (e.g., “*It was, it was*”) and key words (e.g., “*some phrase about the deviants. The deviants.*”). In addition, it should be noted that negative experiences with religious leaders were reported by both religious groups. For example, one Christian mother spoke of a homophobic encounter with her priest. This mother reported that her priest said to “*choose God*” over her love for her gay children. However, it should also be acknowledged that this mother received the opposite ruling from a priest from another church.

Furthermore, 3 Jewish allies (1 sister, 2 mothers) and 2 Mormon parents discussed having been afraid of potential homophobic reactions from their religious community, limiting the number of people they disclosed to. One of the Jewish mothers specifically discussed her fear that a public disclosure would adversely affect her heterosexual son’s marriage prospects. This conflict was eventually addressed by deciding “*that if it did cause difficulty, we wouldn’t even want that person anyway.*”

Religious Difficulties

I begin this section by discussing the unique religious conflicts and difficulties experienced across stakeholder groups. I then present participants' discussions of their institutionalized discriminatory policy experiences. This section then concludes with a discussion of how these experiences affected gay men and their religious family allies' religious experiences and difficulties.

Stakeholders' Unique Religious Conflicts and Experiences

Similar percentages of gay men and family allies from Christian and Jewish backgrounds reported negative interactions with religious figures, community members, or distrust of religious institutional systems (see Table 4.3: Percentage of Participants Reporting religious Difficulties and Examples, p. 185). However, differences emerged when religious conflicts were coded for being directly or indirectly experienced. For example, nine men (75%) from Christian backgrounds as compared to only two men (29%) from Jewish backgrounds reported direct experiences such as being formally excluded from services. An additional difference that should be noted is that fewer family allies in both religious groups reported experiencing religious difficulties as compared to their gay relatives. This difference indicates that while both stakeholder groups are experiencing difficulties within this activity-meaning system, the experience of religious difficulties may be uniquely related to the experience of sexual minority stress. This is further supported by the narratives of all 12 clinicians which elaborated upon the unique stressors experienced by gay men from religious backgrounds.

Institutionalized Experiences

A number of participants discussed their religious difficulties in terms of feeling unwelcome within or cast out of their religious structures. For example, three men from Mormon backgrounds reported not receiving the traditional “calling”, or “*a specific role within that congregation*”, due to their sexual orientation. It was explained to one 27 year old semi-active Mormon in Seattle that “*it might not be good to have you in a position of authority in the Lord....*” In addition, one reported that he was asked to leave his Mormon university with the statement that “*you’re not gay but we think that it would be best if you dealt with this elsewhere.*” This participant was later told that he could not serve on a religious ‘mission’ due to his homosexual history. This was particularly frustrating for the participant as he had actively attempted to repent and remain celibate in an effort to join his peers. Similarly, a 29 year-old Mormon man from the Western region of the United States has been disfellowed for the past four years although the typical term of disfellowship is one year. In his words,

below excommunication is what’s called disfellowship... you retain your membership in the church, however... one can’t hold a calling. Um, one can’t speak in church and by that I mean uh speak from the pulpit. Um, one cannot pray in a public setting of opening prayer, closing prayer in a class or meeting...

Although the participant acknowledged that at times this status is difficult, he also said that he has received support from his conversion therapist. The participant reported that he has found strength in the perspective that the purpose of the church estranging him by disfellowship is “*to*

warn the person... this is kinda what's gonna happen if you continue down the path you're going down. There's going to be this separation between you and the church." Alternatively, a 28 year-old non-active Mormon discussed the pain of his excommunication and the unusual addendum that he not return to the church after repentance. Although the participant sought out the excommunication hearing to address his state of limbo during disfellowship, it was still reported as a painful process during which he felt abandoned by his congregational Bishop. The complete narrative of this experience is presented in Table 4.3: Percentage of Participants Reporting religious Difficulties and Examples (p. 185). Similar sentiments of disappointment were discussed by the two Jewish participants who reported having directly experienced negative interactions with rabbinic figures. As was discussed previously, one man's family consulted with a rabbi that encouraged a family estrangement and the other Jewish participant spoke of rabbinic leaders in his Orthodox Jewish college asking for his impeachment as Student Body President. Although the Jewish participants were not formally excommunicated from their religious structures, both reported feeling shunned by the leadership of those structures, suggesting that structural exclusion can be both a formal and relational process.

Effects of Religious Difficulties on Religious Activities and Practice

Both gay men and their religious family allies reported that their religious/faith experiences negatively changed in relation to their difficulties and conflicts with the religious system. However, this experience was not shared by all participants. In fact, two participants (1 Jewish, 1 Christian) reported that their religious community participation and practice activities intensified after their disclosure.

Alternatively, nine of the 15 participating religious family members (4 Jewish, 5 Christian) discussed having had faced religious challenges or questions of faith after their gay relative's disclosure and 14 gay men reported that they were no longer traditionally religious. Nine (64%) of these gay men additionally reported that their change in religious observance was a result of the incompatibility of their sexual orientation and religious policies and practices. For example, a 23 year-old participant from a Mormon background in Utah shared

I've, I've, I'm not what, I wouldn't call myself Orthodox Mormon anymore... because I don't believe...that the church being true means it's perfect and, and we don't have to think about the things they tell us... you can see that in the way that people reacted to Prop 8 [See Glossary], after the church officially supported that. They didn't, they didn't even look at the issue, they just became, they just girded their armor and ran out to the battlefield...

The above narrative is representative of the majority of participating gay men's sentiments that their sexual orientation is not a sin and their resultant difficulty relating to community members who maintained that it was. However, religious family members often did not share this experience and were instead more likely to maintain that being gay was a sin, and this in of itself was their source of religious difficulty. For example, four religious family allies (3 Jewish, 1 Christian) reported that they believed that being gay is wrong, unnatural, a sin, or an abomination. As one Evangelical mother shared,

I'm not gonna lie, I still feel like it would be wrong for men to have sex with each other. I do. Um, but, uh, also, I'm not so sure that, I mean, if, if my son committed that act, I do not feel that would keep him out of heaven any more than I would think that if somebody committed murder, they would never go to heaven.

Although the above narrative seems to be equating being gay with committing murder, it should be noted that the participant repeatedly clarified that *“No sin is greater than another. The world is the one who chooses to make sin categorized.”* In her perspective, being gay or committing murder was the same level of sin as being glutinous and *“eating too much chocolate cake.”* However, this perspective did not alleviate her religious and spiritual concerns as she was troubled that her son would not ask for forgiveness from God as he did not view being gay as a sin. In addition, this mother’s religious concerns culminated in feeling *“a little bit betrayed, because it’s like, why did you do this, God? This kid did nothing wrong... Because this child didn’t ask for this and didn’t want it, and why couldn’t you answer his prayers (to change his orientation)?”* This segment of the participant’s narrative is important as it highlights that the mother’s faith was challenged by her son’s lack of choice in his orientation, although not specifically by the religious categorization of it being a sin. This sentiment was similarly echoed by a participating Mormon mother who said, *“I, I went through my period of bitterness. I was angry at God because he didn’t answer my son’s prayers (to change his orientation).”* In addition, this mother’s relationship with religion was additionally challenged as she heard about the homophobia her son encountered from select bishops within the Church of the Latter Day Saints.

Religious Difficulties as Sources of Pain

Religious family allies shared that they found religious prohibitions to be a challenge to their faith in light of their pain knowing that their relative is *“condemned to a lonely life.”* For example, a Jewish mother from the Tri-State Area shared that *“It’s a Torah prohibition and we have to uphold it. Uh at the same time I think uh its pretty uh tragic situation for people who are gay... And um so it’s to me it’s pretty heartbreaking.”* A similar sentiment of anguish was shared by a Mormon sister, who said *“Just like, there’s no way that he’s [participating brother] in the wrong... it was very irritating for sure.”*

In addition, it should be noted that some gay men explicitly discussed how their altered relationship with the religious community of their youth was a source of tremendous pain. For example, a 34 year-old participant from a Jewish background in the Tri-State area shared:

...once I was coming out, that, the saddest thing for me was losing the Jewish community, the Orthodox community. That I, you know, was so strongly a part of. So, you know, once I left the Orthodox community just by the sake of coming out, uhm, I had to redefine what my relationship with Judaism meant.

Although the participant redefined his relationship with Judaism and God in new and positive terms, the participant’s anguish of being excluded from the faith community of his youth by virtue of his sexual orientation was still present. This issue of religious exclusion was also discussed by clinicians, some of whom suggested that their clients overcome these experiences by taking *“from it [religion] what they want and what they need”* and by finding alternative

welcoming faith communities as there can be *“a lot of value in faith... particularly when someone’s depressed to the point of suicidality.”*

Adjustment of Expectations

In this section I present the differences in participant discussion frequency across stakeholder positions. I then present a narrative analysis regarding the differences in this experience for parents and siblings of gay men. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how this experience was managed and addressed in a variety of ways by participants.

Adjustment Differences across Stakeholder Groups

Although participants in all stakeholder groups reported the experience of having to adjust their heteronormative expectations, this experience was more common for some stakeholder groups than others (see Table 4.4: Percentage of Participants Reporting Expectation Difficulties and Examples, p.185). For example, only 40% of men from Jewish backgrounds reported attempts to change their sexual orientation as compared to 69% from Christian backgrounds. However, this difference between religious groups was inversely present for religious family allies, with a greater percentage of participating Jewish family allies (100%) reporting the adjustment of expectation as compared to participating Christian family allies (75%).

Different Experiences for Parents and Siblings

Though religious relatives did not struggle to change their own sexual orientation, all seven Jewish family members and 6 Christian family members (Catholic, Mormon, Evangelical, Methodist) reported that there was a time period in which they had to adjust their expectations regarding their gay relative. However, mothers' narratives regarding their adjustment of expectations were somewhat more complex than that of siblings' as mothers more often referenced their efforts to adjust their hopes, plans, and dreams for the future. For example, an Evangelical mother shared that the disclosure period was *"a time where I just realized that all the plans I had for the future no longer were, that I had to rethink everything I thought our future was going to be. There would be no little Xs running around."* Perhaps part of the difficulty for this mother in adjusting her expectations is also coming to terms with her son's individuation. Based on the mother's use of the phrase *"our future"* it appears as though this is an ongoing process.

A Jewish mother from the Tri-State Area tried to explain the complexity of this period of adjustment by stating that *"ultimately you want your child to be very much like you, cuz you like who you are. That's the whole concept of, you know, individuality versus you know, kind of falling into line and, and being a clone of yourself."* In this narrative the participant insightfully explained that parents develop dreams for their children that often look similar to their own lived experience. However, it should be noted that this participant's *"hopes, dreams, and wishes"* extended beyond her child's sexual orientation and included *"good things"*, *"good choices"*, and *"important paths"*, all of which remained unchanged even after his disclosure. Furthermore, the mother shared that she believed that adjusting to altered expectations in any realm of parent-child relations is the defining moment of the relationship.

The complexity of these maternal sentiments are in contrast to siblings' more concrete efforts to come to terms with not having a sister-in law (e.g., "*And like it just also kind of makes me sad, like you know it would have been nice to have a sister-in-law. Or it would have been nice to have a niece or a nephew.*") and their brother having a male partner instead of a female (e.g., "*I was worried that, because, completely changed my view of what my brother's life would be like...I expect[ed] my younger brother will get married to a girl someday...* "). The differences exhibited in these narratives are likely related to the different roles that mothers and siblings occupy within the family activity-meaning system. However, a minority of mothers did additionally acknowledge their specific sadness in not having an opportunity to build a relationship with a daughter-in-law.

Diverse Methods of Adjustment

Gay men reported diverse attempts to navigate their heteronormative expectations. Participants reported utilizing cognitive processes, prayer, conversion therapy, or conversion therapy support groups in a variety of different ways. For example, two (20%) men from Jewish backgrounds and four (31%) men from Christian backgrounds had attempted or were currently attempting to change their orientation via conversion therapy. Two participants (1 Jewish, 1 Mormon) who currently identify as being actively gay felt that their experience in reparative therapy was helpful as it allowed them to exhaust all possibilities which helped them come to terms with the permanent reality of their sexual orientation. Three other participants (1 Jewish, 2 Christian) expressed relatively neutral sentiments regarding their experience while acknowledging that it did not work. One participant remains in "*reparative therapy*" and still maintains that one's sexual orientation can be changed.

Alternatively, six participants (2 Jewish, 4 Christian) attempted to “pray away the gay” and be “fixed.” This experience was reported as being an unfruitful, “agonizing”, and painful experience by all participants. In the words of one Jewish man, “*I would fall asleep crying, like begging God to just change who I was like you saying you know okay this is a challenge, I can’t do it. Help me, get me out of here. And I would wake up and you know, nothing would be different.*” This narrative illuminates that for this participant his desire to change his sexual orientation was viewed as a desire to change a salient aspect of himself (e.g., “*just change who I was*”). Another Jewish participant shared that he utilized the cultural tools of the Western “Wailing” Wall in Jerusalem and Psalms in the hopes that his sexual orientation would change (See Image 3: Western Wall Jerusalem, p. 180). Although the participant’s orientation remained unchanged, he did credit his use of prayer with his continued relationship with God. In his words, “*...my strong relationship with God is because I have always spoken to God throughout this whole entire struggle. You know, like always asking Him like what did he expect me to do? What should I do?*” This experience of developing a relationship with God even as prayers to change one’s sexual orientation remain unanswered was shared by all participants. For example, a Mormon participant shared that after a series of unanswered prayers he

was inspired to ask a question that I’ve never asked before... And it was, “Do you accept me as a gay son?” And at that moment, it was like seriously being completed, enveloped in love from on high... And that’s the question that I was answered.

This experience of turning to God for affirmation and unconditional love was additionally shared by two other Mormon participants, both of whom received personal revelations to marry a man. Although these personal revelations are in direct contradiction to the current policy of the Church of the Latter Day Saints, participants explained that John Smith's revelations had also been at odds with the customs of his time. Although this unique method of revelatory mediation appears to be specific to the Mormon community, similar elements were reported by participants from other religious backgrounds. For example, a non-practicing Jewish participant shared that his currently "*strong relationship with God is because I have always spoken to God throughout this whole entire struggle. You know, like always asking Him like what did he expect me to do? What should I do?*" Similarly to the Mormon participants quoted above, this Jewish participant highlights the dialogical nature of prayer (*asking Him*) as well the relation between prayer and the disclosure journey ("*this whole entire struggle*").

Discomfort with the Gay Community

In this section I present the differences in participant discussion frequency across stakeholder positions. I then present a discussion of the elements of the gay community which gay participants discussed having difficulty with. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of the interrelationship between gay men's' discomfort with the gay community and the other conflict categories in their activity-meaning system.

Different Discomfort Reports Across Stakeholders

Forty-two percent of clinicians discussed having worked to alleviate their clients' discomfort with the gay community. This is notably lower than clinician frequencies for the

other sources of conflict (e.g., Family: 100%; Religion: 100%). Clients' discomfort with the gay community may be a secondary issue to that of family and religious concerns and may therefore not be an initial focus of therapy for all clients.

In addition, a notably smaller percentage of participating religious family allies reported experiencing discomfort with the gay community (13% Christian, 29% Jewish) as compared to their gay relatives (92% Christian, 60% Jewish). Those family allies that did discuss any feelings of discomfort often focused on how they don't have a relationship with the gay community or people who identify as gay outside of their relationship with their relative (See Table 4.5: Percentage of Participants Reporting Discomfort with the Gay Community and Examples, p.186). A greater percentage of gay men may have reported difficulties than family allies as this experience was more personally relevant to them and related to their own internalized homophobia. This theory is supported by the fact that 12 gay men specified that they felt uncomfortable with the "*stereotypical gay community*" and "*Queens.*" Participants additionally reported feeling uncomfortable with the "*promiscuity*" and "*highly sexualized context*" of the gay community.

Interrelationship of Conflicts

Similarly to prior research, the experience of feeling uncomfortable with the gay community was in many cases related to gay men's other conflict and discomfort experiences (Rodriguez, 2006). For example, five gay men (3 Christian, 1 Jewish) indicated that their unease with the gay community was related to their own difficulty adjusting to their sexual orientation. Alternatively, four participants from Christian backgrounds additionally discussed the relation between their earlier homophobic socialization and their discomfort with the gay community. In

addition, 50% of these participants explicitly connected these homophobic experiences to their own internalized homophobia. For example, a 28 year-old man from a Catholic background in New York shared: *“Um, I think that when I first came out, I had sort of negative perceptions around, you know, don’t act gay or I just felt uncomfortable even just going into a gay bar, but those things have really passed. I think it was just this sort of negative reaction to my own insecurities, to my own worries...”* This narrative was not directly solicited as the only prompt was an inquiry as to whether the participant believed that his relationship with the gay community had changed over time. However, the participant took this opportunity to elaborate upon how his own *“insecurities”* and *“worries”* based on internalized homophobia (e.g., *“don’t act gay”*) prevented him from both feeling comfortable with being gay as well as *“being around gay people.”* This narrative illuminates the complexity of individual-societal relations and the interaction between conflicts in that the participant shared that he internalized his homophobic experiences which then affected his interactions with gay community.

In addition, 10 participants (5 Christian, 5 Jewish) reported that their discomfort with the gay community was related to their religious values. For example, a 21 year-old Orthodox Jewish participant with a history of depression shared that his relationship with the gay community is

not as strong as I would like it to be. One, I don’t, I feel distant because of my religious uh status. Um I can’t relate to that many people. Two, I’m not fully in that lifestyle and to some degree I feel that if I, if I don’t, do that, if I don’t feel that connection towards people. Three um, I don’t feel as um, open or self-

confident as a lot of other gay people who are very out there and strong opinionated. I mean I'm also like a virgin so I can't always relate to the highly sexual context of everything that is in the gay community cause there is a lot...

This participant additionally shared that he often felt judged by members of the Orthodox Jewish community for his orientation even though he had not yet begun to date men or transgress any commandments. He passionately spoke about his belief that religious sentiments do not give people the “*right to sometimes treat the person like a non-human being. Or to just totally shut them out or not even to listen... It's not even the homosexuality. But the idea that you can't understand. You can't understand so therefore, you can't judge.*” This experience of feeling dehumanized, judged, and misunderstood was particularly frustrating to the participant as he believes that “*it goes against Judaism and we don't fully ever understand how people feel cause you can't step into their shoes all the time.*” Within this context it becomes clear that the participant is “*stuck*” between two subsystems that appear to be at odds with each other, as he cannot find comfort with either. Furthermore, the participant indicated that he believed that this difficult experience of being “*stuck*” may be a permanent worldly struggle, as he said “*...[I] might not be happy in this world if I follow exactly what I should be doing [not acting on gay impulses], but it will get me to, to what I ultimately want even though I don't see it or feel it right now.*” This participant's decision to be removed from the gay community in order to maintain his religious values was not shared by all participants. For example, a 27 year-old liberal Mormon came to a different conclusion regarding his search for happiness and relational fulfillment even though he initially shared concerns similar to the Jewish participant. As he said,

I have decided that I want to marry a man but if I do that, then I'll always have in the back of my mind: What if LDS Church teachings are right, true? So I'll always have that sadness in the back of my mind about what's going to happen in the next life... But for me, the choice of of of wanting to get married to another man and start a family is that that kind of daily happiness will be able to outweigh some of that constant nagging sadness in the back of my mind.

In the above narrative, the Mormon participant shares similar concerns as the Orthodox Jewish participant regarding the incompatibility of everlasting spiritual happiness and worldly happiness attained via romantic relationships. However, unlike the Jewish participant, this participant has decided that the “*daily happiness*” of his lived experience of being married to a man may outweigh his religious concerns and emotional difficulty (as reflected in his repetition of words).

Anxiety, Depression and Suicide

Prior research indicates that there is a positive correlation between gay men's exposure to non-affirming or heteronormative religious communities and their experience of internalized homophobia (Barnes & Meyer, 2012). In addition, gay men with more religious relatives are less likely to receive social support during this time of acute stress (Shilo, 2012). Drawing on minority stress theory, extant research indicates that sexual minorities experience unique forms of stress within socioreligious contexts that may lead to mental health concerns (Rodriguez, 2006). This is further supported by research indicating that gay men experiencing chronic shame

and guilt regarding their sexual orientation are more likely to experience mental health problems and are less likely to achieve their intimacy-related goals (Bybee, Sullivan, Zielonka, Moes, 2009; Frost, 2009, 2011).

In this section I explore this relation between minority stress and mental health concerns by presenting differences across stake holder positions. I then present a discussion of participants' thoughts regarding the interrelationship between their conflict experiences and their mental health concerns. Finally, I conclude with an analysis of the effects of mental health concerns upon familial relationships and religious experiences.

Different Mental Health Experiences Across Stakeholder Groups

Although family allies and gay men often reported encountering difficulties within similar activity systems, the challenges of depression and suicide were uniquely reported by gay men (see Table 4.6: percentage of participants Reporting Mental Health Difficulties and Examples, p.186). Four gay men (31%) from Christian backgrounds and four gay men (40%) from Jewish backgrounds reported experiencing depression related to their sexual orientation and religious struggles as compared to none of their religious family allies. In addition, this issue can be understood as being a serious mental health and quality of life concern as 100% of participating clinicians referred to these issues in relation to their clients. This is further illustrated by two men from Mormon backgrounds that reported that their depression led to either suicidal thoughts or a suicide attempt.

Sexual Minority Stress & Mental Health Concerns

All eight gay men who experienced depression additionally reported a lack of identification with or difficulties relating to segments of the gay community. This is reflective of recent research that has reported that a sense of community belonging is a predictor of depression in gay men (McLaren, Jude, McLachlan, 2008). In addition, seven of these participants reported having had experienced familial difficulties during and post their coming out process. Furthermore, three of the participants with a history of depression additionally reported having had experienced or witnessing homophobic bullying and six (75%) participants reported having tried to change their sexual orientation. These results are similar to prior reports of the relation between depression, suicide, and internalized homophobia (Igartua, Gill, Montoro, 2003).

In addition, the two participants that identified as suicidal reported a connection between their intense depression and their religious experiences. For example, a 27 year-old Mormon participant shared *“your knees are bloody from prayer [to change one’s sexual orientaton] and your pillows are wet from crying and that’s a lot of times where people are desperate to the point of considering suicide...And I understand where they are coming from. I’ve had those thoughts before.”* Similar thoughts were shared by a 22 year-old moderately religious Mormon who attempted to overdose on pills in his dorm room. The participant made it clear in the following narrative that he believed that his attempt was caused by his religious and sexual struggles: *“It was entirely in dealing with how I, how, to marry my sexuality and my spirituality. If that issue hadn’t been, if that had not been an issue, then, I, don’t think I would’ve ended up in the hospital.”* This relationship between suicidality and religious issues was additionally elaborated

upon by a clinician who discussed that his client's multiple attempts to commit suicide were driven by his difficulty in *"accepting his being gay in a Lutheran church."*

This tormenting tension between religion and sexuality can be difficult to explain to relatives who believe that the resulting anxiety and depression is caused by being gay as opposed to the meaning attributed to being gay by socioreligious values. For example, an adolescent Mormon sister, ignorant of her brother's orientation, commented that if a gay and suicidal peer *"wasn't gay, he wouldn't have those thoughts [of suicide]."* To which the participant responded *"No...the problem isn't that he's gay, the problem is that people tell him he's worthless because of it."* This response is particularly moving as the participant independently highlights the sociocultural context of the conflicts experienced by many of the gay men and religious family members in this study.

Effects of Mental Health Concerns on Familial Relationships & Religion

Gay men's mental health issues related to sexual minority stress can become exacerbated by negatively impacting prior systems of social and moral support such as family and religion. For example, two Jewish participants reported that their depression had negative effects upon their relationship with their parents as well as religious observance. As one 23 year-old Jewish participant reported

I went, I went through a very severe depression for about seven years. Definite root in um come in terms with my sexuality and during that time I didn't know how to express myself... and that fractured my relationship with my parents. But I've definitely been able to rebuild that and to um get closer with them since

then...while I was going through depression, I very much like pushed away from religion and getting back was a struggle as well where I mean there was a period I didn't wear tzitzis [religious fringed garment]. I didn't daven [pray], I broke shabbos [Sabbath] a few times, I mean very rarely um, I think it happened twice but that was definitely there.

This narrative is particularly complex as it highlights the interacting subsystems of the gay participant's personal and agentive experience as related to the subsystems of religion and family as well as the continuous evolution of those relationships (e.g., "*I've definitely been able to rebuild that and to um get closer with them since then*" and "*there was a period I didn't wear tzitzis*"). Although this participant's relationship with his familial and religious social support networks improved alongside his mental health, this may not be the case for all gay men experiencing depression. Future research should therefore focus on raising awareness of co-occurring conflicts and their impact upon previously available sources of support.

Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to illuminate the familial, religious, and social conflict contexts that religious family members and gay men are navigating. Analyses across stakeholders and conflict contexts indicate that conflicts are occurring within the interconnected web of a complex activity-meaning system. For example, participants across stakeholder positions (gay man, family ally, clinician) discussed religious difficulties as being highly embedded in the contexts of communal and internalized homophobia as well as the resultant mental health concerns. This interconnection between conflicts is further illustrated in Tables

3.1-3.6 and reflects similar reports from other sociocultural contexts (Vincke & Bolton, 1994). For example, Vincke & Bolton (1994) found that a non-clinical sample of Flemish gay men reported a relation between low levels of post-disclosure social support, levels of self-acceptance, and depression.

In addition, the family system context is preserved as a unit of analyses by including analyses of both gay men and family allies' narratives. This allowed for an analysis of both the similarities and differences between the types of difficulties that gay men and their religious family allies encounter. While both gay men and their religious relatives reported difficulties in largely similarly activity systems, their experiences within those systems differed due to their different stakeholder roles. For example, although both gay men and family allies reported experiencing family difficulties, the majority of family allies focused on their difficulties mediating family relationships whereas the majority of gay men focused on being rejected by religious family members' and their negative relational uses of religion. Thus, in light of the different conflicts and difficulties encountered by the two groups, Chapter 5 will not seek a single coherent narrative across stakeholders and will instead focus on understanding the nuanced differences between gay men's and their religious relatives' mediational strategies.

Chapter V: Humanization Strategies across Stakeholder Positions

Dehumanization has long been discussed as a product of individual-group relations, discrimination, and imbalances of power (Marx, 1844/1961; Haslam, 2006; Weber, 1905/1976). However, the proactive use of humanization as a tool to improve power laden social interactions has only recently begun to be discussed in the social science literature. Humanization has been broadly defined as “the process through which a person stands in relation to another person in a way that affirms her or his humanity and human potential” (Hidalgo, 2012, p.1), thereby altering the dynamics of power and oppression and promoting relational attachment (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Hidalgo, 2012). In recent years, humanization has been discussed in relation to the power dynamics of healthcare (Phillips, 2012), interactions between homeless individuals and service providers (Hidalgo, 2012), immigration (Costello, Hodson, Gordon 2010), the workplace (Bell & Khoury, 2011) and governmental use of torture (Madabhushi, 2012). Conflicts between religiously situated homophobia, gay men, and their religious family allies requires humanization, however, research has not yet examined how this mediational strategy can be applied.

In this chapter I discuss humanization’s relevance to cultural historical activity theory, relational complexity, and the activity-meaning system of gay men and their religious relatives. I then discuss how both cognitive and affective processes are involved in actualizing humanization strategies. After which, I analyze the differences and similarities in humanization use across stakeholders as applied to both family relationships and the gay community.

Relevance and Applicability of Humanization

I selected humanization as the interpretive lens for analyzing mediational strategies as it compliments cultural historical theory (Vygotsky, 1978) as well as the theory of relational complexity (Daiute, 2012), both of which postulate that human development is mediated within dynamic co-constructed social environments with diverse others. The definition of humanization is thus expanded to include the myriad of social systems and power relations that are inherently embedded in interpretive efforts to actualize humanity (See Appendix A: Glossary, p. 164). Moreover, relations between gay and religious family members are understood to be situated within multiple interacting subsystems such as religion, family, and community. Expressions of their humanizing strategies are thus viewed as dynamic processes developed in relation to diverse purposes and interlocutors.

Participants' responses to semi-structured interview questions were therefore coded for the use of humanization as a tool facilitating meaningful and flexible interactions. Humanization is operationalized as the use of the following ten strategies: (a) Normalization of the gay community, (b) Recognizing diversity of the gay community, (c) Sympathizing with pain of the gay community, (d) Integrating interactions with the gay community, (e) Understanding religious relatives' religious, personal and demographic contexts, (f) Identifying with religious relatives' acceptance journey, (g) Viewing gay relative as being the same person pre and post-disclosure, (h) Expressing unconditional love for gay relative, (i) Expressing sympathy for gay relative's difficulties, (j) Changing power relations and relationship role (for further information see Table 6: Percentage of Participants Humanizing Relatives and Examples, p. 187).

Interrelationship of Conflicts and Strategies

Given the activity-meaning system design of this study and its focus on the family systems' interaction with religious, sexual and secular systems, conflicts and strategies are viewed as mutually interacting components of the human development process. This relation is supported by stakeholders' references to connections between humanization strategies and conflict experiences. References were independently made by all sampled stakeholder groups as well as in response to interview questions (e.g., "What were the most poignant issues that your gay clients encountered during and post their sexual preference disclosure to their religious family and how did they address those issues?").

In addition, analyses indicate that the types of conflict contexts experienced and the types of humanization strategies employed by stakeholders were often related. For example, 100% of participating gay men that humanized the gay community also reported being uncomfortable with the gay community, suggesting that their humanization of the gay community was an active effort to mediate their discomfort. Similarly, 92% of participating gay men that humanized the gay community reported experiencing religiously situated homophobia, suggesting that gay men may be motivated to counter religious homophobia with humanization. In some cases, participants independently discussed the relation between their homophobic experiences and their efforts to humanize the gay community. For example, a 24 year-old non-active Mormon participant stated that he does not "*think it's [gay community] bad by any means*" as he shared that "*...growing up, I guess like the perception was that the gay and lesbian community was bad... it was definitely an underlying tone, kind of stated by like my parents or other adults within the church.*" This narrative is particularly multi-faceted as the participant independently

discussed the interactions between his new perception of the gay community and his familial (“*stated by like my parents*”), religious (“*within the church*”), and self (“*growing up*”) conflicts.

Similarly, religious family allies discussed this relation between humanization strategies and conflicts across stakeholder contexts (e.g., gay community, religious community). For example, a Mormon mother shared that she would like her estranged son and the gay community to understand “...*the fact that we as heterosexuals have to come to terms with a lot of things too...*”, indicating her need for what I define as humanization. Alternatively, a mother from a Seventh Day Adventist background stated that “*Hey! You know what, they’re human beings just like everybody else. You know, the same kindness and you know, same rights*” in contrast to her religious community’s dehumanizing belief that there is a “*demon*” inside of gay people. Religious family allies also explicitly referenced textual and religious concerns alongside humanization strategies. For example, a Jewish mother from the Tri-State Area shared that being gay in the Orthodox Jewish community is

*a huge issue... that the Torah um, condemns acts of... sexual relationships. Um and so you just wonder um, how to reconcile that God created **me** and here **I** am um, and if **I** want to live uh as a um, this is an observant uh to a Jew um, you know **I** am pretty much condemned to a lonely kind of a life.*

By narrating her discussion of the effects of unchangeable prohibitions in the first person as opposed to the third person (e.g., “*God created **me***”), this mother embodies the act of humanization as a mediator of religious conflicts. Martin Buber (1923) describes this transition

from “I-It” and “I-You” narration process as part of becoming fully human, as humanity’s actualization is dependent upon our social relations.

Relationally Complex Humanization Strategies

Participants acknowledged the social dimensions of power intertwined across stakeholder interactions, illustrating the theory of relational complexity (see Appendix A: Glossary, p. 164). For example, a clinician commented that the therapeutic system represents an opportunity for gay men to make meaning of “*what it’s like for another person to know them*”, although some clients from religious backgrounds reportedly attempted to alter this power dynamic by inserting a “*confessional tone.*” In addition, family allies repeatedly focused on the sociocultural context of their relatives’ difficulties (e.g., “*this is society’s um problem that you [gay son] have to deal with...*”) as well as their own (e.g., “*... the difficulty is not in accepting him, the difficulty is worrying about what he has to deal with...Um, society, you know...*”), indicating an awareness of the sociocultural contexts of their relationship.

In addition, four allies (2 Jewish, 2 Christian) shifted the power dynamic of their relationships by specifically noting that their gay relative’s disclosure was about their relative’s experience as opposed to their own. For example, one Jewish sister shared “*it wasn’t really my process, it was more my brother’s process.*” This perspective was echoed by a Methodist mother in her statement that “*You know it’s not my story. It’s his story. And my story is to support him if he needs support and I’ll be there for that. And I’ve told him that I could love anybody that he could love.*” Similarly, a Mormon mother shared “*my pain never mattered. It was his pain that came first. So, it didn’t matter what I was going through, I was gonna be there for my son.*” In addition, a Jewish mother shared how her son’s recommendation to focus on his needs during the disclosure event helped her navigate her concerns regarding community reactions. As she said,

“This is not about me, or my husband, or our family. It’s really about my son... it was almost like I was misguided in thinking that it was about me. It was not about me, it was more about him, and it was about his life and his choices. Uhm, and it was important for us to be supportive of him and not get so carried away. It was more at the beginning, of who to tell, what to tell, how to tell, when to tell? It was just like that’s kinda ridiculous when you think about it. Uhm, and so my son helped me a lot in in, in trying to focus uhm and kind of realizing what it was really all about, cuz it really is not about me.”

In the above narrative the participant states three times that her son’s disclosure was “*not about me*” and even goes so far as to say that her concerns regarding community disclosure were “*ridiculous.*” The mother’s narrative highlights that her son’s recommendation to change her focus was most helpful. This was corroborated by her son who commented that his family had “*grown just as much as I have*” and that during his disclosure his mother “*was very emotionally supportive and wanted it to only be known that I was loved, and that it was not something that would be an impediment to our relationship. And that whoever I’d brought home, would be acceptable and loved. It was a very Kodak moment.*” In addition, both of these narratives of mutual respect are particularly meaningful given that the son is now seriously dating a Christian boyfriend.

Humanization Strategies as Cognitive and Affective Processes

Humanization strategies were frequently represented as involving both cognitive and affective processes, indicating that this is a complex strategy that needs to be integrated on multiple levels of development. For example, a mother from an Evangelical background began with mostly cognitive words and then switched to **affective** words in the following statement:

*I think that, like a lot of people, I think I might have thought that some people chose it on purpose, but I think now I, I see beyond, I, I wonder what they're **struggling** with and *wh-how* their **feelings** are.*

Furthermore, the mother's affective tone was additionally reflected in her repetition of words and syllables (e.g., "I, I see beyond, I, I wonder" and "wh-how") as she elaborated upon her understanding of the struggles and feelings of the gay community. This is particularly striking as this analysis indicates that the mother became increasingly emotional as she used the humanization strategy of becoming more cognitively aware of the gay community's struggle.

Differences in Humanization Use across Stakeholder Positions

Although participants from all stakeholder categories utilized humanization strategies in some way, the types of humanization strategies employed differed across stakeholder groups. While it may be helpful for gay men and their family allies to focus on the commonalities of their experiences, future research must note the unique contexts of sexual minority stress as well as the complexities of family dynamics. Below I describe differences in the subject of humanization (e.g., relative vs. gay community) across stakeholder positions, differences in

family allies and gay men's methods of humanization, and between-group humanization differences for gay men from Christian and Jewish backgrounds and their religious family allies.

Subject of Humanization Frequency Differences across Stakeholders

Clinicians were slightly more engaged in encouraging clients to humanize family relatives as compared to humanizing the gay community (See Table 6: Percentage of Participants Humanizing Relatives and Examples, p.187). This fits with the conflict data presented in the previous chapter, as family conflicts were discussed most frequently by the most clinicians as compared to all other conflict categories (e.g., discomfort with the gay community).

Similarly, more Jewish and Christian gay men's reports indicated that they used humanization strategies to mediate familial relationships as compared to gay communal relationships. However, this difference was not apparent in the narratives of Christian or Jewish family allies, as all participating family allies humanized the gay community as well as their gay relative. In addition, both members of all sampled dyads humanized the gay community as well as each other. Moreover, a greater percentage of family allies as compared to gay men applied humanization strategies to the gay community as well as familial relationships. This difference is most pronounced in regards to Jewish gay men and their relatives (see Table 5: Percentage of Participants Humanizing Gay Community and Examples, p.187). Such results indicate that humanization strategies are a cornerstone of successful familial relationships post sexual-orientation disclosure.

Different Methods of Humanization for Family Allies and Gay Men

Humanization strategies by definition are embedded within sociorelationally complex dynamics as they focus on understanding how the ‘other’ person navigates and is impacted by institutional and communal frameworks. Therefore, the strategies used by gay men and their religious relatives to humanize the gay community are likely to differ due to their different stakeholder roles within the activity-meaning system. For example, 11 (48%, 10 Christian, 1 Jewish) gay men used the strategy of recognizing diversity within the gay community (e.g., “...*If you define it as partying and clubs...I am not associated with it at all...the gay community for me are my gay friends... and... good wholesome fun.*”), although this humanization strategy was not used by their family allies.

Similarly, religious family allies made efforts to alter their perceptions, rhetoric, and experiences with and regards to the gay community utilizing two strategies that were not used by their gay relatives. The two strategies that were uniquely explored by religious family allies were the strategies of understanding and sympathizing with community pain (26%) and seeking to integrate their interactions with gay community members into everyday social experiences and activities (26%). Religious family members attempted to integrate their interactions with the gay community by not singling out individuals based on their sexual orientation and interacting with gay friends as “*part and parcel*” of their “*day to day routine.*” In addition, participating clinicians discussed the strategy of integrating interactions with the gay community. For example, Table 5 (p.183) highlights one clinician’s suggestion that his clients introduce their family members to gay friends prior to disclosing their own or their friend’s sexual orientation, thereby allowing their family members to evaluate people free of stigma.

Between-group Differences for Christian and Jewish Gay Men and Allies

The most notable difference between gay men from Christian and Jewish backgrounds is in regards to their use of strategies to humanize the gay community. Eighty-five percent of gay men from Christian backgrounds humanized the gay community in their narratives as compared to 20% of gay men from Jewish backgrounds. Furthermore, this difference was largely due to a notably greater percentage of gay men from Christian backgrounds recognizing the diversity of the gay community (See Figure 2: Between-group differences in Gay Men's Humanization of Gay Community, p. 194). These differences may be related to the fact that a greater percentage of gay men from Christian backgrounds reported conflicts related to their discomfort with the gay community and communal homophobia.

In addition, although similar percentages of gay men from Christian (92%) and Jewish (90%) backgrounds humanized their religious relatives, men from Christian backgrounds were slightly more likely to practice the strategies of understanding community and personal contexts (See Figure 3: Humanization of Religious Relative Bar Graph, p.195). This between-group difference may be a result of diverse contemporary cultural emphases. Although both religious groups share a cultural history of valuing empathy based on the Old Testament teaching of "*Love thy neighbor as thyself*" (Leviticus 19:18), almost identical variations of this passage are repeated five times in the New Testament (Matthew 22:39, Luke 10:27, Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14, and James 2:8).

Similarly, a notable difference emerged between Jewish and Christian family allies' use of the unconditional love strategy aimed at humanizing their gay relative. Four of the seven Christian participants mentioned religious cultural tools (e.g., Jesus, Christian values) in relation

to their unconditional love, whereas there was no explicit religious discussion related to unconditional love by Jewish allies. This is particularly noteworthy as both religious groups share the text in the Old Testament to “love thy neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). Although, it should be noted that even amongst those Christian participants that did reference religious values, only one explicitly quoted biblical text (Mathew 25). For example, a Catholic mother shared that she focuses on “*the greatest commandment of all, which is, love.*” In addition, a Methodist mother referenced Jesus in her discussion of loving her son, as she said “*I look at Jesus’ message of love and forgiveness and that we’re friends by the blood that I don’t feel that people are condemned by the actions they have done.*” These religious values were similarly expressed by a Mormon father who shared the following during our discussion of the biblical prohibition against homosexuality, “*your goal, your reason for being, should be to accept and to love and to lift up and to suckle those in need no matter who they are.*” It should also be noted that in addition referencing general religious values regarding love, participants also explicitly discussed their personal, loving relationship with their gay relative.

These differences between Christian and Jewish participants were not highlighted by any of the participating clinicians, possibly because the clinicians did not service large comparative samples. Alternatively, such differences may be specific to non-clinical populations. Further research with a larger sample of clinical and non-clinical populations would be necessary to make such a determination.

Normalization: A Shared Method of Humanization across Stakeholder Positions

Although different types of humanization methods were employed in regards to the gay community and family relatives, all stakeholders did share the general humanization strategy of

normalizing the gay community. For example, three gay men (1 Jewish, 2 Mormon) normalized their concerns regarding the gay community by acknowledging that their issues were shared by the heterosexual community as well (e.g., “...*anyone who knows anything about HIV knows that straight people get it too.*”). Clinicians echoed this normalization strategy as being important in regards to educating religious family members regarding HIV risk and prevention as “*the parents’ fear of AIDS*” is “*one of the first things that come up.*”

Similar to their gay relatives, religious family allies’ attempted to understand the human experience that is shared across all sexual orientations. For example, a Catholic mother shared that her priest had counseled her that “*they (people in the gay community) want the same things that you have...They want a family, a house, you know, children.*” This normalization of the shared human experience was also discussed by allies in terms of the daily struggles that both sexual orientation groups share (See Table 6: Percentage of Participants Humanizing Relatives and Examples, p.187). In addition, a number of family allies attempted to normalize the religious/sin experience of gay/straight communities. For example, three Christian family members discussed the shared experience of human sin and the universal redemption provided by Jesus’ sacrifice (e.g., “*I don’t think that it’s any different for the gay community, or for gays individually...we all will have sins to answer for, every single one of us...*”).

In conclusion, though all stakeholders used the same general strategy of normalizing the gay community, analyses indicate that gay men and religious allies focused their normalization efforts on different issues within their activity-meaning system. This difference in the application of normalization highlights that humanization strategies are enacted with consideration to both personal and sociorelational contexts, supporting a relationally complex method of analysis.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the humanization strategies that religious family allies and gay men are using to mediate their relationships and conflicts with each other as well as with the gay community. Efforts were made throughout this chapter to present narratives within the relationally-complex contexts that participants presented throughout their interviews. Therefore, multiple standpoints and stakeholders within the activity-meaning system were often acknowledged in an effort to highlight the multifaceted nature of family relationships.

This chapter explored systematically differences in how stakeholders used mediational strategies. Although all stakeholders' interviews indicated that mediational strategies were employed, the frequency of their specific strategy use and the ways in which they actualized strategies differed in content and tone across stakeholders. Gay men and clinicians were more likely than religious allies to normalize the negative characteristics of the gay community. For example, gay men repeatedly focused on how gay men as well as heterosexual men exhibited difficult interpersonal behaviors. In contrast, religious allies were more likely to use the strategy of normalization to positively focus upon how the dreams, relationships, and daily lived experience of gay men are similar to the heteronormative community. Differences in the subject of normalization may be a result of the different roles that each stakeholder occupies within the activity-meaning system. Meaning, humanization strategies, such as normalization are customized and deliberately employed in relation to stakeholders' specific needs and experiences. Furthermore, the relationally complex role of humanization strategies was further illustrated by frequency analyses and stakeholders' explicit discussions of the relation between conflict contexts and employed strategies. This was particularly notable in regards to the relation

between gay men's efforts to humanize the gay community and their prior experiences of religious difficulties and communal homophobia.

However, although gay men and their religious family allies often reported different conflict and mediational strategy experiences, there were commonalities across stakeholder groups. For example, participants in all stakeholder groups used humanization strategies when discussing both family relatives as well as the gay community. Participants in all stakeholder groups also utilized the humanization strategy of normalization in some way. The general use of humanization across stakeholder groups indicates that this method of mediation is a strong component of successfully negotiating conflicts and developing strong familial relationships post-disclosure. In addition, humanization strategies were employed by both gay men and religious allies that had not participated in therapeutic contexts, indicating that this form of mediation may not always require clinical intervention. However, the parallel use of humanization strategies within therapeutic contexts suggests that this mediational strategy can be successfully taught if needed. Therefore, future research efforts should focus on determining the best methods of educating clients in this activity-meaning system regarding the theory and practice of employing humanization strategies.

Chapter VI: Cultural Tools

Cultural tools are understood to be the socially constructed, historically situated, and individually adapted physical, symbolic, or abstract means by which we accomplish specific socio-relational goals. Cultural tools serve as “*conductor[s] of human influence on the object of activity*” and are situated within socio-relational contexts (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). In an effort to operationalize mediational cultural tool use this chapter focuses the unit of analysis on goal directed activities that are facilitated by individuals’ deliberate use of symbolic and physical tools and activities. For example, many gay men reported that their use of prayer altered as they worked through the difficulty of adjusting their heteronormative expectations. Gay participants that self-identified as having Orthodox Jewish and religious Christian backgrounds shared that they initially prayed to God to change their sexual orientation and once that was unsuccessful they prayed for insight to help them live both morally and sexually fulfilled lives.

Within this socio-relational framework of cultural tool use, language has been highlighted as a primary cultural tool as its creation and reception are inherently mediated by both the individual and society (Daiute, 2013). In the words of Bakhtin, “*There is no voiceless word that belongs to no one. Each word contains voices that are sometimes distant, unnamed, almost impersonal, and voices resounding nearby and simultaneously*” (Bakhtin, 1987, p. 124). In this chapter, I therefore explore the cultural scripts and audiences present in participants’ discussions of their use of writing tools such as blogs, letters, and Facebook. Facebook is included in this analysis as it is “a massive epic narrative” that is also used to craft individualized self-presentations (Daiute, forthcoming). In addition, this chapter explores the reading materials that

played a role in participants' disclosures and their relation to participants' use of disclosure discourse activities.

Furthermore, this chapter highlights additional mediational tools that participants used to reconcile relationships and navigate the post-disclosure context. The primary focus of this chapter is how support groups/therapy, television/movies, reading & writing (blogs and articles, Facebook, letters, and books), and religious tools (scriptural interpretation, religious council, prayer) were used across stakeholder contexts (See Table 7: Examples and Percentage of Participants using Cultural Tools to Mediate religions, Conflicts, and Relationships, p.188). Only tools that were utilized by three or more participants are reviewed in this chapter.

This chapter aims to highlight the unique structural locations of each stakeholder position by discussing the major differences in participant frequencies across tool categories. In addition, qualitative differences in the reported uses and benefits of tools are explored across stakeholders. Analyses of each cultural tool category are initially discussed individually. A summary of results across tools and stakeholders is presented in the conclusion.

Support Groups and Therapy:

Given the lens of sociocultural theory, support groups and therapy can be understood as interactive cultural tools that are appropriated, used, and modified by stakeholders. For example, prior research indicates that gay men see a greater number of therapists for a longer period of time than heterosexual men (Liddle, 1997). However, there has been limited empirical research regarding gay men and their therapists' perspectives regarding the therapeutic process. Furthermore, there seems to be no prior publication record of a systematic inquiry into the therapeutic and support group process for religious relatives of gay men. Therefore, in this

section I present information regarding how stakeholders use and discuss support groups and therapy as well as the diverse forms of therapy they participate in.

Differences in Therapy Use across Stakeholder Positions

One-hundred percent of clinicians discussed the use of therapy as a medium used to negotiate difficulties and conflicts encountered by gay men and their religious relatives. Although this result is expected, what is unusual is that no more than 33% of clinicians discussed any other tool used within the therapeutic context. This notably higher frequency of therapy use as compared to other processes that emerge as cultural tools was similarly reported by gay men from Jewish backgrounds and their religious family allies contexts (See Table 7: Examples and Percentage of Participants using Cultural Tools to Mediate religions, Conflicts, and Relationships, p.188).

Furthermore, a similar percentage of gay men from Jewish backgrounds (90%) and their allies (86%) used therapeutic strategies. Contrastingly, a greater percentage of gay men from Christian backgrounds (85%) utilized therapy as compared to their key family allies (12%). This difference between religious groups may be related to the fact that a number of key family allies from Christian backgrounds indicated that they had sought the council of a religious figure instead of a mental health professional. It is possible that the Jewish participants' greater likelihood of seeking secular council may be related to their higher levels of secular education as compared to Christian participants. Such results suggest that Jewish and Christian communities may have different perspectives regarding the added value of mental health services and the social stigma associated with seeking help from a mental health professional. This difference is most

likely not related to a lack of difficulty with relatives' sexual orientation as all stakeholders noted experiencing some form of difficulty.

Diverse Forms of Therapy

Participating clinicians discussed a wide range of therapeutic goals and methods that they used to inform their practice. For example, therapists discussed their efforts to assist clients in the process of self-acceptance by providing empathy and acceptance (e.g., *“The therapist is often seen as an alternative parental figure and to accept them um in ways that their parents didn't is a powerfully healing experience.”*), recommending that gay men and family members attend Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians And Gays (PFLAG) and alternative accepting faith communities (e.g., *“being able to talk with other parents who might have had similar concerns”; “People are able to connect with other people, other lesbian and gay people that have grown up in conservative backgrounds and, and there's some healing in telling their stories to each other”*), suggesting that gay clients envision their parents attending therapy or a support group (e.g., *“Can you imagine your parent ever reading this material or going to meetings like this? Um, could you imagine your parents going into therapy themselves? ... Is it fair that you're the one sitting here with me having this much heartache about it?”*), providing clients with disclosure strategies (e.g., *“I'll advise uh clients to take some friends home before they tell...And then when they're coming out... It's not just a category. It's not just what they've heard... once people know actual individuals...it's like a house of cards. You know, um, the prejudices just kind of go away.”*).

In addition, participating religious family allies discussed a diverse range of reasons for pursuing therapy. Some parents spoke about the need to seek council to ensure that they were

assisting their younger children in coping in developmentally appropriate ways while other allies sought assistance in ensuring that they were emotionally supportive to their gay relative (e.g., *“I just wanted to know that my brother could see that I was trying to learn more about, to be a part of what he has going through and to know that I am totally there for him.”*).

Although the comparative sample of parents and siblings that sought therapy is limited, such differences in therapeutic goals indicate that this tool is embedded within the sociorelationally specific conflicts and concerns of each familial relationship.

Similarly, 20 gay men reported participating in both affirmative and conversion oriented therapy to assist with their self-acceptance and disclosure experience. Eleven gay men discussed having attended affirmative therapy, with six participants attending affirmative support groups that were religious in nature. These affirmative religious contexts were largely viewed as being helpful. However in some cases, affirmative support groups were noted as having limited benefits. For example, Jewish participants felt that the affirming support group, Jewish Queer Youth [JQY] was largely geared for members in the midst of intense religious and sexual struggles, with one participant referring to JQY as *“an emergency room for emotional pain.”* Participants indicated that once they accepted their sexuality and made peace with their religious questions they were interested in developing a JQY II which would focus on social networking within less emotionally charged contexts.

Alternatively, nine gay men reported having attended “reparative” or conversion therapy settings. Although the American Psychological Association (1997) has reported conversion therapy to be unethical, conversion therapy was included in the coding processes as many participants reported that this experience was a helpful tool in their journey. However, many participants did differentiate between their own personal positive outcome and the

intended therapeutic outcome of heteronormativity. For example, a now actively gay Jewish participant reported that his experience of being able to safely discuss his sexuality and explore all possibilities in the sexual orientation conversion therapy group, JONAH [Jews Offering New Alternatives to Homosexuality], enabled him to *“to go from being really religious to being really gay.”* This experience of finding conversion therapy focused groups to be a safe space to discuss concerns about one’s sexuality was similarly shared by Christian participants in regards to the Lightstar organization (e.g., *“a lot of what Lightstar deals with... is the idea of differentiating between um shame and guilt...”*).

Television and Movies

Sociologists have studied the impact of television and movies from the standpoint that this medium is a “key site for addressing the complex interrelationship between culture and institutional/organizational power” (Grindstaff & Turow, 2006, p. 103). Furthermore, within the framework of cultural historical activity theory, this definition is expanded to include the how the individual proactively engages this medium as cultural tool. Although the content of television and movies may be limited by economics and other powerful sociocultural frameworks, how television and movies are used by individuals given these affordances is the very essence of cultural tool theory. Below, I expand this discussion by analyzing how television and movies are utilized across stakeholders as methods of conflict mediation.

Differences in Media Use across Stakeholder Positions

The use of television and movies to mediate post-disclosure conflicts was discussed by the fewest number of clinicians and Christian family members as compared

to the number of participants that discussed other cultural tools. This may be because there was a lack of positive nonheterosexual depictions on mainstream television programs during participants' youth (Fisher, Hill, Grube, and Gruber, 2008). An additional difference in participant frequency is in regards to participating gay men from Jewish and Christian backgrounds. Almost double the number of participating gay men from Jewish backgrounds discussed having used television and movies as compared to participating gay men from Christian backgrounds. A similar between-group difference was found for Christian (12%) and Jewish (43%) family allies' use of television and movies. Participants did not explicitly discuss any concrete reasons for their lack of television and movie use during the disclosure process although this difference be related to Jewish and Christian participants' different regions of residence and resultant access to media in general. In addition, more Jewish participants may have discussed the use of such tools due to the popularity of the documentary on Jewish gay men, *Trembling before God* (2001). This film was in fact repeatedly referenced by Jewish clinicians, Jewish family allies, as well as by some Jewish gay men.

Different Methods and Outcomes of Media Tool Use

A variety of methods and outcomes of media tool use were discussed by stakeholders, highlighting the personal customization process of tool use. Seven gay men (3 Christian, 4 Jewish) and four participating family allies (1 Christian, 3 Jewish) discussed how movies and TV shows assisted them in coming to terms with their own or their relative's sexuality by providing role models for them and their religious family members. Alternatively, four gay men (3 Christian, 1 Jewish) spoke about utilizing

movies and TV shows about gay characters as opportunities to begin a dialogue with family members either pre or post their disclosure. For example, one participant from a Mormon background shared that it was helpful to watch and discuss the movie *“Prayers for Bobby”* with his mother as it depicted the true story of Bobby Griffith. The film focuses on the religious community’s and his mother’s homophobia as being driving forces of Griffith’s suicide, a particularly relevant storyline as the participant had attempted suicide as well. Similarly, a 34 year-old participant from a Jewish background shared that although his Orthodox Jewish sister is uncomfortable discussing his sexuality, she *“got a TV and uhm, so we talk about all the gay shows. And, well, not the gay shows, the straight shows that had gay characters. And that has helped her a lot.”*

Religious relatives may find it to be less threatening to discuss issues related to sexuality when they are less personal or fictional. In fact, three religious mothers (2 Jewish, 1 Mormon) and one Orthodox Jewish sister shared their appreciation of having watched films documenting the difficulties of gay men from religious communities. Furthermore, one Jewish mother from the tri-state area shared that she hosted a screening party for her friends of *“Trembling before God”* despite a community Rabbi having issued a statement that his congregation should not view the film. The benefits of the film *“Trembling before God”* were additionally highlighted by a participating lesbian therapist.

Reading and Writing

Narrative has been described as a developmental cultural tool and a process that promotes reflection and change (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2003). Given this lens, writing can

be understood as a transformative and meaningful process. Similarly, reading others' narratives, such as blogs, is a developmental process as cultural scripts become adopted, translated, mediated, and applied. Below, I present results regarding how gay men, their religious family allies and their therapists used and discussed reading and writing tools in relation to sexual and religious concerns. I first introduce differences in the frequency of reading and writing tools use across stakeholders and then discuss the different methods of tool use across stakeholder groups. I then conclude this section with an analysis of the diverse sociorelational outcomes of reading and writing tool use across participants.

Differences in Narrative Use across Stakeholder Positions

Stakeholder groups differed considerably in regards to the number of participants that utilized reading and writing tools to mediate post-disclosure contexts. For example, a notably lower proportion of family allies utilized reading or writing cultural tools as compared to their gay relatives (see Table 7: Examples and Percentage of Participants using Cultural Tools to Mediate religions, Conflicts, and Relationships, p.188). Only four (50%) participating family allies from Christian backgrounds and two Jewish family allies (29%) reported reading books, using Facebook, blogs, or self-initiated letter writing as compared to 100% of participating gay men from Christian backgrounds and 80% of participating gay men from Jewish backgrounds. In addition, a greater number of Jewish gay men utilized the discourse tools of Facebook and letter writing as compared to gay men from Christian backgrounds. Alternatively, a greater percentage of gay men from Christian backgrounds used the tools of Blogs and books as compared to gay men from Jewish backgrounds.

This between-group difference in the use of Blogs seems to be reflective of the general population. A Google Blog search for Christian Gay blogs resulted in 39,800,000 homepage hits as compared to 12,700,000 hits for Jewish Gay blogs. The overall popularity of blogs for gay men from religious backgrounds may be related to the concept that although a retelling of a story cannot alter events, it can transform the associated meaning of those events and possibly modify the course of future social-relations (Daiute, 2006). Within this context, Blogs can become tools by which people mediate society through the disclosure of their personal experience within a public context.

Differences in Family Ally and Gay Men Tool Use

Analyses of stakeholders' reading and writing tools use indicates that the interactions between gay men and their religious activity system differs from that of their religious family allies. For example, although both gay men (8 Christian, 8 Jewish) and religious family allies (6 Christian, 3 Jewish) acknowledged on average a similar number of difficulties ($M= 4$) and solutions ($M= 3$) in their letters to religious leaders, the arguments they crafted differed in content and tone. This is illustrated by a greater percentage of participating gay men (100%) than participating religious family allies (77%) writing letters about explicit problems (e.g., “[Jewish] *Orthodox high school[s] address issues of drugs, alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases, but not homosexuality. It was hurtful and confusing to know that it was okay to discuss... sexual attraction towards women, but know that none of that really applied to me.*”) as opposed to implicit problems (e.g., “*Our children need to feel safe to disclose who they really are.*”). In addition, a greater percentage of participating gay men (69%) wrote about problems experienced on the religious community level as compared to their participating religious relatives (33%).

Moreover, a greater percentage of participating gay men (38%) as compared to their participating religious family allies (11%) wrote about community problems while simultaneously praising their religious leader for their other efforts. For example, a 22 year-old Mormon participant shared *“I love you, Bishop. You, and people like you, make my life easier every time I pause to remember the blessings you’ve provided. Unfortunately, I choose to pay more attention to those who make my life more difficult...[unsupportive members of the LSD community]”* Religious family allies may be less likely to praise religious leaders while critiquing them as they feel more secure within their religious activity system. This hypothesis is supported by the data indicating that a greater percentage of religious family allies as compared to gay men used religious values and faith to mediate their conflicts between religion and sexuality (Family Members 89%, Gay Men 38%, 1, N=25, $p=.013$). For example, although a Jewish sister wrote that homosexuality *“remains a conflict within the Orthodox world”* due to the commandment to procreate heterosexually, she also referenced the religious values of communal unity in her argument not *“to stray those who are homosexual away.”* A similar strategy was used by a Methodist mother from the South who began her letter by asking *“What would Jesus say?...Spiritual love between two people seems to never be portrayed as a sin -- love your neighbor as yourself.”* These analyses indicate that a greater percentage of religious family allies (89%) critiqued religious leaders as compared to gay men (38%). Such variations in tool use suggest that gay men and their family allies have different perceptions and daily methods of navigating socioreligious difficulties.

Diverse Types of Reading and Writing Tools

Stakeholders used a wide range of reading and writing tools to mediate the post-disclosure activity-meaning system. For example, all thirteen gay men from Christian backgrounds and 8 (80%) gay men from Jewish backgrounds spoke about initiating the use of or having the following reading and writing tools play a role in their disclosure: Books, Facebook, Blogs, Letters (See Figure 4: Gay Men's Reading and Writing Tool Use, p. 195). Seventy-one percent of these participants utilized more than one reading and writing tool. Eighty-nine percent of gay men utilized both reading and discourse tools, highlighting the relation between cultural scripts that are read and those that are appropriated.

In addition, a variety of different types of reading tools were used across stakeholders. For example, both affirming and conversion oriented therapeutic books were used by gay men. However, a notably greater percentage of participants reported utilizing affirming literature (100% Jewish, 71% Christian) such as "God vs. Gay? The Religious Case for Equality" by Jay Michaelson (2011) as opposed to conversion oriented literature. Participants reported that these books were helpful in reconciling their faith and sexuality, disclosing to their loved ones, as well demystifying and normalizing their sexual orientation.

Diverse Benefits and Outcomes of Reading & Writing Tools

A broad range of beneficial outcomes were reported by participants who utilized reading and writing tools to mediate their pre and post-disclosure experiences. For example, a 22 year-old participant from a Seventh Day Adventist background shared that

being able to, to read about the fact that other people were able to be gay and, and be normal kind of made me go 'Oh, well, you know, I guess they can do it, maybe I can too.' ... reading books where, you know, people told their families and they were accepted, and I said 'Well, um, maybe it would work, I don't know,' you know, 'cause up until that point I'd always, just like, I can't ever tell anyone... and I was just totally confused.

In the above narrative the participant shared that reading affirming literature helped him in a number of ways: the books helped the participant normalize and humanize the gay community, feel more comfortable with his sexual orientation, and provide a positive and hopeful disclosure model. In addition, two participants from Mormon backgrounds shared that their experiences with religious literature focusing on the struggles of same-sex attraction were helpful as it provided them with strength and insight (see Image 1: Exodus International Literature, p. 179). For example, a 22 year-old practicing Mormon shared

I'm reading a book right now, and it's excellent, it's kind of like an LDS view of homosexuality... this book discourages that ["praying the gay away"] and says that when that's your goal, when your goal is to become straight, then you become frustrated... this book kind of advocates becoming strong and becoming whole with yourself and becoming a follower of Jesus Christ in and of yourself without any conditions...and focusing your efforts on building your relationship with Him rather than focusing your efforts on becoming straight.

The above narrative is particularly complex as although the participant has come to accept the possible permanence of his sexual orientation, he still views it as a struggle since the actualization of this lifestyle would be incongruent with his faith. The participant therefore has found solace in literature which emphasizes the spiritual dimensions of his experience as well as the importance of accepting the reality of his sexual orientation within his religious context.

An additional sociorelational benefit was uniquely related to the use of social media tools such as Facebook across stakeholder groups (2 Christian mothers, 8 Gay Christian men, 7 Gay Jewish men). Fifty-three percent of gay men (5 Jewish, 3 Christian) that used Facebook discussed their use of Facebook as a tool for networking with members of the gay community or religious figures pre and post their disclosure. In addition, 46% of gay men (4 Jewish, 3 Christian) that used Facebook spoke about having “*come out on Facebook.*” As one moderately religious 22 year-old Mormon shared “*I had come out on Facebook and everybody knew. I think there were some people who had their heads under a rock, but those people I don’t really talk to in general anyway.*” A similar sentiment was shared by a 34 year-old participant from an Orthodox Jewish background, as he said “*I remember unblocking my profile and changing my status to “interested in men.” And changing my status to “I’m Gay.”* In this narrative the participant makes it clear that he publically shared (unblocking profile) both his sexual orientation (*interested in men*) as well as his group identification (“*I’m Gay*”) on Facebook.

In addition, Facebook served as a method for participants to determine if and when their relatives’ and friends’ attitudes towards homosexuality changed. For example, a participant from a Seventh Day Adventist background spoke about having seen his mother’s attitudes towards gay marriage change in their Facebook statuses, thereby giving him the courage to disclose. Similarly, the participant’s mother also discussed her use of Facebook to both “*lay the*

groundwork” for homophobic religious relatives to become educated and to share with her son that her own attitudes had changed. The mother specifically noted that she was “*pretty sure he [her son] noticed*” her pre-disclosure Facebook posts focused on “*allowing gay marriage, and you know and respecting gay people.*” This narrative is particularly interesting as it suggests that the mother and son have not explicitly discussed the mother’s use of Facebook, although it still impacted the disclosure process as the mother was able to let her son know she was receptive to his disclosure via her Facebook posts.

The beneficial outcomes of social media tools in the disclosure process of gay men were additionally discussed in regards to blogs. Gay men discussed a number of benefits associated with their blogging. One noted benefit of blogging and other virtual environments is the safe space that is created by the anonymity and alternative social context (Etengoff, 2011a; 2012). In the words of a 27 year-old liberal Mormon,

growing up you very much feel like you are alone and that no one else understands. Because it’s not talked about much. [C]: Right. And so being online in a community of more academic writers kind of talking about what is going on, I guess it was a safe way to address a problem of what should never be talked about.

In addition to noting the safety provided by blogging and creating a different community context (“*more academic*”), the participant contrasts this with the isolating silence of his youth. This discussion of the hostility or condemnation that can be experienced via silence is similarly expressed by Foucault in his discussion of sexuality and religion, as he says

Silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is... an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies... There is not one, but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses (Foucault, 1978, p.27).

Within this context it becomes clear that the participant's discourse via his blogging is addressing the unspoken hostile discourse of his religious community.

In addition, participants shared that the act of blogging itself was cathartic. For example, a 22 year-old moderately religious Mormon shared that

initially, it [blogging] was very helpful in terms of getting everything out and writing things down and it was a cathartic experience just writing, then came the connecting with other people portion of it all, [C]: Right, and, meeting others and sort of becoming a part of and seeing a larger part of an ad-hoc community of gay Mormons who were there to kind of support and love each other.

In the above narrative the participant shares that the blogging experience was helpful as the writing process itself was personally cathartic in addition to allowing the participant to connect to and be supported by others in similar circumstances. This process of social networking via blogging was additionally facilitated for Mormon participants by the “*blog called the “MoHo” directory, a listing, where you could find every gay Mormon blog on the planet, if*

you'd like.” The term “*MoHo*” was discussed as “...*an easy way to identify... It's like a backwards homosexual, you know... It provides a label for some people that are looking for that for their lives, looking for a community, and acceptance.*” In addition, some Mormon participants shared that they were “*kind of hoping that Mormons would read it and find it [their blog]*”, suggesting that the blogging experience was focused on both seeking social support and educating others. In addition, bloggers from both Jewish and Christian backgrounds shared their interest in having family members read their blogs, thereby developing a better understanding of their experience.

Additional sociorelational benefits were associated with traditional forms of discourse as well, such as letter writing. For example, four gay men (3 Jewish, 1 Mormon) and one Jewish mother independently (and not directly in response to the writing task) wrote letters focusing on their negative experiences related to the intersection of religious contexts and sexual orientation. Four letters were specifically addressed to religious leaders that were in positions of power to change current policies. This empowering method of narrative construction allowed participants to focus on alternative problems than those discussed in their interview. In fact, 49% of the problems explored by all participants that wrote letters were not explored in their personal interviews.

Participants wrote about problems related to scriptural concerns as well as their religious leadership's contemporary decisions and actions related to the gay community. For example, a gay Mormon participant wrote of his dissatisfaction from an Old Testament exegetic standpoint (e.g., “*Why would this one "to'eba" item be different from any others in that respect?*”) as well as from a contemporary context (e.g., “*It is of course well known that the specifically LDS scriptural canon never mentions homosexuality*”). Similarly, a Jewish participant wrote of his

textual concerns in terms of contemporary relevance (e.g., “*I do not think the, that verses in Leviticus are applicable to contemporary understandings of gay identity, of loving relationships*”). In addition, the participant focused on the human consequences of literal scriptural interpretation (e.g., “*I have friends, Jewish and Catholic, who have been disowned from their families, kicked out etc. How can Judaism prefer the oppression of its people based on broad scriptural readings of a few specific verses in the bible...?*”).

In addition, letters were used to present mediational solutions to religious leaders that suggested new alternatives to the oppressive experiences of the past (Daiute, 2013). For example, a gay man from a Jewish background instructed his rabbinic reader that

exercising leadership is more than acknowledging pain and anguish... True leadership mandates an honest and open engagement with the laws and principles and spirit of halacha [a system of religious laws and commandments], reconfiguring the social spaces and life cycles of the Orthodox community to include gay people who desire religious fulfillment and a place to raise their families, celebrate their smachot [happy life cycle events], educate their children, care for their sick, bury their dead, and recite kaddish [a public daily prayer of mourning] for their departed...

In the above excerpt the participant focuses on his desire to have the rabbinical leadership utilize the spirit of the law to mediate his painful conflict between religion and sexuality. The participant elaborates upon the specifics of how this could be achieved by providing

examples of how members of the gay community could be integrated into religious rituals relating to family, community, and life cycle activity systems.

Religious Tool Use: Scriptural Interpretation, Religious Council, Prayer

Religious experiences are both relational and performative as religious participation usually occurs within a social and public context in addition to private and personal contexts (Etengoff, 2011b; Day, 2002). In addition, religious development is an activity that both influences and is influenced by cultural tools and artifacts (e.g., religious texts and rituals), cultural and individual practices (e.g., religious commitments and activities), and activity-meaning systems (e.g., familial, religious, and social). Given this sociocultural perspective, religious experiences and norms are understood to alter over time alongside changing social dynamics and societal expectations (Belzen, 1999). Below, I expand this discussion by presenting an analysis of how different stakeholders' use of religious tools altered over time as they mediated familial conflicts and existential difficulties related to their or their relative's sexual orientation. I begin this discussion by presenting an analysis of between-group differences and continue with an analysis of the diverse ways in which various religious tools were used across stakeholder groups.

Differences in Religious Tool Use across Stakeholder Positions

A greater percentage of Christian family allies as compared to Jewish family allies used religious tools to mediate their activity-meaning system. This difference was most pronounced in regards to prayer, with 63% of Christian family allies utilizing prayer as compared to 0% of

Jewish family allies. These between-group differences in religious tool use may be a result of Orthodox Jews believing that prohibitions written in the *Torah* cannot be changed and are therefore less likely to engage any religious cultural tools, such as Living Word scriptural interpretations, to mediate difficulties (e.g., “*it’s a Torah prohibition and we have to uphold it*”). Alternatively, this difference may be related to Orthodox Jewish family allies reconciling these issues in secular counseling sessions. In addition, a lower percentage of gay men and clinicians discussed the use of prayer as compared to other religious tools, indicating that Christian family allies’ heavy use of prayer is particularly unique (See Table 7: Examples and Percentage of Participants using Cultural Tools to Mediate Religion, Conflicts, and Relationships, p.188).

Diverse forms of Religious Tool Use

Bakhtin (1981, p. 351) wrote that “the transmission and interpretation of the divinely inspired...word are acts of religious thought and discourse having the greatest importance.” This standpoint positions scriptural interpretation as an important activity as opposed to a ‘passive reader’ process. Within Vygotsky’s (1934/1978) cultural-historical activity framework, the act of scriptural interpretation is also understood to be situated within relational and sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, the activities of scriptural transmission and interpretation can serve a tool use function, enabling the actor to mediate relational, cultural, and theological conflicts. Given this framework emphasizing the sociocultural and relational contexts of religious textual interpretation and transmission, the enacted fundamental, historical-contextual, and Living Word methods of this process are likely to vary in relation to the unique lived experience of the individual. Below I expand upon this discussion by presenting an analysis of the diverse forms of

gay men's scriptural exegesis practices as well as their use of other religious tools within this activity system, such as prayer.

Diverse forms of Scriptural Interpretation

Fourteen gay men discussed multiple forms of scriptural interpretation as well as the contemporary ir/relevance of scriptural verses. For some gay participants this was a transitional mediational tool whose importance was inversely related to their comfort with their sexuality. For example, a 34 year-old non-Orthodox Jewish participant recruited via his affiliation with a Jewish gay group shared that his thoughts on the texts in Leviticus that prohibit sexual relationships between men (18:22) were initially more fundamentalist/literalist in focus:

in the beginning of, in my coming up out process, I said you know what, I define that passuk (verse) as anal sex and I am just going to refrain from that. [C] OK. You know, whether giving or receiving, I didn't think it mattered from the passuk (verse) and I said I am just going to like avoid that as a whole and still be gay. Uhm, you know, I have since stopped that thinking, in the last few years and I think a lot of that just comes like from like even normal progression.

However, the participant continued to explain that he now engages in anal sex and believes that this choice is only between him and God, suggesting that he may now be more oriented toward a Living Word method of interpretation. Other participants' efforts to mediate the text illustrate the historical-contextual method of interpretation in their focus on the ancient societal context in

which the text was written as well as the authority of the author/s. For example, a 29 year-old gay man from a Catholic background felt that Paul's personal history of sin undermined the relevance of his authorship of Corinthians. As he said, *"I don't, it's kind of like Bill Clinton coming to you to talk to you about the importance of, you know, staying within your marriage, and, uh... You know, I mean, would you really take that serious?"* This sentiment was similarly echoed by a mother from a Seventh Day Adventist background who shared that *"Paul seemed very prideful and stuck on himself"* and that much of what he shared was *"his personal opinion"* concluding with the thought that she was therefore *"a lot more worried about loving my fellow man than I am about what Paul said."*

Other participants additionally focused on the lack of verifiable authentic translations of both Greek and Hebrew terminology. For example, a 22 year-old self-identified agnostic from a Seventh Day Adventist background shared *"it's [Corinthians] actually using the same word over and over and over again... and it, it basically, it just meant, you know, bad people who do this, and it could have encompassed any number of those things."* Although the above methods of interpretation seem to be largely cerebral, this mediational tool use was often occurring within emotionally laden contexts, as is indicated by the above participant's repetition of articles (*"it, it"*). In addition, some participants explicitly discussed their frustration and angst related to the text and their search for mediational interpretations. For example, a 25 year-old participant from an Evangelical background said *"Oh, well, you know, I – previously, I was very concerned with it, you know, 'cause like you know, the Bible is infallible, yada yada yada, and so I would really work to find support that it was not valid."* In addition to the participant explicitly stating that he was *"very concerned"* with the text, the emotional context of his exegesis is indicated by his use

of qualifiers, repetition of the phrase “*you know*”, and the use of vague, pejorative terms (“*yada yada yada*”).

Differences across Stakeholder’s Temporal Uses of Religious Council

While religious allies typically discussed their concerns with religious council post their relative’s disclosure, gay men from Jewish (75%) and Christian backgrounds (44%) shared that they disclosed to a religious figure prior to disclosing to friends or relatives. This experience was often noted with mixed-feelings as participants shared that they felt that their religious figures had limited knowledge regarding the issue, were unable to make any changes in religious policy, and reaffirmed that their sexuality was in conflict with religious values. For example, a Jewish participant that disclosed to his rabbi while studying in Israel after high school shared

I mean like it was good to be able to talk to someone about it but I, I dunno, I also expected to find something and I like they didn’t really like, there was nothing to do. I mean actually one of them did suggest a kind of reparative therapy... And I really do think he was like coming from the best possible, trying to do what was best for me.

In the above narrative the participant emphasizes that although his rabbi had the best intentions, this experience was unsatisfactory in that “*there was nothing to do.*”

Alternatively, all family allies that approached a religious figure regarding sexuality and religion reported that the experience was supportive and comforting.

However, it should be noted that one Catholic mother approached two different priests

and found one to be affirming and the other to be damning. Although, this participant shared that her present orientation towards her son is based upon the affirming priest's perspective who told her that *"if it's your church or your children... you choose your children, because in essence... God is love, and if you don't love your children, you don't love God."* The majority of allies may have reported only positive reactions from their religious council because they did not seek council from religious leaders who had already made their negative perspectives known.

Diverse Uses of Prayer

Prayer is a flexible cultural tool as is demonstrated by how participants used prayer in a number of different ways to mediate their activity-meaning system. Some gay men from Mormon backgrounds shared that they had received a personal revelation regarding the issue of their sexuality and religious goals. For example, a gay Mormon participant shared that the Lord responded to his prayers with the answer that he *"needed to...prepare to find a husband. And that we could adopt a few kids."* Alternatively, some gay men shared that they prayed for sex-changes, understanding, acceptance, help, and peace. Although it would at first appear that prayers related to sex changes would be unhelpful and should therefore not be coded as a successful or helpful mediational strategy, many participants shared that this form of prayer was an important and healing junction in their journey. For example, one Mormon participant shared that although God did not answer his prayer for a change in his sexual orientation, this was an answer that allowed him to then accept his sexuality.

In addition, participants' interviews were coded for the use of prayer as a tool when they discussed that they had stopped praying in relation to sexual and religious frustration. In this case, the choice to not engage the cultural tool of prayer according to cultural scripts and norms

was a deliberate act on the part of the participant to mediate the tension between their interacting activity systems of religion and sexuality with the tool of not praying. For example, an agnostic gay participant from a Seventh Day Adventist background shared *“I used to cry myself to sleep praying to God that he would fix me, you know, and that clearly never did... and then that was probably the point at which I finally said okay, you know what, I am [gay], there’s nothing I can do about it.”* Furthermore, this participant is currently on academic probation at his religious school for not attending the required number of chapel services due to his questions of faith.

Gay Men’s Use of Prayer Post-religious Disaffiliation

However, even when gay participants no longer identified with the religious community of their youth, many still felt connected to a higher power through prayer. For example, one gay participant who had been excommunicated from the Mormon Church shared

I feel that God has put me where I am, and I feel that if He wants me to change or do something differently, He would be the one to tell me... And that’s thanks to my religious background, because I still believe that God hears prayer and answers to prayer....

A similar sentiment regarding the continued personal relevancy of prayer was shared by a no longer Orthodox, although culturally affiliated Jewish participant who said *“my strong relationship with God is because I have always spoken to God throughout this whole entire struggle.”* The participant later went on to explain that although he does not formally observe all of the commandments he still feels closely connected to God.

Conclusion

In this chapter I illustrated the variety of ways in which participants appropriated and modified the use of cultural tools to mediate their conflicts between the interacting subsystems of religion, community, family, and sexuality. In this chapter, cultural tools were understood to be situated within religious (e.g., prayer) as well as secular (e.g., Facebook) activity systems and used to mediate sociorelations on both the fellow man and God level.

Cultural tool use varied considerably across stakeholder positions, both in terms of the number of participants using the tools and the way in which tools were used. For example, a greater percentage of Jewish family allies (86%) used the tool of therapy than Christian allies (12%). However, a greater percentage of Christian allies than Jewish family allies used the religious tools of prayer, religious council, and scriptural interpretation (for further information see Table 7: Examples and Percentages of Participants using Cultural Tools to Mediate Religion, Conflicts, and Relationships, p. 188). These differences may be related to Jewish family allies attending secular educational settings for a greater number of years than their Christian counterparts, influencing their belief in secular counseling tools. Alternatively, this between-group difference in allies' cultural tool use may be related to different contemporary sociocultural beliefs in the relevancy of personal miracles or divine revelation.

Differences also emerged across other stakeholders' use of tools. For example, a greater percentage of gay men, as compared to their family allies, explicitly wrote letters about their problems. Contrastingly, a greater percentage of family allies, as compared to their gay relatives, wrote letters to religious leaders that discussed their concerns implicitly. Such differences may be related to gay men's unique sexual minority stress experiences and their pressing desire to be heard after being communally silenced in the past. Alternatively, family members that still

identify with their faith communities may be more likely than their secular gay relatives to observe sociocultural scripts related to voicing complaints within the religious institutional framework. Such differences in both the types of tools that are used as well as the way in which they are used are reflective of the different roles that each stakeholder occupies in the activity-meaning system. Meaning, stakeholders reported using cultural tools in personally meaningful and relevant ways to navigate their unique and specific conflicts.

In addition to the many differences in the use of tools, a number of shared forms and methods of tool use emerged amongst stakeholders. Firstly, all stakeholders used or recommended the use of cultural tools to mediate conflicts. Secondly, all stakeholder groups utilized a wide range of cultural tools to accomplish diverse goals. These commonalities suggest that the theory of cultural tool use is both meaningful and relevant across stakeholders. Furthermore, this shared use of tools may be a cornerstone to both familial parties navigating conflicts successfully. Moreover, therapists' discussions of a wide range of tools indicate that like strategies, successful tool use may be taught within a therapeutic context as well.

Chapter VII: Conclusion and Implications

This dissertation research was inspired by my personal and professional experiences with gay men from religious backgrounds. As both a friend and Graduate Teaching Fellow, I have worked to create safe spaces for sexual minorities to share their experiences and for others to confront and deconstruct stigma and ignorance. While teaching an undergraduate Human Sexual Behavior course, I was continuously intrigued by my students' efforts to make meaning of our discussions and readings given their religious and largely heteronormative contexts. In addition, my research on the relation between familial religious practices and individual religious engagement and tool use during cultural minorities' emerging adulthood experience highlighted the value of utilizing a complex sociocultural perspective of development that includes the family system (Etengoff, 2011; Etengoff & Daiute, In Press). Motivated by these research and pedagogical experiences, I developed a scholarly interest in the pathways that sexual minorities and their religious relatives construct and use to make meaning of their sociorelational experiences.

A Study of Human Development

The primary research questions of this study were aimed at exploring how gay men and their religious family allies mediate religion and sexuality in relationally flexible ways to make meaning of their experiences and conflicts. As presented in the first chapter of this work, human development is an active, relational process of mediation as opposed to a passive participation in the inevitable. As an active and relational process, human development is methodologically approached and studied as a diverse process as opposed to one that focuses on coherence alone. This approach to development as a relationally flexible process is of particular contemporary

importance given our increasingly diverse society and the growing permeability of ethnic and religious communities (Etengoff & Daiute, 2013). In light of these changing sociocultural contexts, the developmental process of engaging relationships in complex and flexible ways is now becoming an important development task across age groups and family member positions. Given this perspective of development, this dissertation studied human development by focusing on how family units maintained relationships by using cultural tools and strategies to mediate conflicts within secular and religious activity systems. Within this framework, individuals are not bound to a uniform and inevitable unfolding of developmental and relational stages. For example, while some gay men had developed strong allied relationships with select family members, other relationships continued to be difficult highlighting the need for both parties to be engaged in developmental processes, such as humanization. Moreover, some participants shared their concern that their relationships with family allies may alter once new variables, such as a same-sex marriage, were introduced. In light of such sentiments, it becomes clear that individual development is an ongoing relational process as opposed to a linear and hierarchical rite of passage that is uniformly adopted across relationships.

Sampling the System

Given my broad doctoral training in socio-historical theory, I wanted to sample the religious, secular, sexual and family systems that gay men and their religious relatives interact with as they resolve sociorelational and sociocultural conflicts during the disclosure process. This study is therefore the first to incorporate clinicians, gay men's and their family allies' perspectives of their experiences negotiating issues related to family, religion, and sexuality. The family unit of analysis was preserved by connecting the narratives of different family members

from the same unit and presenting tabular results on an individual and family systems level. For example, Tables 4.1-4.6 present the conflicts reported by clinicians, gay men, their religious family allies, as well as the percentage of dyads that reported conflicts within the same category (p.188-190). The conflict category with the greatest percentage of dyad reports is the adjustment of expectations (63% Christian dyads, 100% Jewish dyads), although this was not necessarily the case for each individual religious and family member group. In fact, only 40% of Jewish gay men reported experiencing expectation difficulties as compared to 100% of Jewish gay participants that reported experiencing family difficulties. Moreover, although 100% of Jewish gay participants reported experiencing family difficulties, family difficulties were only mutually reported by participating Jewish dyads 71% of the time. Similarly, while the number of gay men and family allies discussing humanization strategies differed, the family unit analysis provided in Table 5 highlights the relational importance of humanization as 100% of participating dyads spoke of humanizing each other as well as the gay community (p.191). Lastly, Table 7's presentation of individual and dyad reports of cultural tool use give voice to the differences and similarities within the family system (p.188). For example, a greater percentage of participating Jewish gay men reported using religious tools as compared to their relatives, suggesting that they may be more motivated to mediate an equitable place for themselves within the Jewish community as compared to their religious relatives that may not believe such a place can be found (i.e., "*It's a Torah prohibition and we have to uphold it*"). However, 86% of participating Jewish dyads reported that they had individually participated in therapeutic support groups or counseling, suggesting that this may be a shared safe space for Jewish families to explore religious concerns together. Alternatively, Table 7 indicates that support groups and therapy may

not be the best mediational space for Christian family units as no participating Christian dyads reported using therapeutic systems.

Cultural Artifacts, Stakeholder Documents and Tools

In addition, in an effort to include the mutual developmental interactions of the individual and their sociocultural context, I included analyses of clinicians' perspectives, religious stakeholder documents, and cultural tool use as well. Analyses presented herein support prior cultural historical activity research suggesting that individuals' engagement with cultural tools is an interactive, goal-directed, sociorelational process of development (e.g., Daiute, 2006). As explored in Table 6, although cultural structures exist for prayer, council, and scriptural interpretation, participants customized these cultural artifacts and structures as they used them to mediate interpersonal and sociocultural conflicts. For example, a 22 year-old gay self-identified agnostic from a Seventh Day Adventist background shared that he continued to engage religious texts to help him improve communications with his religious relatives. In his words, "*I was trying to basically prove that it [being gay] was acceptable...it wasn't because I was actually needing to know, because to me it, it wasn't an issue anymore because I don't believe in Christianity anymore.*" Although this agnostic/atheistic sentiment was not shared by all participants, many participants spoke of using religious cultural tools such as scriptural interpretation, council of a religious leader, and prayer to make meaning of their familial and cultural relationships. In addition, participants reported utilizing the often secular, though sometimes secular and religious cultural tools of therapy and support groups, television and movies, as well as reading and writing.

Emerging Adulthood and Disclosure

Though not a criterion for inclusion, all recruited gay participants engaged their disclosure process during the developmental life phase of emerging adulthood (18-29 years). Emerging adulthood is a time characterized by seemingly endless possibilities and attainable choices that differ from previously socialized behaviors (Arnett, 1998). In addition, emerging adulthood is often a time of change in regards to romantic relationships and sexual behaviors (Arnett, 1998). For example, individuals often begin their sexual-disclosure process during late adolescence and continue during the emerging adulthood years of 18-29 (Dahl, 2011; D'Augelli, Hershberger, Pilkington, 2010). In summary, given the many concrete life changes that usually accompany this age, this stage often becomes the age of exploration, instability, being self-focused, feeling 'in-between', and yet, the age of attainable possibilities (Arnett, 2006). Within this perspective it becomes clear that sense-making is a task of utmost importance during this life phase and perhaps even more so for sexual minority emerging adults. Furthermore, the sense-making activities of gay men from religious backgrounds are particularly relationally-complex as they also engage family and religious subsystems of development. Social scientist can therefore learn a lot about this unique developmental period and its sociopolitical impact when the multiple dimensions of this experience are included systematically in both the research design and methods of analysis.

Summary of Findings

Participants across stakeholder groups demonstrated relationally complex and flexible methods of using cultural tools and humanization strategies to negotiate familial and communal

conflicts, suggesting that this developmental paradigm is already enacted by many religious family systems (See chapters 5 and 6). As participants discussed their adoption and transformation of cultural tools and symbols to achieve goals, resolve conflicts, and overcome obstacles such as social stigma, it was evident that their interactive individual-societal relations lead to the creation of meaning in their everyday activities (See Chapter 6). Prior research indicates that individuals identifying as sexual minorities can overcome the negative effects of social stigma within the context of intimacy and romantic relationships by engaging in meaning-making activities (Frost 2011), the results presented in this study suggest that this paradigm can be expanded to include other familial relationships as well.

Chapter 2 outlines the ways in which mediational strategies and cultural tool use can be operationalized as ways in which people resolve conflicts and enhance sociorelations. Though this argument has previously been applied to cultural tools such as prayer (Etengoff, 2011b), narrative (Daiute, 2010), history (Daiute, 2010), text messages (Lucic, 2010), and Second Life (Etengoff, 2012; Etengoff, 2011a), this article is the first to systematically apply this theory to gay men's and their religious relatives' mediational strategies and cultural tool use. Chapter 3 further illustrates the application of cultural historical activity theory to this unique socioreligious context of development with a discussion of how religious stakeholder document use can differ in relation to the interacting demands of sexual, secular, and religious subsystems. The interactive relation between these different subsystems of development is further explored in Chapters 4's analysis of the conflicts and difficulties that gay men and their religious relatives experience. Although a substantive amount of research focuses on disclosure related conflicts within religious contexts (e.g., Schnoor, 2003), Chapter 4 is the first systematic presentation of these conflicts and difficulties across subsystems from multiple stakeholder perspectives. In

addition to enhancing our understanding of the challenges that gay men and their religious relatives navigate, this chapter aimed to operationalize a more comprehensive understanding of the developmental context as a multifaceted activity system comprised of stakeholders and their mediating/ed interactions focused on meaning-making.

As American society continues to become more diverse and permeable to change, individuals are increasingly likely to mediate sociocultural issues within sociorelational contexts. Thus, human development needs to be studied as an agentic process that is situated within individuals' choices related to their engagement within the interactive web of sociocultural, sociorelational, and familial systems (Daiute, Forthcoming). Chapter 5 and chapter 6 offer a theoretical and methodological case study of how such a developmental systems approach can be operationalized given this contemporary context. For example, chapter 5 illustrates the importance of studying human development within a relationally complex paradigm by focusing on how gay men and their religious relatives humanize each other and the gay community in diverse ways, focusing on the unique needs of the 'other'. Similarly, chapter 6 focuses on gay men's, their religious relatives', and clinicians' methods of uniquely mediating conflicts related to religion, sexuality, and family with diverse uses of cultural tools. In summary, this dissertation suggests a theoretical and methodological approach to studying human development in a way that is sensitive to the relationally complex diversities and lived experiences of gay men and their religious relatives during the current era of sociopolitical change.

Participants across all stakeholder groups reported navigating familial conflicts during the disclosure period. However, given the different stakeholder positions of gay men and their religious allies, each stakeholder group navigated different types of familial conflicts. For example, religious family allies were often faced with the daunting task of educating other

family members, mediating family relationships, and defending their support of their gay relative. In contrast, gay men spoke of trying to work through extended periods of family estrangement and hostility related to their sexual orientation. In addition, clinicians', gay men's, and allies' reports highlighted the interrelationship between various subsystem conflicts such as family, religion, communal homophobia, and the adjustment of expectations. Although both gay men and religious family allies reported experiencing conflicts and difficulties related to similar issues, the emotional impact of these sources of stress seem to be uniquely experienced by the gay men sampled. For example, only gay men reported experiencing depression, anxiety, and suicidality in relation to the stress of the disclosure period. Such results support the growing body of research regarding sexual minority stress and emphasize the importance of developing relationally complex and flexible interactions to mediate post-disclosure conflicts (e.g., Chen & Tyron, 2012).

In this work, relational complexity has been defined as a “context-sensitive extension of perspective taking in diverse and contentious circumstances” (Daiute, 2010; Lucic, 2012, p. 175). Participants in this study enacted the theory of relational complexity by developing diverse humanization strategies to mediate their conflicts and difficulties with relatives as well as with the gay community. While participants demonstrated a variety of ways to actualize the theory of humanization, all humanization strategies shared the goal of affirming the other's humanity and human potential, altering the dynamics of power, and promoting relational attachment (Bell & Khoury, 2011; Hidalgo, 2012). For example, gay men frequently explained their allies' early post-disclosure difficulties by recognizing their personal and cultural contexts as well as identifying with their temporal needs to process this new reality. In addition, religious allies often highlighted their unconditional love for their gay relative as well as their recognition that

one's sexual orientation disclosure does not have to alter their prior goals, dreams, and values. Furthermore, both gay men and their religious allies humanized the gay community by normalizing the gay community experience. For example, gay participants spoke of how AIDS is a concern for heterosexual couples as well. Similarly, a number of religious allies focused on how members of the gay community are seeking substantive and meaningful relationships just as many heterosexuals are.

Gay men and their religious allies reported utilizing a variety of cultural tools to navigate their conflicts and difficulties. As the findings from both chapter 3 and chapter 6 indicate, briefly summarized in Tables 6 and 7, individuals reported modifying ancient cultural tools as they mediated contemporary conflict contexts. For example, a Methodist mother referenced Jesus in her discussion of loving her son post his sexual disclosure, as she said *"I look at Jesus' message of love and forgiveness and that we're friends by the blood, that I don't feel that people are condemned by the actions they have done."* In addition to the appropriation and mediation of religious artifacts and historical cultural tools, gay men and religious allies reported utilizing popular cultural tools to mediate the disclosure process. For example, gay participants reported using blogs and Facebook to heal, network, disclose their sexual identity, and educate others in their religious communities and family systems. Contrastingly, religious family allies were less likely to use computer-mediated communication tools to make sense of their experience and instead used these tools to make sense of their relative's experience. In addition, looking at the television and movies description presented in Table 6, it becomes clear that this form of media engagement was also primarily focused on understanding the gay individual's perspective. Such results indicate that religious family members need to utilize multiple tools to develop an

understanding of the unique sexual minority stressors that their gay relatives are mediating if they are to become allies.

According to the findings in this study, we can see that gay men's *and* their religious family allies' awareness of the sociocultural contexts of their relationships are important components in the successful negotiation of their conflicts with each other and with their respective communities. Participants discussed utilizing a variety of cultural tools and mediational strategies to navigate the complex web of their activity system. Analyses of participants' humanization strategies and tool use support the argument that development is an agentive and relational process occurring within sociocultural and historical contexts. Furthermore, in addition to participants using cultural tools to manage their interpersonal relationships, participants used cultural tools to affect change within their cultural and communal activity system. For example, gay men and religious relatives shared that they had written and sent letters to their religious leaders regarding the changes that could be made in their community to reduce homophobia and prejudice. Furthermore, communal change has begun via their very participation in this study. In fact, I have already been informed that an Orthodox synagogue in New Jersey has begun establishing inclusive policies as a result of the rabbi's wife becoming more sensitive to these issues due to her work as a research assistant for this project. Such changes highlight the interwoven tapestry of individual, familial and community development and demonstrate the necessity of approaching the study of human development from a cultural historical activity perspective that highlights secular and religious cultural tool use.

Limitations of the Present Study

This dissertation provides the first multilayered description of how a sample of gay men and their religious family members mediated conflicts related to sexuality, religion and family subsystems in relationally complex ways via their use of humanization strategies and cultural tools. Moreover, this study is the first systematic exploration of clinicians' perspectives regarding the therapeutic process with gay men and their religious relatives. Given the framework of cultural historical activity theory, this stakeholder group's perspective is particularly important as clinicians are in the unique position to assist gay men and their family members in navigating both secular and religious subsystems. In addition, this study also suggests a theoretical and methodological approach for studying relational development in a way that is sensitive to the religious diversities of gay men and their religious relatives in the current era of sociopolitical change.

The purpose of this study was to highlight diverse ways in which sociorelational conflicts and sociocultural difficulties related to religion, sexuality and family are mediated by gay men and their religious relatives, and as such the specific results of the present study cannot be generalized beyond this population. In addition, the results of the present study must be interpreted in light of the associated sampling and data collection limitations. Firstly, future research should expand the general sample size as well as that of religious and regional subgroups. For example, the Christian sample was limited in that half of the participants were from the same religious subgroup (Mormon), while the other half identified as having diverse religious backgrounds (e.g., Seventh Day Adventist, Catholic, Evangelical, Methodist). Moreover, differences in religious affiliation were often accompanied by different regional locations, making it difficult to assess how responses may be related to religious or regional

experiences. In addition, due to recruitment difficulties, the Jewish and Christian participants in the study lived in different regions of the United States and as a result more Jewish participants were interviewed in person as compared to the Christian participants. Secondly, the generalizability of this study is limited as the participants recruited were already engaged in mediational strategies such as support groups and blogging. In addition, as this study was designed to be an exploratory narrative analysis study, a smaller sample size was viewed as acceptable. However, this sample size is not large enough to statistically indicate whether results are representative of a pattern within the larger population of the sample studied. Furthermore, due to sampling restrictions, this study relied on gay men's reports of their non-allied family members' behavior. Non-allied relatives may have different perspectives regarding their behavior and future research efforts should therefore aim to include both allied and non-allied family members. Therefore, researchers and clinicians should proceed with caution before applying these results to different religious and regional and groups that are not already engaged in strategies to manage the interaction between religious, sexual, and familial systems and values.

In addition, this dissertation was designed as an exploratory study of interacting systems rather than an intervention as it was the first research work to study this developmental junction for gay men and their religious relatives in terms of mediational strategies and cultural tool use. However, about 50% of gay men and their religious allies shared without prompt or solicitation that the interview experience was healing and beneficially impacted their relationships with each other, suggesting that the interview narrative process was an important sense-making intervention. For example, a 23 year-old gay Christian participant shared the following with me a couple of weeks after his and his mother's participation:

I'm very grateful that my mother and I got to participate in this study. It opened up a lot of things that we hadn't talked about directly, and especially with my mother getting ill, we've both appreciated that openness. It brought us closer together, so I have to thank you for that from the bottom of my heart.

Similar sentiments were shared by religious family allies as well. For example, an Evangelical mother shared that *“I think maybe with both of us having done this interview, maybe this’ll open the door for us to talk a little bit more.”* In addition, four dyads requested copies of their individual transcripts with the goal of exchanging their transcripts post-participation. In addition to such participant feedback highlighting the sense-making function of narrative construction, it also illustrates the unique benefits of relationally complex semi-structured interviews. Although the majority of participants had already engaged various humanization strategies and mediational cultural tool uses prior to their participation, such reports indicate that participation in this study provided an additional benefit. Stakeholders may have reported positive participation outcomes because many had not previously engaged in therapy of any kind as well as the fact that none of the participants had previously engaged in any form of family therapy. Such results indicate that it may be beneficial for clinicians working with gay men from religious backgrounds to encourage some form of family member participation. However, preliminary analyses of the clinicians sampled in this study indicate that gay men are usually seeking individual therapy and are not including their family members in the therapeutic process. It may therefore be beneficial for clinicians to begin this process of family inclusion by encouraging their gay clients to participate in relationally complex interviews (see Appendix D: Measures, p. 176).

Implications for Future Research

This dissertation contributes to two debates. First, this dissertation argues that institutionalized prejudice and conflict must be approached as a dynamic that is co-created by the interactions between individuals, family structures, and their community systems. Second, this dissertation adds to the discussion of how these dynamics can be altered by focusing on how gay men and their religious relatives improve interpersonal and sociocultural relations by using humanization strategies and cultural tools to address sexual minority prejudice and conflicts within their family systems and community. In contrast to much scholarship on gay men from religious backgrounds that focuses only on the negative impacts of institutionalized homophobia, this work focuses on how inter-group and inter-personal relations can be improved for gay men and their religious family allies.

The results herein suggest that religious family allies are motivated to navigate interpersonal conflicts and ritualized communal homophobia in an effort to maintain relationships and familial religious rituals. Given this framework, I believe that future research would benefit from designing and testing a system of relationally complex interviews for gay men and their religious family non-allied and allied members based on the work presented in this dissertation. Such interviews would focus on encouraging gay men and their relatives to make meaning of their own experiences as well as their relatives' in light of the various sociocultural contexts and conflicts that each uniquely negotiate. In contrast, the interviews conducted for this dissertation focused on a broad range of issues aside from humanization and were designed to gather accurate information as opposed to encourage humanization. In addition, this study would assess the benefits of focused humanization interviews for both allied and non-allied family members, in contrast to the current study that only incorporated allied family members.

Furthermore, although over 50% of participants reported that the participation experience helped them improve their familial relationships, this data is based only on those participants' that initiated a follow-up correspondence with me. It is possible that the percentage of participants reporting a relational improvement after the interview may in fact be higher. The benefits of participation would therefore have been best evaluated by pre and post participant ratings and descriptions of familial relationships and attitudes regarding homophobia. In addition, results indicated that familial conflicts were often related to internalized communal homophobia and that in some cases familial relationships improved as individuals' attitudes and relations towards the gay community improved. However, the relation between interview questions encouraging meaning-making about community connectedness and the positive relational outcomes of participation could not be explored due to a lack of pre and post measures. Future research would therefore benefit from incorporating a measure of community affiliation (Frost & Meyer, 2012). My next project will therefore include both pre and post participation ratings and descriptions in an effort to explore if a humanization interview can serve as a motivating intervention to reduce conflicts and sexual minority.

In addition, translating the work presented here regarding humanization into a preliminary evaluative measure would allow clinicians to assess whether clients were using this mediational strategy at intake and termination. For example, clinicians would administer a questionnaire or writing task at intake and termination that asked clients to identify a difficult family conflict and then explore some of the possible social and cultural contexts that may have contributed to this argument (i.e., Does anyone else in your community share this perspective? Why do you think that is?). Clinicians could then assess the extent to which their clients were able to relate to others in relationally complex ways as well as whether this had improved over

the course of therapy. In addition, such a measure could be used as a springboard to begin a therapeutic dialogue focusing on how clients are currently engaging their relationships with relatives and how they would like these relationships to progress in the future. For example, if a clinician read a client statement that focused only on how the conflict was caused by the other person's bigotry or hostile personality, the clinician could try to help the client discover the social and cultural origins of that prejudice (i.e, Do you think that person's perspective and behavior would change if there was a change in their community's perspective?). While such exercises would not excuse homophobic behavior, the process of trying to explain and humanize others may help clients create different narratives and interactions in the future. Clinical applications such as relationally complex interviews and humanization evaluation are built upon the premise that the narratives constructed within the therapeutic context are relational and developmental, thereby mediating individuals' sociorelational and sociocultural interactions.

Furthermore, it will be interesting to extend this line of research to include other sexual minorities from other religious groups practicing non-Western faiths. Although the Judeo-Christian heritage has received a considerable amount of attention regarding their heteronormative policies, recent research has indicated that gay men from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds are engaging similar conflicts (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Parekh, 2003). However, little is known about these conflicts and difficulties from a family system perspective. In addition, there has yet to be a systematic inquiry into the mediational strategies and cultural tools that are used by gay men and their Muslim and Hindu relatives during the disclosure process. Future inquiries into the experience of gay men and their relatives from these religious groups should be sensitive to the different roles that sexuality, family, gender, and religion play within diverse ethnic and religious cultures (Rodriguez, 2006). Furthermore, future research designs

should be sensitive to the mutual interactive relations between these activity-meaning subsystems that may also be interacting with ethnic diversity systems. Unfortunately, although there was no ethnicity criterion for inclusion all participants in this study identified as White, preventing an analysis of the impact and interaction of ethnic and religious activity systems.

An additional area of inquiry that may be beneficial is in regards to how the disclosure related experiences of other sexual and gender minorities and their religious relatives can be understood within a cultural historical activity context. For example, a growing trend amongst transgender adolescents and emerging adults is the public posting of an online video narrative documenting their transgender journey, often referred to as a vlog. At the time of this writing, a youtube search for the terms “transgender vlog” yielded about 7, 320 results. However, there has been no research to date regarding transgender vlogs despite the popularity of utilizing this computer-mediated communication tool to document and share the transgender experience (Scrofani & Velayo, 2012). Given that the contemporary popularity of technologically mediated spaces is unprecedented and sexual and gender minority youth are particularly likely to engage this medium for social support, future research should include computer-mediated communication systems in their analyses of cultural tool use (Harris, 2010; Lucic, 2012). However, researchers should proceed with caution before applying the findings of this study to other minority groups, as the experiences of sexual and gender minorities are diverse both within and between groups.

As technologies and society continue to develop the scope of contexts for studying human development will alter. However, as demonstrated in this dissertation, the cultural historical activity framework is flexible and dynamic enough to study such changes. Although Vygotsky’s theory was first conceived in an era without internet and during a time in which

homosexuality was defined as a mental illness, the theory's premise that individuals mediate interactive activity systems as they make sense of their lives is relevant and applicable to today's era of sociopolitical change and technological mediation. Moreover, this dissertation presents a case study of how this sociocultural framework of human development can be applied to study and promote changes in how individuals relate to each other as well as society. Within this lens, sexual minority stress as related to the often conflicting demands between sexual, familial and religious systems is positioned as a relational and sociocultural process that can be actively and successfully negotiated by gay men and their religious allies.

This applied paradigm can be the foundation for future research that continues to learn about how sexual minorities and their family members successfully develop and maintain relationships with each other as they negotiate internal, interpersonal and cultural conflicts. While this study provides a snapshot of this experience at a particular moment in sociocultural history, a longitudinal study would highlight how the negotiation of sexuality and religion may change over time within an intergenerational family system of development. The hope for continued interpersonal development and communal change is one that I share with the participants in this study and served as the motivation for this project. It is my sincerest wish that this dissertation can contribute to creating the changes that are needed to ensure that *"in 20 years...maybe this [being religious and having a gay relative] won't be a problem."*

Appendix A: Glossary

Activity-Meaning System- “depicts an environment of everyday life – a cross-context slice of life – wherein relationships across different points of view by different actors in the system interact in some way (Daiute, 2012)”

Artifacts- objects created by mankind, both recently and in the past, that provide information about the culture of its creator and diverse users

Artifact Appropriation- the process of taking and using cultural artifacts with “one’s own intention and one’s own accent” (Bakhtin 1981, p. 293 as cited in Engestrom, 1995, p. 4)

Cultural historical activity theory- views human development as an activity mediated with cultural tools and artifacts, cultural and individual histories, and multiple practices

Cultural Scripts- Discourse developed within cultural contexts and referenced by a number of stakeholders in the activity-meaning system

Cultural Tools- the socially constructed, historically situated, and individually adapted physical, symbolic, or abstract means by which we accomplish specific socio-relational goals (Etengoff & Daiute, 2012)

Daily Community Life- social and institutional interactions that are viewed as normative patterns of behavior by stakeholders within activity-meaning systems

Exegesis- a critical explanation or interpretation of a written biblical or religious text. Exegesis may include an analysis of the text’s, author’s, or audience’s historical and cultural context as well as grammatical and syntactical analyses of the text itself.

Eisegesis- is the process of subjectively interpreting a text to support a pre-held position or belief.

Humanization- “the process through which a person stands in relation to another person in a way that affirms her or his humanity and human potential (Hidalgo, 2012, p.1)”, thereby altering the dynamics of power and oppression (Hidalgo, 2012) and promoting relational attachment (Bell & Khoury, 2011)

LDS- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, also referred to as the Mormon Church, is the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States (National Council of Churches, 2011).

Leviticus- Third book of the Torah/Old Testament, traditionally believed to be compiled by Moses

Meaning-Making- the process by which meditational strategies are developed to address the relation and possible conflict between practices, experiences, the construction of the self, and cultural scripts (Daiute, 2010)

Mediation- the use of language and other symbol systems to perceive, manage, and develop self-society relations, thereby connecting one's consciousness to others (Daiute, 2010)

Mediated activity subsystems- the mutually interacting daily life experiences and meaning-making processes of communities, individuals, and families with the use of cultural tools

Power Relations- the sociorelational dynamic which establishes which party's interests are served

Proposition Eight- is a California ballot proposition and a 2008 state constitutional amendment adding a new provision, Section 7.5 of the Declaration of Rights, to the California Constitution, which provides that "only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California."

Provo Temple- Located in Utah, this is one of the busiest temples of the Church of the Latter Day Saints. The broad base and narrow spire of the Temple was designed to represent the cloudy and the fiery pillars that guided the Israelites through the wilderness (Larsen, 2011; LDSChurchTemples.com, Accessed, 11/4/2012)

Religious lifestyle practices- religious activities and reflections that are individually meaningful and culturally valued

Sense-making function- when a tool is used to figure out what is going on in the environment, how one fits, and how situations might be better (Daiute, 2012)

Stakeholders- "people whose perspectives (interests, experience, and knowledge) play out in relevant activities and interact across the activity-meaning system (Daiute, 2012)"

Structural Location-the specific sociorelational context of a stakeholder as related to other stakeholders, community structures, and subsystems within their activity-meaning system

Talmud- A central text of Rabbinic Judaism comprised of 63 tractates composed between 200-500 C.E.

Wailing Wall-The last remaining wall of the Second Temple (constructed 19 B.C.E) and site of Jewish prayer and pilgrimage for centuries

Appendix B: Statement of Principles

<http://statementofprinciplesnya.blogspot.com/2010/07/hebrew-translation.html>

July 22, 2010

11 Menahem Av, 5770 [Hebrew calendar date]

For the last six months a number of Orthodox rabbis and educators have been preparing a statement of principles on the place of our brothers and sisters in our community who have a homosexual orientation.

The original draft was prepared by Rabbi Nathaniel Helfgot. It was then commented upon by and revised based on the input from dozens of talmidei chachamim [religious sages], educators, communal rabbis, mental health professionals and a number of individuals in our community who are homosexual in orientation.

Significant revisions were made based upon the input of Rabbi Aryeh Klapper and Rabbi Yitzchak Blau who were intimately involved in the process of editing and improving the document during the last three months.

The statement below is a consensus document arrived at after hundreds of hours of discussion, debate and editing. At the bottom, is the initial cohort of signatures.

If you are an Orthodox rabbi, educator, or mental health professional and would like to add your signature to the current list, please send a short e-mail to: statementnya@hotmail.com with your name, address, cell phone number, and professional affiliation.

Statement of Principles on the Place of Jews with a Homosexual Orientation in Our Community

We, the undersigned Orthodox rabbis, *rashei yeshiva* [rabbinic leaders of religious schools], *ramim* [rabbinic experts that are classroom teachers], Jewish educators and communal leaders, affirm the following principles with regard to the place of Jews with a homosexual orientation in our community:

1. All human beings are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect (*kevod haberiyot*). Every Jew is obligated to fulfill the entire range of *mitzvot* [religious commandments] between person and person in relation to persons who are homosexual or have feelings of same sex attraction. Embarrassing, harassing or demeaning someone with a homosexual orientation or same-sex attraction is a violation of *Torah* [Bible] prohibitions that embody the deepest values of Judaism.
2. The question of whether sexual orientation is primarily genetic, or rather environmentally generated, is irrelevant to our obligation to treat human beings with same-sex attractions and orientations with dignity and respect.
3. *Halakhah* [religious laws] sees heterosexual marriage as the ideal model and sole legitimate outlet for human sexual expression. The sensitivity and understanding we properly express for human beings with other sexual orientations does not diminish our commitment to that principle.
4. *Halakhic* [religious laws] Judaism views all male and female same-sex sexual interactions as prohibited. The question of whether sexual orientation is primarily genetic, or rather environmentally generated, is irrelevant to this prohibition. While *halakha* [religious laws] categorizes various homosexual acts with different degrees of severity and opprobrium, including *toeivah* [abomination], this does not in any way imply that lesser acts are permitted.

But it is critical to emphasize that *halakha* [religious laws] only prohibits homosexual acts; it does not prohibit orientation or feelings of same-sex attraction, and nothing in the *Torah* [Bible] devalues the human beings who struggle with them. (We do not here address the issue of *hirhurei aveirah* [thoughts of performing prohibition], a *halakhic* [religious law] category that goes beyond mere feelings and applies to all forms of sexuality and requires precise *halakhic* [religious laws] definition.)

5. Whatever the origin or cause of homosexual orientation, many individuals believe that for most people this orientation cannot be changed. Others believe that for most people it is a matter of free will. Similarly, while some mental health professionals and rabbis in the community strongly believe in the efficacy of “change therapies”, most of the mental health community, many rabbis, and most people with a homosexual orientation feel that some of these therapies are either ineffective or potentially damaging psychologically for many patients.

We affirm the religious right of those with a homosexual orientation to reject therapeutic approaches they reasonably see as useless or dangerous.

6. Jews with a homosexual orientation who live in the Orthodox community confront serious emotional, communal and psychological challenges that cause them and their families great pain and suffering. For example, homosexual orientation may greatly increase the risk of suicide among teenagers in our community. Rabbis and communities need to be sensitive and empathetic to that reality. Rabbis and mental health professionals must provide responsible and ethical assistance to congregants and clients dealing with those human challenges.

7. Jews struggling to live their lives in accordance with *halakhic* [religious laws] values need and deserve our support. Accordingly, we believe that the decision as to whether to be open about one's sexual orientation should be left to such individuals, who should consider their own needs and those of the community. We are opposed on ethical and moral grounds to both the “outing” of individuals who want to remain private and to coercing those who desire to be open about their orientation to keep it hidden.

8. Accordingly, Jews with homosexual orientations or same sex-attractions should be welcomed as full members of the synagogue and school community. As appropriate with regard to gender and lineage, they should participate and count ritually, be eligible for ritual synagogue honors, and generally be treated in the same fashion and under the same *halakhic* [religious laws] and *hashkafic* [Jewish traditional thought] framework as any other member of the synagogue they join. Conversely, they must accept and fulfill all the responsibilities of such membership, including those generated by communal norms or broad Jewish principles that go beyond formal *halakha* [religious laws].

We do not here address what synagogues should do about accepting members who are openly practicing homosexuals and/or living with a same-sex partner. Each synagogue together with its rabbi must establish its own standard with regard to membership for open violators of *halakha* [religious laws]. Those standards should be applied fairly and objectively.

9. *Halakha* [religious laws] articulates very exacting criteria and standards of eligibility for particular religious offices, such as officially appointed cantor during the year or *baal tefillah* [prayer representative of the community] on the High Holidays. Among the most important of those criteria is that the entire congregation must be fully comfortable with having that person serve as its representative. This legitimately prevents even the most admirable individuals, who are otherwise perfectly fit *halakhically* [within the framework of religious laws], from serving in those roles. It is the responsibility of the lay and rabbinic leadership in each individual community to determine eligibility for those offices in line with those principles, the importance of maintaining communal harmony, and the unique context of its community culture.

10. Jews with a homosexual orientation or same sex attraction, even if they engage in same sex interactions, should be encouraged to fulfill *mitzvot* [biblical commandments] to the best of their ability. All Jews are challenged to fulfill *mitzvot* [biblical commandments] to the best of their ability, and the attitude of “all or nothing” was not the traditional approach adopted by the majority of *halakhic* [religious laws] thinkers and *poskim* [decisors of religious law] throughout the ages.

11. *Halakhic* [religious laws] Judaism cannot give its blessing and imprimatur to Jewish religious same-sex commitment ceremonies and weddings, and *halakhic* [religious laws] values proscribe individuals and communities from encouraging practices that grant religious legitimacy to gay marriage and couplehood. But communities should display sensitivity, acceptance and full embrace of the adopted or biological children of homosexually active Jews in the synagogue and school setting, and we encourage parents and family of homosexually partnered Jews to make every effort to maintain harmonious family relations and connections.

12. Jews who have an exclusively homosexual orientation should, under most circumstances, not be encouraged to marry someone of the other gender, as this can lead to great tragedy, unrequited love, shame, dishonesty and ruined lives. They should be directed to contribute to Jewish and general society in other meaningful ways. Any such person who is planning to marry someone of the opposite gender is *halakhically* [within the framework of religious laws] and ethically required to fully inform his or her potential spouse of their sexual orientation.

We hope and pray that by sharing these thoughts we will help the Orthodox community to fully live out its commitment to the principles and values of *Torah* [Bible] and *Halakha* [religious laws] as practiced and cherished by the children of Abraham, who our sages teach us are recognized by the qualities of being *rahamanim* (merciful), *bayshanim* (modest), and *gomelei hasadim* (engaging in acts of loving-kindness).

Appendix C: The Divine Institution of Marriage

Commentary — 13 August 2008

Introduction

The California Supreme Court recently ruled that same-sex marriage was legal in California. Recognizing the importance of marriage to society, the Church accepted an invitation to participate in ProtectMarriage, a coalition of churches, organizations, and individuals sponsoring a November ballot measure, Proposition 8, that would amend the California state constitution to ensure that only a marriage between a man and a woman would be legally recognized. (Information about the coalition can be found at <http://www.protectmarriage.com/>).

On June 20, 2008, the First Presidency of the Church distributed a letter about “Preserving Traditional Marriage and Strengthening Families,” announcing the Church’s participation with the coalition. The letter, which was read in Latter-day Saints’ church services in California, asked that Church members “do all [they] can to support the proposed constitutional amendment.”

Members of the Church in Arizona and Florida will also be voting on constitutional amendments regarding marriage in their states, where coalitions similar to California’s are now being formed.

The focus of the Church’s involvement is specifically same-sex marriage and its consequences. The Church does not object to rights (already established in California) regarding hospitalization and medical care, fair housing and employment rights, or probate rights, so long as these do not infringe on the integrity of the family or the constitutional rights of churches and their adherents to administer and practice their religion free from government interference.

The Church has a single, undeviating standard of sexual morality: intimate relations are proper only between a husband and a wife united in the bonds of matrimony.

The Church’s opposition to same-sex marriage neither constitutes nor condones any kind of hostility towards homosexual men and women. Protecting marriage between a man and a woman does not affect Church members’ Christian obligations of love, kindness and humanity toward all people.

As Church members decide their own appropriate level of involvement in protecting marriage between a man and a woman, they should approach this issue with respect for others, understanding, honesty, and civility.

Intending to reduce misunderstanding and ill will, the Church has produced the following document, “The Divine Institution of Marriage,” and provided the accompanying links to other materials, to explain its reasons for defending marriage between a man and a woman as an issue of moral imperative.

The Divine Institution of Marriage

Marriage is sacred, ordained of God from before the foundation of the world. After creating Adam and Eve, the Lord God pronounced them husband and wife, of which Adam said, “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.” Jesus Christ cited Adam’s declaration when he affirmed the divine origins of the marriage covenant: “Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh.”

In 1995, “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” declared the following unchanging truths regarding marriage:

We, the First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children . . . The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity.

The Proclamation also teaches, “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.” The account in Genesis of Adam and Eve being created and placed on earth emphasizes the creation of two distinct genders: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”

Marriage between a man and a woman is central to the plan of salvation. The sacred nature of marriage is closely linked to the power of procreation. Only a man and a woman together have the natural biological capacity to conceive children. This power of procreation – to create life and bring God’s spirit children into the world – is sacred and precious. Misuse of this power undermines the institution of the family and thereby weakens the social fabric. Strong families serve as the fundamental institution for transmitting to future generations the moral strengths, traditions, and values that sustain civilization. As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms, “The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society.”

Marriage is not primarily a contract between individuals to ratify their affections and provide for mutual obligations. Rather, marriage and family are vital instruments for rearing children and teaching them to become responsible adults. While governments did not invent marriage, throughout the ages governments of all types have recognized and affirmed marriage as an essential institution in preserving social stability and perpetuating life itself. Hence, regardless of whether marriages were performed as a religious rite or a civil ceremony, married couples in almost every culture have been granted special benefits aimed primarily at sustaining their relationship and promoting the environment in which children are reared. A husband and a wife do not receive these benefits to elevate them above any other two people who may share a

residence or social tie, but rather in order to preserve, protect, and defend the all-important institutions of marriage and family.

It is true that some couples who marry will not have children, either by choice or because of infertility, but the special status of marriage is nonetheless closely linked to the inherent powers and responsibilities of procreation, and to the inherent differences between the genders. Cohabitation under any guise or title is not a sufficient reason for defining new forms of marriage.

High rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births have resulted in an exceptionally large number of single parents in American society. Many of these single parents have raised exemplary children; nevertheless, extensive studies have shown that in general a husband and wife united in a loving, committed marriage provide the optimal environment for children to be protected, nurtured, and raised. This is not only because of the substantial personal resources that two parents can bring to bear on raising a child, but because of the differing strengths that a father and a mother, by virtue of their gender, bring to the task. As the prominent sociologist David Popenoe has said:

The burden of social science evidence supports the idea that gender differentiated parenting is important for human development and that the contribution of fathers to childrearing is unique and irreplaceable.

Popenoe explained that:

. . . The complementarity of male and female parenting styles is striking and of enormous importance to a child's overall development. It is sometimes said that fathers express more concern for the child's longer-term development, while mothers focus on the child's immediate well-being (which, of course, in its own way has everything to do with a child's long-term well-being). What is clear is that children have dual needs that must be met: one for independence and the other for relatedness, one for challenge and the other for support.

Social historian David Blankenhorn makes a similar argument in his book *Fatherless America*. In an ideal society, every child would be raised by both a father and a mother.

Challenges to Marriage and Family

Our modern era has seen traditional marriage and family – defined as a husband and wife with children in an intact marriage – come increasingly under assault. Sexual morality has declined and infidelity has increased. Since 1960, the proportion of children born out of wedlock has soared from 5.3 percent to 38.5 percent (2006). Divorce has become much more common and accepted, with the United States having one of the highest divorce rates in the world. Since 1973, abortion has taken the lives of over 45 million innocents. At the same time, entertainment standards continue to plummet, and pornography has become a scourge afflicting and addicting many victims. Gender differences increasingly are dismissed as trivial, irrelevant, or transient, thus undermining God's purpose in creating both men and women.

In recent years in the United States and other countries, a movement has emerged to promote same-sex marriage as an inherent or constitutional right. This is not a small step, but a radical change: instead of society tolerating or accepting private, consensual sexual behavior between adults, advocates of same-sex marriage seek its official endorsement and recognition.

Court decisions in Massachusetts (2004) and California (2008) have allowed same-sex marriages. This trend constitutes a serious threat to marriage and family. The institution of marriage will be weakened, resulting in negative consequences for both adults and children.

In November 2008, California voters will decide whether to amend their state constitution to define marriage as only between a man and a woman. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has joined in a broad coalition of other denominations, organizations, and individuals to encourage voter approval of this amendment.

The people of the United States – acting either directly or through their elected representatives – have recognized the crucial role that traditional marriage has played and must continue to play in American society if children and families are to be protected and moral values propagated.

Forty-four states have passed legislation making clear that marriage is between a man and a woman. More than half of those states, twenty-seven in all, have done so by constitutional amendments like the ones pending in California, Arizona, and Florida.

In contrast, those who would impose same-sex marriage on American society have chosen a different course. Advocates have taken their case to the state courts, asking judges to remake the institution of marriage that society has accepted and depended upon for millennia. Yet, even in this context, a broad majority of courts – six out of eight state supreme courts – have upheld traditional marriage laws. Only two, Massachusetts and now California, have gone in the other direction, and then, only by the slimmest of margins – 4 to 3 in both cases.

In sum, there is very strong agreement across America on what marriage is. As the people of California themselves recognized when they voted on this issue just eight years ago, traditional marriage is essential to society as a whole, and especially to its children. Because this question strikes at the very heart of the family, because it is one of the great moral issues of our time, and because it has the potential for great impact upon the family, the Church is speaking out on this issue, and asking members to get involved.

Tolerance, Same-Sex Marriage and Religious Freedom

Those who favor homosexual marriage contend that “tolerance” demands that they be given the same right to marry as heterosexual couples. But this appeal for “tolerance” advocates a very different meaning and outcome than that word has meant throughout most of American history and a different meaning than is found in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Savior taught a much higher concept, that of love. “Love thy neighbor,” He admonished. Jesus loved the sinner even while decrying the sin, as evidenced in the case of the woman taken in adultery: treating her

kindly, but exhorting her to “sin no more.” Tolerance as a gospel principle means love and forgiveness of one another, not “tolerating” transgression.

In today’s secular world, the idea of tolerance has come to mean something entirely different. Instead of love, it has come to mean *condone* – acceptance of wrongful behavior as the price of friendship. Jesus taught that we love and care for one another without condoning transgression. But today’s politically palatable definition insists that unless one accepts the sin he does not tolerate the sinner.

As Elder Dallin H. Oaks has explained,

Tolerance obviously requires a non-contentious manner of relating toward one another’s differences. But tolerance does not require abandoning one’s standards or one’s opinions on political or public policy choices. Tolerance is a way of reacting to diversity, not a command to insulate it from examination.

The Church does not condone abusive treatment of others and encourages its members to treat all people with respect. However, speaking out against practices with which the Church disagrees on moral grounds – including same-sex marriage – does not constitute abuse or the frequently misused term “hate speech.” We can express genuine love and friendship for the homosexual family member or friend without accepting the practice of homosexuality or any re-definition of marriage.

Legalizing same-sex marriage will affect a wide spectrum of government activities and policies. Once a state government declares that same-sex unions are a civil right, those governments almost certainly will enforce a wide variety of other policies intended to ensure that there is no discrimination against same-sex couples. This may well place “church and state on a collision course.”

The prospect of same-sex marriage has already spawned legal collisions with the rights of free speech and of action based on religious beliefs. For example, advocates and government officials in certain states already are challenging the long-held right of religious adoption agencies to follow their religious beliefs and only place children in homes with both a mother and a father. As a result, Catholic Charities in Boston has stopped offering adoption services.

Other advocates of same-sex marriage are suggesting that tax exemptions and benefits be withdrawn from any religious organization that does not embrace same-sex unions. Public accommodation laws are already being used as leverage in an attempt to force religious organizations to allow marriage celebrations or receptions in religious facilities that are otherwise open to the public. Accrediting organizations in some instances are asserting pressure on religious schools and universities to provide married housing for same-sex couples. Student religious organizations are being told by some universities that they may lose their campus recognition and benefits if they exclude same-sex couples from club membership.

Many of these examples have already become the legal reality in several nations of the European Union, and the European Parliament has recommended that laws guaranteeing and protecting the

rights of same-sex couples be made uniform across the EU. Thus, if same-sex marriage becomes a recognized civil right, there will be substantial conflicts with religious freedom. And in some important areas, religious freedom may be diminished.

How Would Same-Sex Marriage Affect Society?

Possible restrictions on religious freedom are not the only societal implications of legalizing same-sex marriage. Perhaps the most common argument that proponents of same-sex marriage make is that it is essentially harmless and will not affect the institution of traditional heterosexual marriage in any way. “It won’t affect you, so why should you care?” is the common refrain. While it may be true that allowing single-sex unions will not immediately and directly affect all existing marriages, the real question is how it will affect society as a whole *over time*, including the rising generation and future generations. The experience of the few European countries that already have legalized same-sex marriage suggests that any dilution of the traditional definition of marriage will further erode the already weakened stability of marriages and family generally. Adopting same-sex marriage compromises the traditional concept of marriage, with harmful consequences for society.

Aside from the very serious consequence of undermining and diluting the sacred nature of marriage between a man and a woman, there are many practical implications in the sphere of public policy that will be of deep concern to parents and society as a whole. These are critical to understanding the seriousness of the overall issue of same-sex marriage.

When a man and a woman marry with the intention of forming a new family, their success in that endeavor depends on their willingness to renounce the single-minded pursuit of self-fulfillment and to sacrifice their time and means to the nurturing and rearing of their children. Marriage is fundamentally an unselfish act: legally protected because only a male and female together can create new life, and because the rearing of children requires a life-long commitment, which marriage is intended to provide. Societal recognition of same-sex marriage cannot be justified simply on the grounds that it provides self-fulfillment to its partners, for it is not the purpose of government to provide legal protection to every possible way in which individuals may pursue fulfillment. By definition, all same-sex unions are infertile, and two individuals of the same gender, whatever their affections, can never form a marriage devoted to raising their own mutual offspring.

It is true that some same-sex couples will obtain guardianship over children –through prior heterosexual relationships, through adoption in the states where this is permitted, or by artificial insemination. Despite that, the all-important question of public policy must be: what environment is best for the child and for the rising generation? Traditional marriage provides a solid and well-established social identity to children. It increases the likelihood that they will be able to form a clear gender identity, with sexuality closely linked to both love and procreation. By contrast, the legalization of same-sex marriage likely will erode the social identity, gender development, and moral character of children. Is it really wise for society to pursue such a radical experiment without taking into account its long-term consequences for children?

As just one example of how children will be adversely affected, the establishment of same-sex marriage as a civil right will inevitably require mandatory changes in school curricula. When the state says that same-sex unions are equivalent to heterosexual marriages, the curriculum of public schools will have to support this claim. Beginning with elementary school, children will be taught that marriage can be defined as a relation between any two adults and that consensual sexual relations are morally neutral. Classroom instruction on sex education in secondary schools can be expected to equate homosexual intimacy with heterosexual relations. These developments will create serious clashes between the agenda of the secular school system and the right of parents to teach their children traditional standards of morality.

Finally, throughout history the family has served as an essential bulwark of individual liberty. The walls of a home provide a defense against detrimental social influences and the sometimes overreaching powers of government. In the absence of abuse or neglect, government does not have the right to intervene in the rearing and moral education of children in the home. Strong families are thus vital for political freedom. But when governments presume to redefine the nature of marriage, issuing regulations to ensure public acceptance of non-traditional unions, they have moved a step closer to intervening in the sacred sphere of domestic life. The consequences of crossing this line are many and unpredictable, but likely would include an increase in the power and reach of the state toward whatever ends it seeks to pursue.

The Sanctity of Marriage

Strong, stable families, headed by a father and mother, are the anchor of civilized society. When marriage is undermined by gender confusion and by distortions of its God-given meaning, the rising generation of children and youth will find it increasingly difficult to develop their natural identity as a man or a woman. Some will find it more difficult to engage in wholesome courtships, form stable marriages, and raise yet another generation imbued with moral strength and purpose.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has chosen to become involved, along with many other churches, organizations, and individuals, in defending the sanctity of marriage between a man and a woman because it is a compelling moral issue of profound importance to our religion and to the future of our society.

The final line in the Proclamation on the Family is an admonition to the world from the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve: “We call upon responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.” This is the course charted by Church leaders, and it is the only course of safety for the Church and for the nation.

Appendix D: Measures

Clinician Interview Questions & Demographics

1. How long have you been a practicing clinician? What is your age?
2. What is your highest level academic degree?
3. What is your area of specialization or your focus of interest?
4. Have you worked with clients who are gay men and grew up in a religious family or such religious family units?
5. How recently have you worked with this population?
6. What were the most poignant issues that your gay clients encountered during and post their sexual orientation disclosure to their religious family and how did they address those issues?
7. What were the most frequently expressed issues that the religious family members encountered during and post sexual orientation disclosure and how did they address those issues?
8. What was the initial reason for beginning the therapeutic process with your gay clients?
Did the therapeutic process specifically begin to address issues of sexual orientation?
9. How do you view your role in this therapeutic process?
10. What role do you think community and religious leaders could or should play in addressing this socio-religious issue?
11. How would you describe your relationship to the gay community?
12. How would you describe your relationship to the religious community?

13. What specific questions (themes, contexts, or variables) would you like to see addressed in future research regarding this population? Are there any issues that you would like me to be familiar with that were not included in this interview?

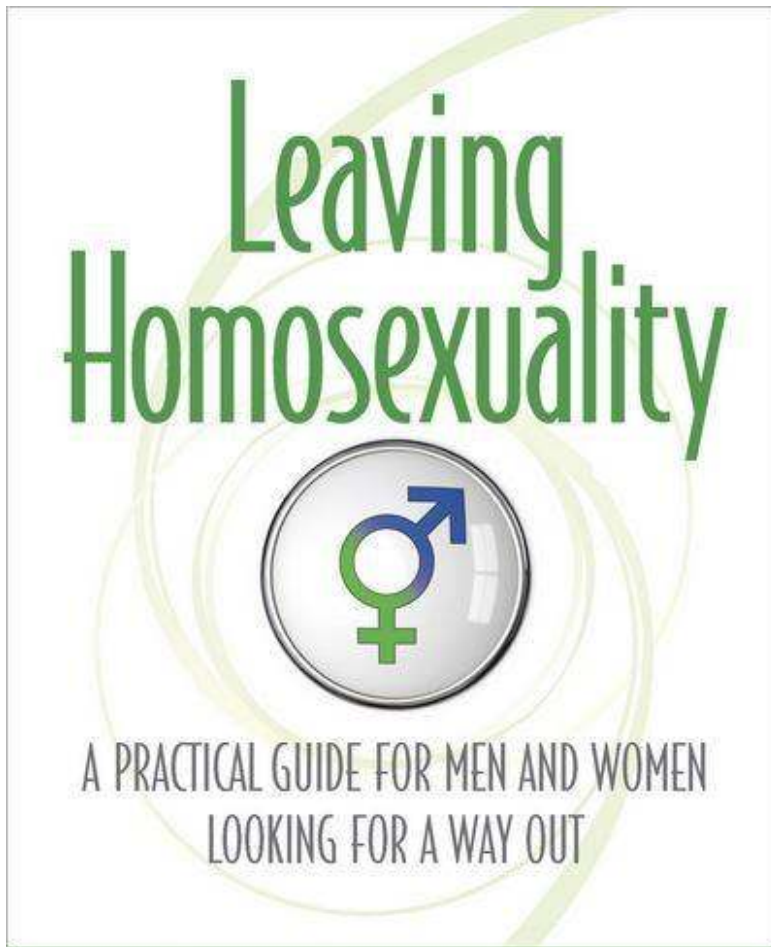
Gay Men & Religious Family Allies Interview Questions:

1. How old are you?
2. What is your educational background?
3. How would you describe your financial status or income level?
4. Tell me a bit about the religious community in which you grew up. Would you describe this community as highly religious, moderately religious, not really religious, or something else? Why?
5. How would you describe your feelings, beliefs, and thoughts about religion?
6. How would you describe your relationship with your family?
7. [Gay Participants Only] How old were you when you first “knew” of your sexual orientation/orientation? Were there any activities or people that helped or hurt this process?
8. How old were you at the time of your/his sexual orientation disclosure to the family? Friends? Class/work? Religious group?
9. How would you describe the family disclosure event and that time period in your life?
10. Do you believe that your relationship with your family has changed over time? If so, how?
11. Is there someone(s) in your family who is (are) your key ally? If so, can you describe your relationship with them?
12. How do you think this person views your relationship?

13. Is this the person in your family with whom you have most frequently confided in about family reactions and the tension between religion and sexual orientation? If not, than whom?
14. Is there someone in your family who is experiencing “the most difficulty” in this process? If so, can you describe your relationship with them?
15. Do you attend religious services? If so what type and how frequent?
16. Do you believe that your relationship with religion has changed over time? If so, how? Why?
17. How would you describe your relationship with the gay community?
18. Do you believe that your relationship with the gay community has changed over time? If so, how?
19. What are your thoughts about the text in Leviticus/ Corinthians that prohibits homosexual activity?
20. Have you ever attended a support group? If so, what was your experience like?
21. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me?

Images

Image 1: Exodus International Literature



Leaving Homosexuality

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR MEN AND WOMEN
LOOKING FOR A WAY OUT

Alan Chambers
PRESIDENT OF EXODUS INTERNATIONAL

Harvest House Publishers
EUGENE, OREGON 97401
www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Contemporary Issues/Counseling
ISBN 978-0-7389-2610-2 \$11.99

9 780736 726102 U.S. \$11.99

"As one who has gone through the struggle of 'leaving homosexuality' personally...I found this book to be a beacon of hope."
DENNIS JERNIGAN
author, songwriter, and recording artist, Shepherd's Heart Music

You're gay... so what do you do now?

Is there anything you can do? Or should you embrace your same-sex attractions and get on with your life?

In this accessible book, Alan Chambers, president of Exodus International, offers you another option—a life based on God's love for the gay man or woman. In this thoughtful book, Alan explains how God brings about the positive changes many formerly gay-identified men and women have undergone as they've submitted themselves to His will for their life.

Through insight gained from his own experience and his years of ministry to those seeking freedom, Alan explains how to:

- enter into a new life in Christ
- set realistic and healthy expectations
- build authentic community
- learn to forgive
- overcome the power of sexual addiction

Young or old, male or female—if you're ready for change in your life, *Leaving Homosexuality* will help you establish your own walk of faith. A new life of freedom beyond homosexuality is available for you.

Alan Chambers is president of Exodus International, a worldwide ministry to those affected by homosexuality. Alan has shared his story of overcoming unwanted same-sex attraction with audiences around the world and has been interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Almanac*, *Time* magazine, *Fox News Network*, and *CBN*. He and his wife, Leslie, and their two children make their home in Florida.

Image 2: Provo Temple Utah



Image 3: Western Wall Jerusalem



Table 1: Activity-Meaning System Design

Stakeholder position	Stakeholder sampling method	Stakeholder participant activities
Gay Men	21 gay men were recruited via community list serves, blogs, and snowball sampling.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay men were interviewed about their own experiences. • Religious allies were interviewed about their perspectives regarding their gay relative and the family unit's experience.
Religious Families	15 religious family allies were identified by their participating gay relative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gay men were interviewed about their religious relatives' experiences. • Religious allies were interviewed about their own experiences.
Religious Tradition	Participants were recruited from two different religious groups (Christian & Jewish) and religious texts were analyzed as stakeholder documents.	Gay men and religious relatives wrote letters to religious leaders regarding their community's current policy concerning the issue of sexual orientation and disclosure.
Secular Values	12 clinicians were recruited as mediators of the secular subsystem for gay men and religious relatives. Clinicians were recruited via list serves and snowball sampling.	Clinicians, gay men, and religious relatives were interviewed regarding their involvement in the therapeutic context as well as their use of secular texts as mediating tools.

Table 2: Jewish and Christian Stakeholders' Demographic Information

	Jewish Participants n=17	Christian Participants n=21
Mean Age of Gay Men	25	25
Mean Age of Religious Relative	42	52
Number of Participants living in the Northeast	16	4
Number of Participants living in the Midwest	1	3
Number of Participants living in the West	0	9
Number of Participants living in the South	0	4
Number of Parent Participants	2	7
Number of Sibling Participants	5	1
Number of Gay Participants	10	13
Number of participants with income below \$15,000	4	5
Number of participants with income between \$15,000-30,000	3	5
Number of participants with income between \$30,000-\$60,000	5	3
Number of participants with income between \$60,000- \$100,000	5	1
Number of participants with income \$100,000+	4	3
Highest Level of Education: Some college	9	4
Highest Level of Education: B.A.	7	5
Highest Level of Education: B.A. and some graduate school	1	5
Highest Level of Education: Masters or higher degree earned	4	3

Table 3: Historical Religious Stakeholder Documents

Year	Historical Event	Jewish (Orthodox)	Christian
1440—1400 ¹ B.C.E.	<i>"Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination... And if a man lie with mankind, as with womankind, both of them have committed abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them (Lev.18:22 & Lev.20:13)."</i>	X	X
56—57 C.E.	<i>"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God (New Testament: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10)."</i>		X
219 C.E.	<i>"Rabbi Huna said in the name of Rabbi Joseph, 'The generation of the Flood was not wiped out until they wrote marriage documents for the union of a man to a male or to an animal (Genesis Rabbah 26:5; Leviticus Rabbah 23:9)."</i>	X	
390 C.E.	Christian emperors Valentinian II, Theodosius I and Arcadius denounce males <i>"acting the part of a woman"</i> , condemning them to death by fire.		X
1963	<i>"All understand that the transgressors of this sin [homogenital intercourse] are corrupt and not members of civilization at all (Iggrot Moshe, Orach Chaim, Part 4, Responsa 115)."</i>	X	
1986	<i>"Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder (Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons, Ratzinger & Bovone)."</i>		X ²
1997	<i>"The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition. (Catechism 2358)."</i>		X ²
2010	<i>"All human beings are created in the image of God and deserve to be treated with dignity and respect. Every Jew is obligated to fulfill the entire range of mitzvot [religious commandments] between person and person in relation to persons who are homosexual or have feelings of same sex attraction. Embarrassing, harassing or demeaning someone with a homosexual orientation or same-sex attraction is a violation of Torah [Bible] prohibitions that embody the deepest values of Judaism... Halakhah [religious laws] sees heterosexual marriage as the ideal model and sole legitimate outlet for human sexual expression. The sensitivity and understanding we properly express for human beings with other sexual orientations does not diminish our commitment to that principle. (Statement of Principles, Signed by Select Rabbis & Leaders)."</i>	X	

¹ Years are estimates and some remain debated by historians.

² This quote is specific to the Catholic Church, although other segments of the Christian community have voiced similar sentiments.

Table 4.1: Percentage of Participants Reporting Family Conflicts & Difficulties and Examples

Difficulty	Description/Example	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Familial Difficulty	<p>Gay Men: Avoiding disclosing to select family members, Family members unable to accept orientation and relative, Family members avoiding disclosure and post-disclosure discussion, Theistic Triangulation Example: <i>"When I came out to my parents, you know, it was this big blow up and they kind of cut me off, so like, I was disconnected from my family unit."</i></p> <p>Family Ally: Mediation of family relationships, Educating family members, Establishing inclusive family policies, Addressing sibling discomfort Example: <i>"We have a lot of discussions with them uh a lot of talks with our other kids about this."</i></p> <p>Clinicians: Families experience guilt and shame for relative's sexual orientation, Families view orientation as a sin, Family non-acceptance, Familial estrangement Example: <i>"I just had a client lately where he, he was just smothered by...it was a Catholic family He was just smothered by, they were Evangelical Catholics and...Thought he was possessed by the devil...They looked for an exorcist. And they found one and the exorcist told them "young man you're not possessed by the devil."</i></p>	<p>Christian: 9/13 69%</p> <p>Jewish: 10/10 100%</p>	<p>Christian: 6/8 75%</p> <p>Jewish: 5/7 71%</p>	<p>Christian: 3/8 38%</p> <p>Jewish: 5/7 71%</p>	<p>12/12 100%</p>

Table 4.2: Percentage of Participants Reporting Communal Homophobia and Examples

Difficulty	Description/Example	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Communal Homophobia	<p>Gay Men: Fear of being bullied or identified as gay, Being bullied or teased Example: <i>"I remember walking down- I remember walking down the, uh, going out of high school, and then this, uh, they were driving past in a car, some kids, and they threw a snowball, and yelled "Faggot!"</i></p> <p>Family Ally: Childhood and current homophobia, Dehumanization of Gay Community, Threats of physical violence, Homophobia expressed by religious leaders and figures Example: <i>"I was taught to be prejudiced, I just wasn't educated."</i></p> <p>Clinicians: Friends reacting negatively to sexual disclosure, Feeling discriminated against by society at large, Shame experienced in religious environments Example: <i>"...the sense of abandonment from one's community, um whether or not that's a fear in advance of coming out, that they would be vanished from it. Or, actually, you know, coming out and having such a negative reaction... there would be a parent... who kind of finds selectively pieces of their religion to back up their own homophobia and their own fear of themselves being sort of um seen as someone who has a gay kid."</i></p>	<p>Christian: 8/13 62%</p> <p>Jewish: 4/10 40%</p>	<p>Christian: 6/8 75%</p> <p>Jewish: 3/7 43%</p>	<p>Christian: 3/8 38%</p> <p>Jewish: 1/7 14%</p>	<p>11/12 92%</p>

Table 4.3: Percentage of Participants Reporting Religious Difficulties and Examples

Difficulty	Description/Example	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Religion, Religious Figures, and Community	<p>Gay Men: Excommunication & Disfellowship, Homophobic religious council Example: "...there's one person who is allowed to sort of be on your side in the excommunication hearing and that's the bishop of the congregation you're living in. He didn't even show up."</p> <p>Family Ally & Gay Men: Anger at God, Religious confusion, Changes in Religious Orientation, Homophobic sermons, Community Discomfort. Fear of disclosure to religious figures and community, Community silence Family Example: "I felt a little bit betrayed because it's like, why did you do this, God?"</p> <p>Clinicians: Anti-gay messages of religious institutions, religious leaders, religious texts, Clients feeling angry at God in relation to struggles with sexuality, religion, and family Example: "yes, they are concerned about what the neighbors will say, they are concerned, there is the shanda [Yidish: shame], how will other children get married? ... There are rabbis who have the courage to say "Well, we haven't learned it, we, actually, yes, there is this paragraph in Leviticus, but it is open to interpretation, but everyone is welcome in my Shul [synagogue]." But, there are rabbis who wouldn't want that to happen. There are politics involved."</p>	<p>Christian: 12/13 92%</p> <p>Jewish: 9/10 90%</p>	<p>Christian: 5/8 63%</p> <p>Jewish: 4/7 57%</p>	<p>Christian: 5/8 63%</p> <p>Jewish: 4/7 57%</p>	<p>12/12 100%</p>

Table 4.4: Percentage of Participants Reporting Expectation Difficulties and Examples

Difficulty	Description/Example	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Adjustment of Expectations	<p>Gay Men: Attempts to change sexual orientation, Conversion therapy and support groups, Praying to change sexual orientation: Example: "During therapy to become straight I attended Evergreen International It was an accountability group... if you're ever tempted to have sex with someone who is the same gender, call your buddy at Evergreen."</p> <p>Family Ally: Adjusting heteronormative expectations, coming to terms with not having grandchildren/daughter-in-law/sister-in-law Example: "The only thing for me was the, the disappointment, I think, of knowing I wasn't going to have the normalcy. The daughter-in-law, the grandchildren."</p> <p>Clinicians: Gay men and family members efforts to alter sexual orientation, Coming to terms with alternative futures, expectations, and religious experiences Example: "...family members who want the child not to be gay anymore. Either denying that their experience of being gay is real. Or if they do acknowledge that it is um insisting that they change it. So um I have had a number of clients who come to me after being in so-called reparative therapy, which is really a non-therapy."</p>	<p>Christian: 9/13 69%</p> <p>Jewish: 4/10 40%</p>	<p>Christian: 6/8 75%</p> <p>Jewish: 7/7 100%</p>	<p>Christian: 5/8 63%</p> <p>Jewish: 7/7 100%</p>	<p>11/12 92%</p>

Table 4.5: Percentage of Participants Reporting Discomfort with the Gay Community and Examples

Difficulty	Description/Example	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Discomfort with Gay Community	<p>Gay Men: Feeling uncomfortable with "stereotypical" gay community and its various segments</p> <p>Example: <i>"My relationship with the gay community is probably more strained than my relationship with the LDS community... from a religious standpoint, I am either not a part of or just don't understand a lot of that, like the promiscuity, and when it comes to the alcohol, smoking, drugs, that and I don't get along too well."</i></p> <p>Family Ally: Not having relationship with Gay Community or people whom identify as gay. Feeling uncomfortable with Gay Community</p> <p>Example: <i>"I have an easier time dealing with one on one than I do when I'm dealing with the gay community at large, it's so in your face... I don't go around pushing my sexuality in people's face all the time. And I understand, they're coming out of... having been discriminated against so dreadfully... But, then another thing is dealing with it if I came in contact with it."</i></p> <p>Clinicians: Family members or gay men directly discussing discomfort with the gay community</p> <p>Example: <i>"Cause the whole root of a fear about being gay is misogyny. It's about being in a submissive position. So we also work on that."</i></p>	<p>Christian: 12/13 92%</p> <p>Jewish: 6/10 60%</p>	<p>Christian: 1/8 13%</p> <p>Jewish: 2/7 29%</p>	<p>Christian: 1/8 13%</p> <p>Jewish: 2/7 29%</p>	<p>5/12 42%</p>

Table 4.6: Percentage of Participants Reporting Mental Health Difficulties and Examples

Difficulty	Description/Example	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Anxiety, Depression & Suicide	<p>Anxiety, Extreme and sustained sadness, Suicidal thoughts, Suicide attempts related to sexual orientation</p> <p>Gay Men Example: <i>"I struggled on a cyclical basis probably on like a two-week cycle just being die-hard button-down Mormon and then being full-blown gay, and it was just like this terrible cycle... I ended up in the hospital because I had tried to commit suicide."</i></p> <p>Clinician Example: <i>"I would say depression is probably foremost, the foremost reason people come into therapy. And one of the major difficulties in that, is that frequently men from religious families are taught not to talk. It goes part-in-parcel. [C] And you would say that's across religions? Yes. [C] About their feelings, or about their identity... Everything. They'll come in with a presenting problem of depression and it's only, I mean I can usually tell in the first session if family's an issue. But it's more intimated than talked about, 'cause they're not allowed to... talk."</i></p>	<p>Christian: 4/13 31%</p> <p>Jewish: 4/10 40%</p>	<p>Christian: 0</p> <p>Jewish: 0</p>	<p>Christian: 0</p> <p>Jewish: 0</p>	<p>12/12 100%</p>

Table 5: Percentage of Participants Humanizing the Gay Community and Examples

Strategy	Definition/Example	Gay Men	Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Humanization of Gay Community	<p>Gay Men: Recognition of community diversity, normalization of community issues Normalization Example: "...anyone who knows anything about HIV knows that straight people get it too."</p> <p>Family Ally: Normalization of community issues, Sympathizing with community pain, Integrating interactions Normalization Example: "They (people in the gay community) want the same things that you have...They want a family, a house, you know, children."</p> <p>Clinician: Normalization of community issues, Integrating interactions Normalization & Integration Example: "All the kind of stereotypes come out... Often I'll advise uh clients to take some friends home before they tell them [religious parents]... And then when they're coming out... It's not just a category. It's not just what they've heard... So once people know actual individuals you know they it's like a house of cards. You know um the prejudices just kind of go away."</p>	<p>Christian: 11/13 85%</p> <p>Jewish: 2/10 20%</p>	<p>Christian: 8/8 100%</p> <p>Jewish: 7/7 100%</p>	<p>Christian: 8/8 100%</p> <p>Jewish: 7/7 100%</p>	<p>7/12 58%</p>

Table 6: Percentage of Participants Humanizing Relatives and Examples

Strategy	Definition/Example	Gay Men	Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Humanization of Family Member	<p>Gay Men: Understanding personal and community context, identifying with difficulties, Acknowledging personal and demographic context of religious relatives Example: "It's something I've dealt with my whole life and I've had a whole lifetime to process it, but they've had like 20 minutes."</p> <p>Family Ally: Unconditional love, Sympathy, Recognition of gay relative being the same person post disclosure, Hoping for happiness, Changing power relations and relationship role Example: "My pain never mattered. It was his pain that came first. So, it didn't matter what I was going through, I was gonna be there for my son."</p> <p>Clinicians: Unconditional love, Sympathy, Changing power relations and relationship role, Acknowledging personal and demographic context of religious relatives Example: "Some [religious families] are... disturbed and disappointed but they try their best to be supportive of the young man... Well uh, they don't accept the behavior, but they accept the person, and um you know they try to maintain an open relationship."</p>	<p>Christian: 12/13 92%</p> <p>Jewish: 9/10 90%</p>	<p>Christian: 8/8 100%</p> <p>Jewish: 7/7 100%</p>	<p>Christian: 8/8 100%</p> <p>Jewish: 7/7 100%</p>	<p>8/12 67%</p>

Table 7: Examples and Percentage of Participants using Cultural Tools to Mediate Religion, Conflicts, and Relationships

Cultural Tools	Mediated Stakeholder Positions	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Support Groups & Therapy: Attending support groups or clinical therapy	Secular world mediator for gay men and religious relatives regarding issues in both religious and secular subsystems.	Christian: 11/13 85% Jewish: 9/10 90%	Christian: 1/8 12% Jewish: 6/7 86%	Christian: 0/8 0% Jewish: 6/7 86%	12/12 100%
Television and Movies: Watching films that promote self-acceptance and acceptance of the Gay Community	Films such as <i>Prayers for Bobby</i> (2009) and <i>Trembling before God</i> (2001) address both religious and secular stakeholder positions for gay men and religious relatives.	Christian: 4/13 31% Jewish: 4/10 40%	Christian: 1/8 12% Jewish: 3/7 43%	Christian: 0/8 0% Jewish: 3/7 43%	1/12 8%
Reading & Writing: Reading books, Posting on Facebook, Reading & writing blogs, Letter Writing	Gay men and religious relatives used Facebook, Blogs and letters to communicate with both religious and secular subsystems. Books often addressed secular and religious issues.	Christian: 13/13 100% Jewish: 8/10 80%	Christian: 4/8 50% Jewish: 2/7 29%	Christian: 4/8 50% Jewish: 1/7 14%	2/12 17%
Cultural Tools	Mediated Stakeholder Positions	Gay Men	Participating Family Ally	Both Members of Family Unit	Clinicians
Scriptural interpretation and text use: Engaging religious texts either directly or via interpretive methods	Gay Men, Family Allies, Religion, Discussed in clinical settings.	Christian: 10/13 77% Jewish: 8/10 80%	Christian: 5/8 63% Jewish: 1/7 14%	Christian: 5/8 63% Jewish: 0/7 0%	4/12 33%
Council of Religious Leader: Seeking counseling or support from a religious teacher, Rabbi, Priest, or Bishop	Gay Men, Family Allies, Religion, Discussed in clinical settings.	Christian: 9/13 69% Jewish: 4/10 40%	Christian: 4/8 50% Jewish: 2/7 29%	Christian: 3/8 38% Jewish: 1/7 14%	4/12 33%
Prayer: Praying for sex-change, understanding, acceptance, help, peace; Stopping to pray in relation to sexual frustration; Receiving a revelation regarding the issue of sexuality and religion	Gay Men, Family Allies, Religion, Discussed in clinical settings.	Christian: 5/13 38% Jewish: 3/10 30%	Christian: 5/8 63% Jewish: 0/7 0%	Christian: 3/8 38% Jewish: 0/7 0%	2/12 17%

Figure 1: Gay Men's Religious Identification

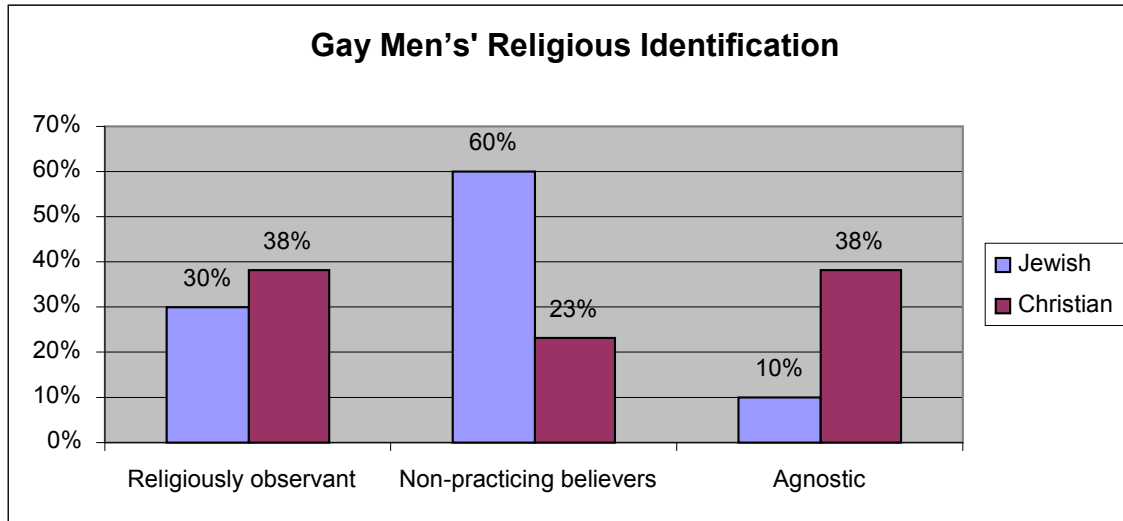


Figure 2: Between-group differences in Gay Men's Humanization of Gay Community

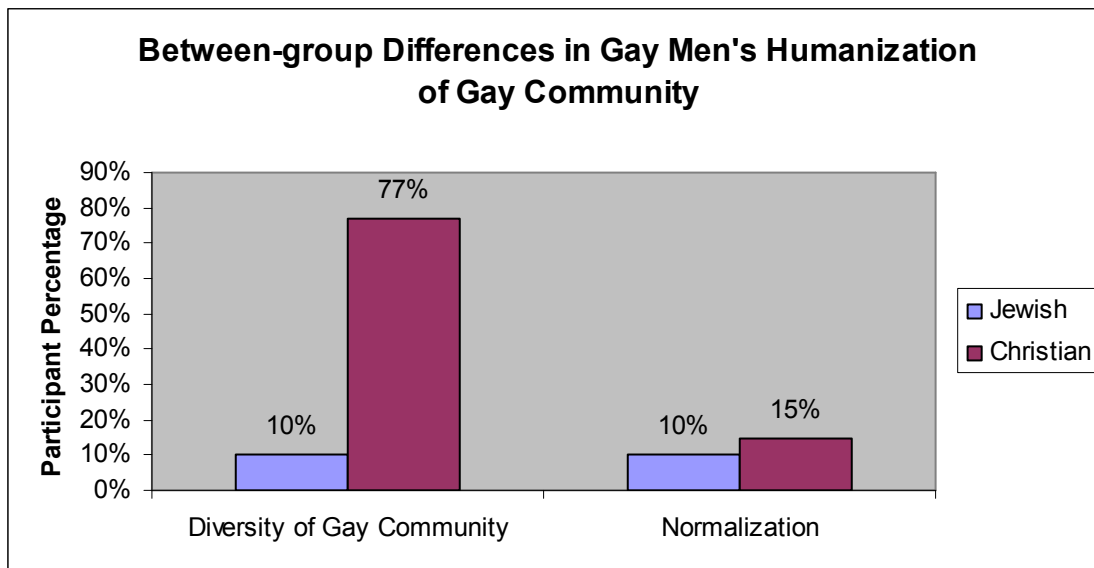


Figure 3: Humanization of Religious Relative Bar Graph

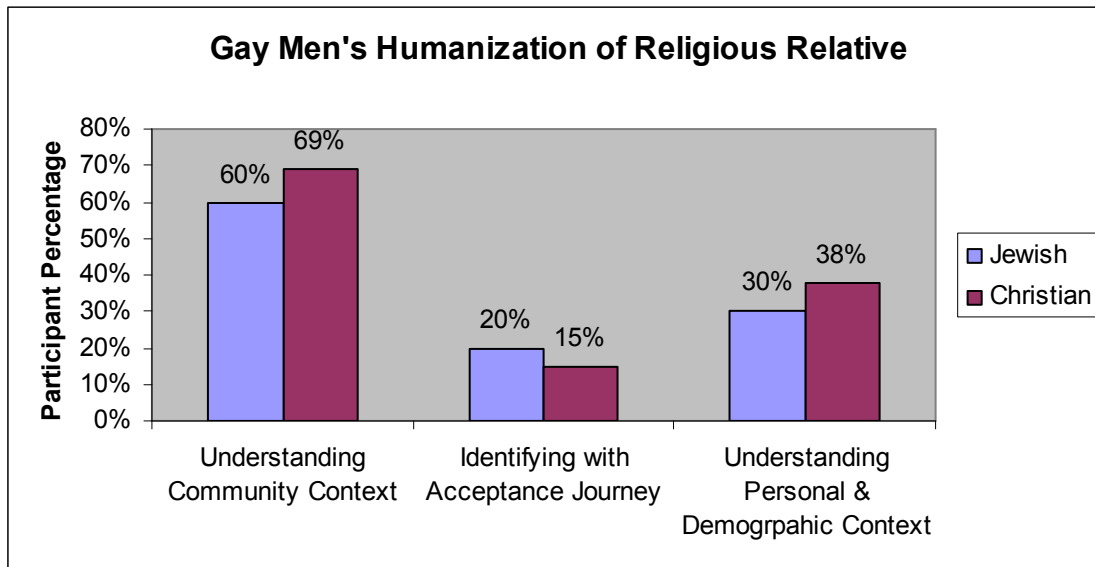
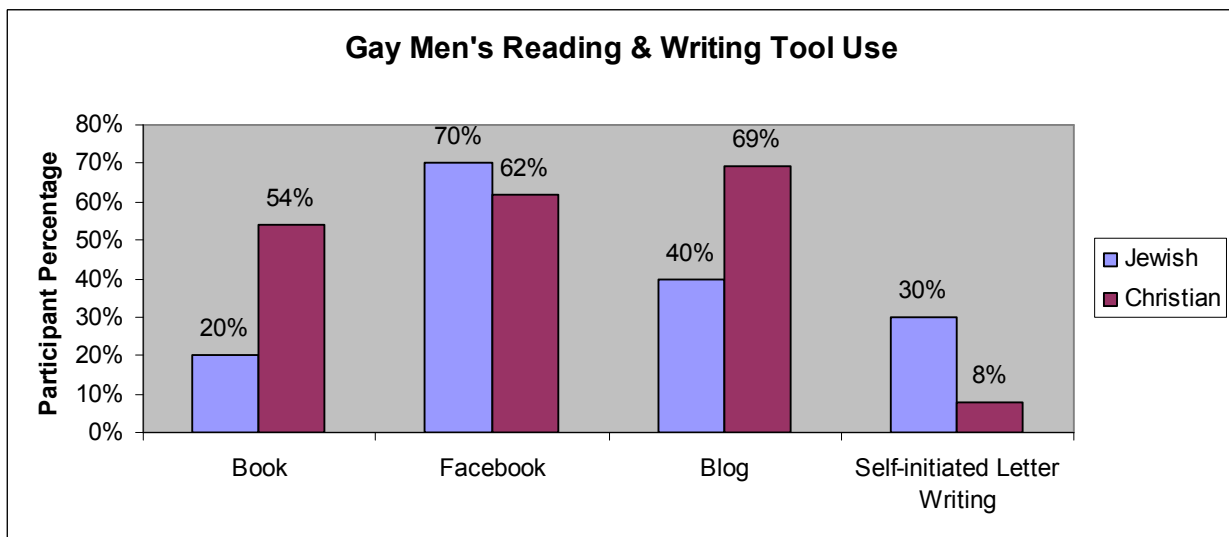


Figure 4: Gay Men's Reading and Writing Tool Use



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