

Competing Identities: A Gendered Analysis on the Effect of Religiosity on Homosexual Identity
Formation

by

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Abstract

This study analyzes the effect of religiosity on homosexual identity formation, focusing specifically on if this effect is different between males and females. Past research has shown that gender and levels of conservatism have a strong effect on how individuals are viewed and treated in society (Hequembourg and Brallier, 2009; Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). Based on these findings this study made the hypotheses that individuals with a stronger religiosity will have a lower homosexual identity formation stage commitment and that gay men with a strong religiosity will have a lower homosexual identity formation stage commitment than lesbians who also have a strong religiosity. Brady and Busse's (1994) Gay Identity Questionnaire is used to identify individual's homosexual identity formation stage based on the model that was developed by Cass (1979). Surveys that were composed of questions focusing on religiosity and homosexual identity formation were completed over the internet by individuals who were either a member of an open and affirming churches or of LGBT groups on college campuses in a variety of states. The statistics supported both null hypotheses and this study did not find that gender was an influential factor in the development of a homosexual identity stage commitment.

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List of Abbreviations

GBT	Gay, bisexual, and transgender
GLB	Gay, lesbian, and transgender
HIF	Homosexual Identity Formation
IRB	Institutional Review Board
LGQ	Lesbian, gay, and queer
LGB	Lesbian, gay, and bisexual
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender

Chapter 1

Introduction

Recently there has been an enormous amount of media coverage that focuses on the topic of homosexuality. Specifically, the media have focused on the high rates of suicide among homosexual youth due to bullying as well as the fight for and against the legalization of gay marriage. This media attention has brought to the forefront a subject that is often overlooked because of its deviant position in our society. Due to the media treatment on this topic there has been a recent surge in the academic literature having to do with the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community (Talbert, 2004). Researchers have discovered many pertinent findings that are relevant to the media coverage being presented on a daily basis, including the fact that homosexual youth suicide rates are much higher than those of their non-homosexual peers. In 1999 it was reported that 30 percent of LGB youth had attempted suicide at some point while only 13 percent of their non-homosexual peers had attempted suicide (Safren & Heimberg, 1999). In 2003, Burckell and Goldfried found that these rates still persisted. They went on to conclude that sexual minority youth and young adults were two to four times more likely to make a suicide attempt than their nonsexual minority peers (2003). The Suicide Prevention Resource Center has reported that LGB youth are one and a half to three times more likely to report suicidal ideation and one and a half to seven times more likely to have attempted suicide than non-LGB youth (2008). These studies indicate that there is a strong differentiation between the rates of attempted suicide between homosexual youth and their non-homosexual

counterparts, which raises the question as to what experiences homosexual youth go through that lead them to attempt suicide at much higher rates than their non-homosexual peers.

All people have identities that function as strong influential factors in how they are viewed and treated in society. Individuals who possess homosexual identities find that they are defined by this identity in many situations. For them, homosexuality becomes their master status, a perceived social standing that has significance for individual identity and often shapes a person's social experience (Goffman, 1968). When other people find out that an individual is homosexual they often define that person based on their sexuality. More often than not, people and cultural institutions view homosexuality negatively, and this negativity leads numerous cultural institutions to present negative messages about homosexuality. Upon hearing these disapproving messages, homosexual individuals often internalize the hostility causing them to feel unhappy with themselves and their sexual feelings and desires. The negative messages and experiences homosexuals deal with on a regular basis frequently lead them to dislike themselves so vehemently that they often attempt to kill themselves in order to escape the feelings of hatred, anxiety, and despair. It is clear that there is a strong disparity between LGBT and non-homosexual individuals' mental well-being that cannot be ignored.

While society presents homosexuality as something that is negative in general, individual experiences differ for homosexual individuals based on their gender. Past researchers have discovered that gender has a strong influence on how gay individuals are viewed and treated by society (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). Hequembourg and Brallier analyzed how non-homosexual individuals perceived gay men and lesbian women and found that respondents reported that women's same-sex relationships were eroticized and distorted to accommodate heterosexual male desire (2009). Men, however, were negatively

depicted as sexually promiscuous and deviant (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). This difference in perception of homosexuality based on gender leads to how homosexual men and women are treated differently by non-homosexuals. While lesbian women's relationships are not preferred over heterosexuality by the non-homosexual majority, their relationships are twisted by American culture in order to accommodate non-homosexual males and therefore are not viewed as negatively as gay men's relationships. Identifying as gay remains strongly stigmatized because our culture views gay men as inappropriately promiscuous and deviant. This strong negative label would presumably make it more difficult for gay men to be willing to identify themselves as homosexual to other people, while also making it difficult to accept themselves as gay because of the negative stigma that they know is associated with being a homosexual male.

Religion is one of the institutions that places negative pressures on individuals, both male and female, with homosexual identities or feelings (Kubicek et al., 2009; Mahaffy, 1996). Most western religions claim that homosexuals are evil, will go to hell, and are committing sins when they act on their personal desires toward a person of the same sex. Homosexual individuals who are raised in this type of environment often find that they have a hard time merging their religious and homosexual identities into one sense of self that is accepting of both parts of their lives. Many researchers have found that homosexual individuals who grow up in a religious environment hear more negative messages about homosexuality and have a stronger internalization of these homophobic messages than homosexual individuals who do not have a religious upbringing (Kubicek et al., 2009; Mahaffy, 1996). These negative messages and the internalization of this negativity is one of the sources that is believed to lead to the depression and anxiety which contributes to the high suicide rates in the LGBT community that have recently been in the media (Igartua, Gill & Montoro, 2003).

While the institution of religion speaks negatively of homosexuality, in general it could be posited that religious views of homosexuality would mirror the gender discrepancy seen throughout the rest of society. Therefore, it could be conceived that the institution of religion views homosexual males even more negatively than it does homosexual females. Past research has shown that while lesbians are treated disapprovingly, gay men experience much stronger hostility, especially in conservative environments (Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). Since numerous religions are comprised of conservative members, there is a strong possibility that the institution of religion will also have more negative messages and hostility towards gay men. Such negativity could lead religious gay men to have a more difficult time developing a healthy gay identity. This study will analyze if religiosity (the level of religious activity, dedication, and belief) affects homosexual identity formation differently for gay men compared to lesbian women.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Internalized Homophobia and Cognitive Dissonance

When individuals are raised or live in an environment that does not support who they feel they are, they receive messages of hatred that often become internalized and have the potential to turn into self-hatred. Often homosexual individuals grow up with messages of homophobia being told to them from different sources. They are told, for example, that they cannot get married, cannot have children, and will burn in hell. If believed, homophobic sanctions lead individuals to question their sexual desires and whether they can accept an identity that seems consistent with those desires. Individuals faced with such emotional incongruence find greater hardships if they do not have social supports to help process their thoughts and untangle their emotions. For many, the result is self-hatred and confusion as to who they are and who they want to be.

The internalization of homophobic messages and the resulting self-hatred are evident when comparing depression, anxiety, and suicide rates of the overall U.S. population with that of the U.S. LGB (lesbian, gay, and bisexual) community. Safren & Heimberg (1999) reported that 30 percent of LGB youth had attempted suicide at some point while only 13 percent of their heterosexual peers had attempted suicide. Safren & Heimberg also found a significant difference in depression rates among LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) youth and heterosexual youth with the LGBT youth showing higher rates of depression (1999). Another study by Russell & Joyner (2001) found that LGB youths' risk of attempting suicide was two

times higher than among heterosexual youths. These studies show that there are indeed extra internal and external pressures placed upon LGB youth that affect them in mental and emotional ways. Internalization of the homophobic messages that LGBT youth hear is one of the pressures they deal with that leads to the self-hatred that may cause individuals to have signs of depression or the desire to commit suicide. By internalizing these messages of hatred and lack of acceptance for a nontraditional sexuality, LGBT youth begin to define their sexuality and their sexual attractions in a negative light.

Religious institutions are often one of the more malicious institutional sources of homophobic messages that homosexuals receive. Kubicek et al. (2009) found that young men who have sex with men and are brought up in more conservative Christian denominations heard more severe messages about homophobia and fewer direct messages about homosexuality than those participants who were raised in less conservative Christian denominations. Homosexuals who have strong religious identities, including, but not limited to Christians, take the messages told to them by their religious leaders and texts very seriously. When these messages are not compatible with their homosexual identity, they begin to feel a struggle between their two identities and feel pressure to internalize the homophobic message given to them by their religion. In Kubicek's et al. study of young men who have sex with men, those who had a strong religious connection deeply internalized these messages of homophobia, and many "respondents reported being in a depressive state, contemplating suicide, and fasting or overeating to alleviate their feelings of despair and hopelessness" (2009, p. 614). Mahaffy (1996) found, in her study of lesbian Christians, that women who had an evangelical identity before coming out as lesbian were most likely to struggle with their religious beliefs and homosexual identity. The women in

Mahaffy's study appeared to have "internalized the conservative views of their churches which fosters the conflict between sexual orientation and religious identity" (1996, p. 400).

When two identities that are important to an individual counter one another, individuals feel unsure of either of their identities. This is referred to as cognitive dissonance, tension an individual experiences between two psychologically inconsistent thoughts or beliefs. The founder of cognitive dissonance theory, Leon Festinger, wrote that dissonance was the result of an individual's need for psychological consistency (1957). Individuals may feel that they can only possess one of their identities and must therefore choose which is more important; otherwise they may feel the need to hide one identity while they are participating in the other. More recent theories of cognitive dissonance view dissonance as a cognitive state that arises when an individual's behavior leads to unwanted or aversive consequences (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Without the potential for negative consequences due to inconsistent behaviors or identities an individual will not experience a state of dissonance (Cooper & Fazio, 1984). Cooper and Fazio's view that it was the responsibility for an aversive event that produces cognitive dissonance and not the need for psychological consistency, as stated by Festinger, is much more pertinent when discussing individuals who maintain both a religious and homosexual identity. If individuals do not have a fear of negative consequences from their religious institution, for example, going to hell or being asked to leave their congregation due to their homosexual identity, they do not feel a competition between their two identities. It is evident from past research that individuals who have a fear of negative consequences from their church are the ones who are in a state of cognitive dissonance with their two identities (Mahaffy, 1996; Pitt, 2009; Levy & Reeves, 2011; Yip, 2003).

2.2 Ways in Which Individuals Manage Their Cognitive Dissonance

Internal and external factors can determine how individuals will choose to handle cognitive dissonance. An individual's psychological health, amount of social support, messages from the media, and strength of the identities that are competing against one another may be some of these determining factors. Mahaffy's study of lesbians with Christian identities found that the age of Christian identification and the age at which one first suspects her lesbianism serve as predictors as to which resolution strategy an individual will use (2009). Depending on the aforementioned factors, individuals were found to employ three different types of resolution strategies: altering one's religious beliefs; leaving the church; or living with the dissonance. The women who were more likely to live with external pressures to conform to heterosexual norms were those who had expected earlier in their lives that they were lesbians (Mahaffy, 1996). Mahaffy posits that this may be due to the fact that individuals with an earlier lesbian identification would have a longer time to establish beliefs that validate a homosexual identity and would then have an easier time incorporating both of their identities into their daily life. "Lesbians who became Christians as adults chose to live with the external pressure [of heterosexual norms]" because they elected to be a part of the Christian community and were willing to tolerate people's discomfort with their homosexual identity in order to be a part of this community (Mahaffy, 2009, p. 400). The study also showed that individuals who were most likely to alter their beliefs in order to manage their cognitive dissonance were those that were experiencing internal dissonance instead of external dissonance (Mahaffy, 2009). Mahaffy's study makes it apparent that the sources of dissonance and the degree to which either an individual's religious identity or homosexual identity play a role in their life determines how they will choose to manage their dissonance. Cognitive dissonance management is not a clear-

cut method and is approached differently based on the individuals who are experiencing it and the internal and external pressures that are placed upon them.

Studies have found that homosexuals with a religious identity employ a variety of techniques to manage their cognitive dissonance due to conflicting identities. These techniques include rejecting their sexual identity, rejecting their religious identity, compartmentalizing the two identities (this involves passing as heterosexual in church while maintaining a committed homosexual identity outside of church), integrating their two identities (this involves integrating their sexual identity and religious identity into an altogether different identity), or critically evaluating the source of the homophobic messages that they are receiving.

Instead of having to choose which of their identities is more important, some homosexuals choose to live with both of their identities but simply separate them. This compartmentalization of identities, as Pitt refers to it as, is when a person passes as non-homosexual in church while maintaining a committed homosexual identity outside of church (2009, p. 47). Appleby (2001) found in his interviews of gay and bisexual working class men that most of the men reported some conflict in trying to maintain a Christian identity while still having a gay identity. In an attempt to manage stigma in adolescence and young adulthood the men noted lying or passing as ways they dealt with their sense of dissonance (Appleby, 2001). The men chose to hide their sexual identity in order to avoid conflict and gain acceptance from their religious community without having to give up their gay identity. Attempts at compartmentalizing identities often happen after first attempting to change one's religious identity or trying to ignore one's homosexual desires but realizing that it is not a simple task to give up one identity in exchange for the other. An attempt to compartmentalize one's homosexual identity and religious identity does not come without great effort. Although

individuals get to enjoy maintaining both identities, they still struggle with having to hide their true selves from both their homosexual communities and their religious communities.

Often the internal identity conflict that religious homosexual individuals experience leads to a point in which individuals integrate their two identities in a way that allows them to embrace their homosexual identity while still being a part of a faith community and not having to pass as non-homosexual. Pitt (2009) found that some gay men choose to integrate their two identities through a process that he refers to as “identity synthesis” (p. 49). During identity synthesis gay men “integrate their sexual identity and religious identity into an altogether different identity” (p. 49). The men in Pitt’s study indicated that they experienced a sense of relief once they were able to view their homosexual identity as a valid part of their sense of self (2009).

For some individuals, integrating religious and sexual identity happens sooner than it does for others. Levy and Reeves (2011) found that homosexual individuals with a Christian upbringing took longer to accept their homosexual identity. Often homosexuals raised in a religious background lack the social support that is present for homosexual individuals without a religious background. Families with strong religious beliefs find it difficult to handle when a family member is homosexual and therefore may not offer as much support to homosexual family members as they could. Homosexuals with religious upbringings may also lack social support because they have yet to find an LGBT community that offers the necessary support needed to feel comfortable with their homosexual identity, and the community they use for social support, their religious community, is not accepting of their homosexual identity. These social support factors influence the development of an identity that encompasses both a homosexual identity and a religious identity.

Individuals who have yet to embrace their sexual identity may find it more difficult to integrate their homosexual identity into daily life, especially religious life. The gay Black Christian men in Pitt's study described the process of integrating their identities in various ways. Some men referred to this process as a "journey"; they indicated that "there was no specific point in their lives that they decided to assume this new identity" (2009, p. 50). Other men were able to specify experiences that led them to integrate their religious and homosexual identities. The men mentioned interactions with other gay Black Christians or positive interactions with heterosexual members of their religion being important moments for them in their process of realizing they could integrate their two identities (Pitt, 2009). Some men also mentioned that they reinterpreted portions of their religion that they considered anti-gay, specifically portions of their religious texts that had originally appeared to be against homosexuality (Pitt, 2009). Finally, some men indicated that the reason they chose to integrate their two identities was because they had reached a "crisis point," and the way in which they were able to reconcile their two identities was by integrating them into one (Pitt, 2009, p. 50). Past research shows that various internal and external factors affect the process of integrating one's competing religious and homosexual identities into an identity that embraces and allows the equal expression of both. This process varies from one individual to another in length and emotional investment. For some men, as Pitt demonstrates, interactions with others cause individuals to realize that they desire an identity that encompasses both their homosexual and religious identities. For others, it is a result of numerous events that lead them to their new identity.

In order to obtain an identity that encompasses both faith and homosexuality, individuals must alter their religious identity, which is often done by critically evaluating the areas of their religion that are not accepting of homosexuality. Individuals choose to adopt a spiritual identity

instead of maintain a religious identity that does not align with their homosexual identity. Shallenberger's (1996) study found that gay men and lesbians defined spirituality as a clear separation from the concept of religion. By accepting a spiritual identity, individuals are not emotionally restricted by religious texts, values, morals, or beliefs that are not accepting of those with homosexual identities. Halkitis et al. (2009) hypothesized that LGBTs who defined themselves as spiritual used this term as a way to separate the anti-gay institutional beliefs they experienced in religious institutions from beliefs and practices that affirmed their identities as homosexual individuals. Their "definitions of spirituality focused on relationship with God/higher power and with self and others" (Halkitis et al., 2009, pg. 260). Homosexuals adopt spiritual identities in order to maintain a relationship with a higher power and with others within their faith community while still feeling they are accepting their homosexuality.

Maximizing spirituality and minimizing institutional religious practices that are not accepting of homosexuality foster acceptance of one's homosexual identity, without having to give up their faith, and lessen self-hatred, depression and anxiety (Levy & Reeves, 2011). Levy and Reeves (2011) found that those individuals who had resolved their identity conflict often described their faith as spiritual instead of religious. This alteration in faith allowed individuals to resolve the conflict between their two identities and have a more fluid view of how their sexuality could fit into their faith. This fluidity of identities is in sharp contrast to those individuals in Levy and Reeves' study who kept their sexuality a secret and often attempted to "pray away" their homosexual desires. Unlike those individuals who were able to adopt a spiritual identity that was accepting of their sexual identity, these individuals had feelings of depression because their homosexual feelings still conflicted with their religious beliefs (Levy & Reeves, 2011). This shows how important it is for a homosexual person of faith to find a

spiritual identity that allows them to embrace themselves fully for who they are spiritually and sexually.

Mahaffy's study also shows how altering one's religious beliefs through critical evaluation of religious messages allows individuals to maintain both their religious and homosexual identities. Mahaffy found that one way participants in her study dealt with homophobic messages given to them by their religion was to critically evaluate the source of the message. By critically assessing the source of homophobic messages they received from the church, an individual can maintain his or her religious identity while still feeling it is acceptable to embrace a homosexual identity. Managing their cognitive dissonance in this way allows people to incorporate the identities that play a critical role in who they feel they are as a human being without feelings of self-hatred or depression due to who they are. Yip's (2003) study of GLB (gay, lesbian, and bisexual) Christians found that most respondents felt that the Bible was pervasive for their beliefs; however, the respondents in that study also pointed out that the Bible should not be the sole basis for Christian faith, which indicates that the many individuals were choosing to critically evaluate portions of their religion that were not accepting of their sexuality, specifically the Bible in this case. They felt that the Bible should not be the sole focus of how people should live their lives because if it were, these individuals would not have a way to allow their religious and homosexual identities to coexist. Yip found that the majority of respondents in his study appeared to have developed positive self-identities that harmoniously incorporated their stigmatized sexualities and their Christian faith (2003). Individual's religious beliefs were found to be significantly impacted by their personal experiences and collective social circumstances (Yip, 2003). Instead of allowing religious texts and leaders to decide how they should live their lives, how they should live spiritually, and how they should deal with their

sexuality, the individuals in these studies chose to alter their faith in order to have a healthy way to live with both their spiritual and sexual identities.

Oftentimes, individuals do not start out knowing the best way to manage their religious and homosexual identities. Many times a homosexual individual will choose to simply attempt to reject one of their identities in order to maintain the other one. Attempting to manage one's homosexual desires or deny one's homosexual identity is a method that is commonly employed by homosexual individuals in an attempt to manage the cognitive dissonance that they are experiencing. Levy and Reeves' (2011) study of Christian LGQ (lesbian, gay, and queer) showed that after the initial realization that they were not heterosexual, individuals would keep their sexuality a secret and often attempt to "pray away" their homosexual desires, at which point life was often marked by feelings of depression because of their homosexual feelings and how it conflicted with their religious beliefs (Levy & Reeves, 2011). Pitt (2009) found that Black gay men involved in fundamentalist African-American churches attempted to reject their homosexual identity as one way of dealing with their identity conflict. Without exception, every individual that was interviewed by Pitt ($n = 34$) had rejected the homosexual feelings they were experiencing at some point in their life.

Other studies have also found that sometimes homosexual individuals attempt to manage their identity conflict by rejecting or altering their religious identity since it supposedly cannot coexist with a homosexual identity. Garcia, Gray-Stanley & Ramirez-Valles (2008) found that in adolescence, Catholic Latino GBT (gay, bisexual, and transgender) individuals began to experience a conflict between their Christian identity and their homosexual identity. At this point, in order to cope with the conflict they either remained Catholic, they joined other traditional religions or denominations, they joined nontraditional religious or spiritual groups, or

they abandoned organized religion (Garcia, Gray-Stanley & Ramirez-Valles, 2008). Most of the participants reported discarding Catholicism and joining religions or churches that were seen as welcoming to them as homosexuals instead of choosing to abandon their homosexual self (Garcia, Gray-Stanley & Ramirez-Valles, 2008). Kubicek et al. (2009) found that gay men would explore beliefs such as Kabbalah and Wicca/Paganism in an attempt to gain a sense of acceptance and tranquility that they felt religion or spirituality should provide. Past research has found that gay individuals find it hard to simply discard their religious identity in order to feel comfort with their gay identity. Instead, they choose to alter their religious identity in a way that is more accepting of their homosexual self. Most of the time this involves slight alterations, such as changing denominations, but sometimes individuals chose to make a drastic change in their religious identity by changing their religious affiliation or completely rejecting religion.

Religious homosexuals must develop their homosexual identity in different ways than those without a religious identity because they must incorporate their homosexual identity with an identity that is often contradictory. The lack of social support that religious homosexuals receive from their religious community has an effect on how they develop their homosexual identity. Individuals with religious identities often use their religious community as a source of social support; homosexuals do not always have the luxury of turning to their religious community to support them through their struggles as homosexual individuals. Often homosexuals feel forced to keep their homosexual identity a secret for fear of being completely rejected by their religious community. Religious homosexuals are left to deal with managing their homosexual identity by themselves since they do not have the ability to turn to the community they would commonly use as their social support network.

2.3 Homosexual Identity Formation Stages

Homosexual individuals must go through a variety of steps in order to accept their sexuality, which goes against the norm. Non-homosexual individuals have emotions and sexual attractions toward individuals of the opposite sex and accept these as normal emotions. Homosexual individuals experience these same emotions and attractions but toward an individual of the same sex. While for them these emotions are normal, because it is simply the way they feel, they must, at some point, make the realization that these feelings do not coincide with society's expectation of attraction. Homosexual individuals must go through a variety of steps in order to accept their homosexual emotions because they are required to make the realization that their attractions are considered deviant and must learn how to handle this deviant identity; this is not something that non-homosexual individuals must go through.

The first step individuals experience when trying to accept their homosexual identity is realizing the sexual feelings and desires they have are not heterosexual. Past research has discovered stages of homosexual identity development that homosexuals go through as they realize they have a homosexual identity and learn to embrace it. Unlike non-homosexuals whose sexual identity is assumed, homosexual individuals must realize at some point that their sexual desires are not the norm and define these desires as homosexual. During the first stage of homosexual identity formation proposed by Troiden (1989), individuals assume that they are heterosexual and "do not see homosexuality as personally relevant" (p.50). Troiden (1989) referred to this first stage as sensitization.

The second stage of Troiden's homosexual identity formation model, identity confusion, is the stage in which individuals who try to hide or deny their homosexuality. Individuals begin

to personalize homosexuality and start to think that they are potentially homosexual and realize that this is dissonant from their previously held self-images (Troiden, 1989). In this stage “stigma surrounding homosexuality contributes to identity confusion because it discourages adolescent (and some adult) lesbians and gay males from discussing their emerging sexual desires, or activities” (Troiden, 1989, p.55). This is especially relevant to homosexual individuals who are involved in religions that are not accepting of homosexuality. As mentioned above it is often found that religious homosexuals go through a point in their life in which they feel that they must deny their homosexuality in order to maintain a healthy and strong religious identity. Whereas Troiden refers to these actions, feelings, and experiences as one stage, identity confusion, Cass (1984) divided these into two stages, identity confusion and identity comparison, in her version of the homosexual identity formation model. Cass later realized that there is little differentiation between identity confusion and identity comparison. They are both marked by feelings of confusion about having homosexual feelings, actions and thoughts, confusion due to the realization of these feelings, actions, and thoughts, and feelings of alienation from individuals who are not homosexual as they begin to realize the difference between themselves and non-homosexuals (Cass, 1984). It is evident that individuals who attempt to ignore their homosexual identity in exchange for maintaining their religious identity are in the earlier stages of homosexual identity development because during the earlier stages of homosexual identity development, individuals often attempt to deal with their newfound homosexual feelings by denying their homosexual identity and avoiding their identity (Troiden, 1989). There are a variety of stigma management techniques employed during this stage of homosexual identity formation but these are the two that are most relevant to the topic of religion.

When individuals make the choice to compartmentalize their identities instead of choosing one over the other they have reached Troiden's third stage of homosexual identity formation, identity assumption. During this stage of development an individual has a self definition as homosexual and often have regular association with other homosexuals and exploration of the homosexual subculture. Individuals within the identity assumption stage often pass as non-homosexual in judgmental situations in order to deal with the stigma associated with their homosexual identity. Passing is particularly common in church and other religious settings. In order to avoid stigma gay and lesbian individuals choose to present the identity that they feel is most fitting for the situation, which is expressing themselves as non-homosexual while in their religious community. In Cass's model of homosexual identity formation, these actions and emotions mark the beginning of two stages, identity tolerance and identity acceptance (1984). Identity tolerance occurs when "the individual seeks the company of other homosexuals in order to fulfill social, sexual, and emotional needs" (Cass, 1984, p.151). The increased interactions that an individual experiences within the homosexual community lead to the next stage in Cass's model, which she referred to as identity acceptance (1984). During identity acceptance, individuals maintain a homosexual lifestyle; however, they still pass as heterosexual in possibly threatening situations.

When individuals critically evaluate their religion in order to integrate their competing homosexual and religious identities they have reached the final stage of Troiden's formation of a homosexual identity, commitment. At this stage homosexual individuals see their homosexuality as a way of life. Cass defines this as two separate stages, identity pride and identity synthesis, which later she finds do not have much distinction between one another. Identity pride is "characterized by feelings of pride toward one's homosexual identity and fierce loyalty to

homosexuals as a group” (Cass, 1984, p.152). Identity synthesis is when “a homosexual identity is no longer seen as overwhelmingly *the* identity by which an individual can be characterized” (Cass, 1984, p.152). Minton and McDonald (1984) refer to this as the final stage of ego development, the universalistic stage. During this stage individuals realize that societal norms can be critically evaluated. Individuals who critically evaluate messages received from religious leaders and texts in order to develop a committed homosexual identity are in this final stage of homosexual identity formation.

2.4 Religious Institutions

The journey to find a spiritual identity that does not conflict with one’s homosexual identity is sometimes a longer and more tedious journey for some than it is for others. Different religions perceive homosexuality differently, and this has a strong influence on how homosexual individuals within this community choose to manage their identity. Halkitis et al. (2009) showed that atheists/agnostics and Jewish participants were the least likely to report a change in affiliation while Christians and individuals who were raised in Eastern religions (for example, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam) were the most likely to report a change. This indicates that those in Christian and Eastern religion faiths experience more intense external pressure from their religion to be non-homosexual. Under these conditions gay and lesbian individuals often choose to change their religious identity by adopting an identity that encompasses both their religious and sexual selves.

Often homosexual individuals adopt a religious identity that focuses on spirituality instead of the church or text of their religion. By adopting a faith that is focused on spirituality or relationships with a higher power, individuals are better able to accept themselves as a homosexual person of faith because they do not need to focus on the texts or messages from their

faith that forbid homosexuality. Their homosexual identity does not have an impact on their personal relationship with a higher power when they have a spiritual faith and this means that there is not a need for their identities to compete against one another, instead they can coexist harmoniously. Studies by Halkitis et al. (2009) and Garcia, Gray-Stanley, and Ramirez-Valles (2008) found that homosexual individuals were more likely to rate themselves as spiritual instead of religious and placed a greater emphasis on spirituality than religion. In Halkitis et al. those who identified as spiritual defined religion as “focused on structured, communal forms of worship, beliefs in and relationship with God, as well as on prescribed, rule-based patterns of devotional practice” (2009, p. 260).

2.5 Feminism

Patriarchy, a social system in which the male gender is the primary authority figure, has long been a leading influential factor in how our culture operates. All institutions, including religion and homosexuality, are affected, in one way or another, by the ideas and beliefs that patriarchy perpetuates. In order for the male gender to be the primary agent of power and authority, there must be another gender that they have authority over. The subordination of women has a long and violent history in western civilization, although much of male control is reinforced by women’s acceptance of patriarchal beliefs and values. “Resistance to patriarchy is difficult because patriarchy makes itself seem the natural order of things; as a result, any resistance is ‘ludicrous’ and perhaps even mad” (Amussen, 1996, p. 156). Often those who fight for the rights of women are seen as radical and are often told that they are fighting against something that does not exist. It is important to realize that these individuals are rebelling against something so deeply entrenched in our culture that it often seems that it is either inherent in culture or does not seem to exist at all.

In the late 19th century and early 20th century there were groups of women who joined together for the common cause of gaining social and legal rights for the female gender. This movement was later referred to as the first wave of feminism. Feminism was a new term that was used to describe these individuals who united together in order to fight for the rights of women that had been denied to them in the past because of the patriarchal social system in America. They wanted to gain political, educational, employment, and marriage rights and benefits for themselves and women like them. Many types of women including working class and minority women were often overlooked by the first wave of feminism since the focus was on the experiences that middle-class white women encountered. Since first wave feminism tended to neglect the majority of women and their experiences many women felt the need for a new focus of feminism that would address these topics and women that had been ignored by first wave feminists. This led to the second wave of feminism in which the needs and rights of women who had been overlooked by the first wave feminists would be addressed regardless of race, sexual orientation, income, etc.

The second wave of feminism began in the 1960's and focused on minority women and working class women while still maintaining that the women who composed the first wave of feminism should have their rights as well. Second wave feminism came out of the Civil Rights movement and the anti-war movement and there was a large increase in feminist activity during this time. Second wave feminists fought openly against patriarchy and saw it as directly perpetuating women's cultural and political rights.

During this time many lesbian women were attracted to the feminist movement with hopes that they would also gain the rights that were being achieved for a variety of women that had been overlooked in the past by the first wave of feminism. Lesbians soon found that their

“issues were thought to be a hindrance to the movement in the same way that drag queens had been regarded by homophiles as an obstacle to the acceptance by the heterosexual majority” (Sullivan, 2003, p. 32). During the 1980’s there was a separation of the second-wave from lesbian feminism because lesbians were seen as holding back the movement. Instead of including lesbians in their cause non-homosexual feminists felt that by excluding lesbians they would obtain more rights for women and more quickly than if they were to include lesbians. Betty Friedan coined the term “lavender menace” to describe the perspective that lesbians were preventing the feminist movement from achieving as much equality as possible for women in the shortest amount of time. This view of lesbians as a “lavender menace” led to lesbians turning back to the Gay and Lesbian Liberation movement to fight for their rights instead of relying on the feminist movement to include them.

Third wave feminism began in the 1990’s as a response to what was perceived as the failure of the second wave feminists. “The phenomenon of third wave feminism should be viewed as a more profound development: the rise of a new discourse or paradigm for framing and understanding gender relations that grew out of a critique of the inadequacies of the second wave” (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 57). They challenged the definitions of femininity that second wave feminists were seen as perpetuating. Third wave feminists felt that these definitions of femininity over-emphasized the experiences of middle-class white women and ignored the experiences of other types of women, including lesbians. The third wave feminists use a post-structuralism interpretation of gender and sexuality in order to represent the full range of experiences that women encounter. Post-structuralism rejects the structures that are created by society and questions the need for a binary structure, including gender binaries, within these structures. “A number of feminist theorists embraced these ideas. Rather than viewing

affirmations of identity as liberating, they reconfigured them as disciplinary, restrictive and regulatory” (Mann & Huffmann, 2005, p. 63). This post-structuralism approach to gender and sexuality would strongly influence gay and lesbian studies as well as queer theory, which would develop later. Queer theorists would also adopt this idea that having two socially accepted genders is not necessary for the function of society. Instead they saw gender binaries in society as causing more problems because it innately puts one group against another. They would take these ideas one step further by offering an alternative to the gender binary that existed in American culture.

These three waves of feminism led to the emergence of feminist theory which aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's social roles and lived experience. According to bell hooks (2000), “in its earliest inception feminist theory had as its primary goal explaining to women and men how sexist thinking worked and how we could challenge and change it” (p. 19). By questioning sexism and offering alternatives to living and dealing with it, feminist theory took a step toward equality that would lead to subsequent groups to follow the same direction. Feminist theorists challenged gender and sexual inequality by breaking down the categories that society had constructed. They did not always recognize society’s ideas of normal versus deviant, with deviant being what goes against what society had judged as acceptable characteristics that place an individual within preset categories. By questioning not only the sexism that was inherently present in Western society but also speaking against the traditional gender and sexual inequalities that come with this sexism, feminists exposed a normally accepted and expected part of society for what it was, judgmental and unequal. Feminist theorists’ decision to question something that was so deeply rooted and influential in our culture enabled other groups who were fighting for different types of equality

to have the courage to question other practices that suppressed individuals. This was especially true in the case of homosexual individuals. Feminism showed that gender and sexual norms were not traits that are inherent in an individual's biology but were in fact created by society and therefore could be changed by society. Therefore, an individual's social status that results from having a homosexual identity was shown to be a result of how society views and treats homosexuals and not their biological makeup. The ways in which homosexual individuals were viewed and treated could be changed by members of society just the same as they had been created by members of society.

Gay and Lesbian Liberation groups also led to the emergence of a new strain of theory. Gay and lesbian studies recognized that all sexual identities fall under one of two categories that were measured by societal standards. Individuals either were considered to be "normal" or deviant when it came to their sexual identities. They also sought to expose the fact that those who were considered deviant, namely homosexuals, were not present in dominant cultural production and they attempted to expose this to show that Western society had a tradition of homophobia and of neglecting to recognize those who were not considered normal. These thoughts were an expansion on feminist theory because they showed how sexism and gender norms perpetuated the suppression of individuals that were seen as going against these societal norms by not representing them in popular culture and not presenting their ideas for others to consume and possibly accept. By only representing one point of view of gender and sexuality, popular culture shows that there is only one way to act correctly when it comes to gender and sexuality according to societal standards.

2.6 *Queer Theory*

Out of these two areas of study, feminist theory and gay and lesbian studies, arose a very recent type of theory called queer theory. Queer theory is also directly related to and influenced by both the feminist and gay rights movements. Queer theorists attempt to take feminism and gay and lesbian theory one step further by placing what these schools of thought have seen as lacking in society into motion and making them present in society. Queer culture is motivated by a “desire to get audiences thinking about their own sexuality” (Hilbert, 1995, p. 469). Queer theorists and queer culture do this by taking items that are a part of the cultural mainstream and are considered sexually “normal” and showing how they have “undeniably queer aspects” (hoogland, 2000, p.166).

Queer theory emerged from a number of theorists who were a part of feminist or gay and lesbian studies and who decided that there was a need for expansion upon these topics. Their discussions began by talking about the subject of the lack of representation of alternative gender roles and sexualities within media. This led to discussion about how femininity and masculinity were expressed through our culture, including the media. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick wrote about how feminism focused on femininity and therefore was overlooking a variety of other female experiences and people who were not strictly feminine (1990). Queer theory attempts to address the fact that a variety of females were not being represented by the feminist movement by seeking to question the hegemonic assumption that sex and gender are one in the same (Martin, 1998). Queer theory seeks to separate “anatomical sex, social gender, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual object choice, and sexual practice” (Martin, 1998, p. 12). Queer theory does not only recognize the importance of separating these differences and having them recognized by popular culture but “queer theory and politics necessarily celebrate transgression in the form of

visible difference from the norms that are then exposed to be norms, not natures or inevitable” (Martin, 1998, p. 13). Therefore, queer theorists see the importance in individuals choosing to go against the traditional gender and sexual norms. Queer theorists feel that by going against these norms individuals bring to light the fact that these norms are culturally created and enforced and not something that is biologically inherent. Queer theory indicates that gender determines how individuals interact in society through use of bodily discourse and Sedgwick postulated that “gender is primarily about control over women’s bodies” (Martin, 1998, p. 15). Sedgwick stated gender is a way for one group of people, males, to suppress another group of people, females, based on reasons that are beneficial to the group that does the suppressing. Therefore, queer theorists see gender as a cultural and societal institution that is created and enforced by those in power, males, in order to suppress other individuals, females, so that they can remain in a position of power.

Another influential queer theorist is Judith Butler. Butler addresses gender and sex differently than Sedgwick. Whereas, “for Sedgwick, gender becomes sex, and ineluctably follows the principles of binary division, for Butler, sex becomes gender, that is, is socially constructed” (Martin, 1998, p. 18). Butler sees an individual’s sex as determining their gender, therefore an individual is placed within a certain gender role based on their anatomical features instead of a gender role being created for individuals that possess a variety of anatomical features that group them together into a suppressed category. In Butler’s book, *Gender Trouble*, she also addresses the fact that there are heterosexual genderbinaries, the classification of gender into two separate categories of either masculine or feminine, that are placed upon individuals with a certain body type and therefore a certain gender (1990). Butler (1990) used butch-femme desire to show how homosexual practices may still enforce heterosexual genderbinaries and attempts to

bring this fact to light through the example of butch-femme lesbianism. Overall, Butler questions the face validity of identities and she made sure to recognize the fact that individuals' sexual and gender identities were created by certain people, for specific purposes, and had definite effects on the people who believed in them.

The fact that these theorists were questioning gender patriarchal norms in ways that had never been done before in feminist or gay and lesbian studies meant that there was a need to produce a new theoretical environment in which these issues could be discussed and researched in further detail. Stein and Plummer postulated:

“Queer theory became a rallying cry for new ways of thinking and theorizing. For many, the term *lesbian and gay* studies did not seem inclusive enough; it did not encapsulate the ambivalence toward sexual categorization which many lesbian/gay scholars felt, and the difficulties they faced in fitting sexuality into the ‘ethnicity model’ which provided the template for such fields as African-American and women’s studies, and indeed for identity politics in general” (1994, p. 181).

Queer theory was created in order to focus on the issues that Sedgwick, Butler and other theorists like them felt were drastically important and had been overlooked by feminist and gay and lesbian studies. In order to accurately look at these topics these theorists were in need of a new way to study and conceptualize sexuality and gender that was not available to them in feminist and gay and lesbian studies.

Queer theory is marked by four hallmarks, according to Stein and Plummer:

“...1) a conceptualization of sexuality which sees sexual power embodied in different levels of social life, expressed discursively and enforced through boundaries and binary divides; 2) the problematization of sexual and gender categories, and of identities in

general. Identities are always on uncertain ground, entailing displacements of identification and knowing; 3) a rejection of civil rights strategies in favor of a politics of carnival, transgression, and parody which leads to deconstruction, decentering, revisionist readings, and an anti-assimilationist politics; 4) a willingness to interrogate areas which normally would not be seen as the terrain of sexuality, and to conduct queer “readings” of ostensibly heterosexual or nonsexualized texts (1994, p. 181-182).”

This first hallmark addresses that queer theorists recognize the fact that sexuality and gender exist as binaries in society and that they are constantly reinforced by cultural practices. The second hallmark is important to queer theory as queer theorists seek to expose the fact that these binaries are in need of constant reinforcement throughout every aspect of society, which suggests that they are not as stable as they appear. Butler claims, “that heterosexuality is always in the act of elaborating itself is evidence that it is perpetually at risk, that it ‘knows’ its own possibility of being undone (1991, p. 23).

There are two predominant strains in queer theory, radical deconstructionism and radical subversion. The focus of radical deconstructionism is sexual orientation, and theorists within this strain question categories of sexual orientations and how they are presented in texts. For radical deconstructionalists, “queer theory interrogates categories of sexual orientation, most often from the standpoint of the text” (Green, 2007, p. 28). While radical deconstructionalists question the categories of sexual orientation that are created by texts, radical subversionists go one step further by agitating the things that society uses to normalize the sexual order.

Therefore, instead of just questioning why sexuality and gender are categorized in specific ways, radical subversionists present alternatives to the gender and sexual norms in order to make it apparent that the sexual and gender norms we live by are in fact present and that there are

alternatives to them. Radical subversionists “seek to disrupt the normalizing tendencies of the sexual order” (Green, 2007, p. 28). Generally, both strains of queer theory do not find it important to focus on socially created categories for sexuality and gender. They find it important to address the fact that these are in fact created and enforced by society and to offer up alternatives to these categories that are deeply entrenched in our society. The strains are brought together by the desire to “‘denaturalize’ dominant social classifications and, in turn, destabilize the social order” (Green, 2007, p. 28).

2.7 Queer Theory and the Formation of Homosexual Identities

Both Cass (1984) and Troiden (1989) used models that grouped homosexual individuals into categories based on their level of commitment to their homosexual identity. From the perspective of a queer theorist, the fact that homosexual individuals must move through these stages in order to be accepting of their sexuality, unlike their non-homosexual counterparts, highlights the fact that cultural institutions are in fact perpetuating heterosexist norms in texts and popular culture. Non-homosexual individuals do not have a similar model through which they must proceed in order to understand and accept their sexual feelings and desires because their feelings and desires are seen as being normal and acceptable. Non-homosexual individuals do not have to question their feelings and desires or feel self-conscious about these feelings and desires as homosexual individuals do because they are presented and accepted as normal in our culture. When non-homosexual individuals have sexual feelings they are seen simply as being sexual, there is no need to distinguish them as different the way it is for homosexual individuals.

Ideally, queer theorists would produce an environment in which homosexual individuals do not have to question their feelings and desires or feel self-conscious about them. For queer theorists, “viewing identities as multiple, fluid and unstable was seen as presenting more

possibilities for the surfacing of differences” (Mann & Huffman, 2005, p. 63). If queer theorists’ attempts at disrupting the sexual binaries that exist within society were successful there would not be a normal sexuality, heterosexuality, pitted against another which is considered deviant, homosexuality, and therefore no need for homosexual individuals to move through these homosexual identity formation models. There would no longer be a need for these models because homosexual feelings and desires would be seen simply as sexual desires and feelings, just as heterosexual ones, instead of those that go against the norm. While this idea of gender and sexual equality is an ideal model to move toward, there are still significant differences between people based on their gender and/ or sexual orientation that cannot be ignored. Past research has shown that people experience their lives differently based on their gender and/or sexual orientation and therefore it is an important factor that cannot yet be ignored (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009).

2.8 Homosexual Gender Bias

Studies that have looked at non-homosexuals’ perceptions of homosexual individuals have revealed a gender bias in acceptance of homosexual individuals. The studies, which have analyzed differences in perceptions and interactions between non-homosexuals with lesbian women and gay men, have found that non-homosexuals perceive and interact with lesbian women and gay men differently. Hequembourg and Brallier (2009) found that both gay men and women experienced threatening behavior from non-homosexual men. The type of threatening behavior women and men experienced differed though. For women, the threatening behavior they experienced was more sexual in nature and for the men it was more physically confrontational. Respondents also reported that women’s same-sex relationships were eroticized and distorted to accommodate heterosexual male desire, while men were negatively depicted as

sexually promiscuous and deviant (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009). The fact that gay men experience more physical confrontation than lesbians do and feel that they were seen as sexually promiscuous and deviant indicates that there is a stronger societal bias against men having a homosexual identity and lifestyle. Hequembourg and Brallier's study also found that this pattern of sexual versus physical intimidation applied across social contexts. Based on these observations that lesbians experience sexually threatening behavior while gay men experience physically threatening behavior in all different types of social interaction, it can be posited that the gender bias that is the root of these differences will apply in the institution of religion as well.

Studies have also found that levels of support for homosexuality by both non-homosexual males and females was inversely associated with their levels of political conservatism and religiousness and was positively associated with having "out" gay and lesbian friends (Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). These findings are relevant to homosexual relationships with religious communities because it shows that the community that they wish to be a part of, a religious community, are often the ones that will be least supportive of their sexual identity.

It is clear from the studies on non-homosexuals' perceptions of heterosexuality that there is both a gender and a religious bias when it comes to the support of individuals with homosexual identities. There have been a minimal number of studies that focus on differences between gay men and lesbians and none having to do with religion. This is clearly an important area of research that has been overlooked because as past research shows, gender plays a strong role in how homosexual individuals are perceived and interacted with by non-homosexuals. Past research also indicates that religious identities will have an influence on one's acceptance as a homosexual because religious individuals are often less supportive of those with a homosexual identity.

Given that research has shown that religion influences the development and levels of comfort that homosexual individuals experience with their homosexual identity, and no study to date has investigated differences between gay men and lesbian women, it is hypothesized that religion will have a differential influence on the degree to which gay men and lesbian women accept, maintain, and express their homosexual identity. Since lesbians do not experience as much physically threatening behaviors from non-homosexuals as gay men do, it is hypothesized that lesbians will be more likely to express their homosexual identity in a possibly hostile environment than gay men (Hequembourg and Brallier, 2009). Therefore, it is expected that while religion will still have an effect on the formation of homosexual identity development this will not be as pronounced in lesbian women as it will be in gay men.

On the basis of these ideas, two hypotheses about the effect of religiosity on homosexual identity formation have been formed:

H1: Individuals with a stronger religiosity will have a lower homosexual identity formation stage commitment

H2: Gay men with a strong religiosity will have a lower homosexual identity formation stage commitment than lesbians who also have a strong religiosity.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Research Question

Gender has a strong influence on how individuals interact throughout their daily lives. Past research has found that gay men and women are viewed and treated differently by culture based on their gender (Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Skinner & Goodfriend, 2009; Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). This difference in treatment persists throughout cultural institutions, including religion. If gay men and women are being treated differently by their religion due to their gender, it may be true that this treatment has an effect on their commitment to their gay identity. This study investigates the following question: does religiosity affect homosexual identity acceptance differently for gay men and lesbian women?

3.2 Survey Research

The data for this research project was collected through a survey research design. The survey instrument is a combination of questions developed by past research on gay identity formation (Brady & Busse, 1994) and original questions written specifically for this study. The instrument contains 64 questions that request demographic information and variables that assess psychological well-being, religiosity, and placement on Cass' (1979; 1984) homosexual identity formation stage model. A copy of the survey is attached in Appendix A.

3.3 *Sample*

The participant sample is a nonrandom sample that includes LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered) friendly churches and LGBT organizations in Georgia, Alabama, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Alabama and Georgia were chosen because of their proximity to Auburn University while Virginia and Washington D.C. were chosen because of the large number of open and affirming churches in the area. All participants are at least 19 years of age and self-identify as a homosexual. Both the recruitment e-mail and informational letter ask participants who take part in the survey to be individuals who self-identify as homosexual in an attempt to ensure the desired population is being reached. There are also three questions in the survey that were used to validate individuals' homosexuality ("I have feelings I would label as homosexual"; "I have thoughts I would label as homosexual"; and "I engage in behavior I would label as homosexual").

The diversity that is inherent in LGBT groups led to different demographic questions and answer choices being added to the survey. Sex and gender are often used interchangeably in surveys but for the purpose of this study, there needs to be differentiation between these terms, due to the sample being derived from a group of people who often challenge traditional sex and gender roles. For the purposes of this study, biological sex was determined by biological characteristics, such as external genitalia or having XX or XY chromosomes. Options given to individuals to choose from were male (having an XY chromosome makeup, a penis, scrotum, and testicles and development of facial hair at the onset of puberty), female (a person with an XX chromosome makeup, a vagina, uterus, and ovaries and who develops enlarged breast and

maintains a hairless face at the onset of puberty), and intersexed (an individual displaying sexual characteristics of both males and females). Gender was defined as the social classification of males and females. Options given are male, female, transgender (an individual who's gender identity does not match their assigned sex), and queer (a sexual minority who is not heterosexual, heteronormative, or part of the gender-binary).

A different approach also needed to be taken when it comes to sexual orientation because of the community being surveyed. There are a variety of sexual orientations represented by the LGBT community. The sexual orientations included in this study are gay (a homosexual male who is attracted to other males), lesbian (a homosexual woman who is attracted to other women), bisexual (an individual who is attracted to those of both biological sexes), queer (a sexual minority who is not heterosexual, heteronormative, or part of the gender-binary), heterosexual (individual who is attracted to a person of the opposite sex), pansexual (individuals who are sexually, emotionally, or romantically attracted to people of all gender identities and biological sexes), and asexual (a person who lacks sexual attraction). The term gay is often used interchangeably for gay men and women. For this study, gay men and lesbian women were differentiated because the LGBT community consists of individuals, specifically transsexual, transgender, and queer, who do not fit neatly into biological sex and gender categories. By differentiating between gay men and lesbian women more consistent results can be obtained from respondents in relation to sexual orientation.

Recruitment e-mails were sent to the LGBT organization leaders and leaders of LGBT friendly churches. The e-mail asked organizational leaders to request that their members participate in the study and also contained a link to the online survey. The organization leaders and church leaders functioned as gatekeepers by ensuring the safety of the members of their

group or congregation while also being the point of contact for both the researcher and survey participants.

Auburn University's IRB approved this study and the use of the online survey.

3.4 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable in this study is homosexual identity formation stage, as theorized by Cass (1979). The Homosexual Identity Formation Model (HIF) developed by Cass posits that “change from a pre-homosexual to a homosexual identity occurs in response to the incongruence experienced by an individual when s/he confronts the following: (1) perceptions the individual holds about a characteristic attributed to him/herself; (2) the individual's perceptions about his or her behavior; and (3) the individual's beliefs about what people think about him/her” (Brady & Busse, 1994, p.3).

Individuals move from one homosexual identity formation stage to the other through the process of striving for congruency between perceptions about one's behavior, one's self-identity, and others' beliefs about oneself (Brady and Busse, 1994). The stages of the HIF model are Identity Confusion, Identity Comparison, Identity Tolerance, Identity Acceptance, Identity Pride, and Identity Synthesis (Cass, 1979).

Brady and Busse operationalized Cass' theoretical model in their gay identity questionnaire (1994), which was used in the present research to determine each individual's level of gay identity comfort. Respondents received a score in each stage. The questionnaire consists of 45 statements which subjects respond with true or false. Three of these items are used as validity checks (“I have feelings I would label as homosexual”; “I have thoughts I would label as homosexual”; and “I engage in behavior I would label as homosexual”). In order to be classified as homosexual individuals had to select “true” to at least one of these items. The remaining

statements were used to determine subjects' stage designation of homosexual identity formation. Each of the six stages of homosexual identity formation, as developed by Cass (1979), have seven identifying questions. For each item a subject marks true, a point was accrued for that stage of homosexual identity formation. For each false statement, a point of zero was given for that stage. The stage in which the subject accrued the most points was the homosexual identity formation stage which they were determined to fall within. The stages of homosexual identity formation were measured on an ordinal scale of 1-6: 1 = Identity Confusion, 2= Identity Comparison, 3= Identity Tolerance, 4= Identity Acceptance, 5= Identity Pride, and 6= Identity Synthesis. The gay identity questionnaire was not changed because it has been routinely used and cited in academic literature and maintains face validity (Mayfield, 2001; Rowen & Malcolm, 2003; King & Smith, 2004; Peterson & Gerrity, 2006; Harris, Cook & Kashubeck-West, 2008; Halpin & Allen, 2004).

3.5 Independent Variables

The strength of an individual's religiosity is expected to determine the stage of homosexual identity formation. Therefore, individuals with a stronger religious identity are expected to fall within the lower stages of Troiden's homosexual identity formation stage model. For the purpose of this study, religiosity is defined as level of religious activity, dedication, and belief. Questions were modified from previous religiosity scales to include religions other than Christianity. Questions were, (1) "How often do you read your religious text? (eg. Bible, Torah, Koran)"; (2) "How often do you attend religious services?"; (3) "How often do you pray?"; and (4) "To what extent is the following statement true about you? I am very active in my spiritual/religious community". Items were coded on a 7-point Likert scale and measured as an ordinal variable. The first three questions gave the answer options of, 1= Daily, 2= 2-3 Times a

Week, 3= Once a Week, 4= 2-3 Times a Month, 5= Once a Month, 6= 2-5 Times a Year, and 7= Never. The last question was ranked as 1= Very True, 2= Considerably True, 3= Moderately True, 4= Somewhat True, 5= Slightly True, 6= A Little True, and 7= Not True At All.

Religiosity was determined based on the score an individual is given, individuals with a score of 4-9 were categorized as highly religious, individuals with a score of 10-15 were categorized as religious, individuals with a score of 16-21 were categorized as somewhat religious, and individuals with a score of 22-28 were categorized as not religious.

Demographics were used to determine which traits have an influence on the development of a homosexual identity. Demographics collected were biological sex, gender, age, race, education, sexual orientation, annual household income, and religious affiliation. Biological sex was measured on a nominal scale of 0-2, 0= male; 1= female; or 2= Intersex. Gender was calculated on a nominal scale of 0-4, 0= male; 1= female; 2= transgender; 3= queer; or 4= other. Age was considered as an ordinal variable. Survey participants entered their age. Race was calculated on a nominal scale of 0-5, 0= White; 1= Black or African American; 2= American Indian or Alaska Native; 3= Asian; 4= Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; or 5= Other. Level of education was measured on an interval scale of 0-6, 0= Some high school; 1= High school degree; 2= Technical degree; 3= Some college; 4= Bachelor's degree; 5= Some graduate school; or 6= Graduate degree. Sexual orientation was calculated on a nominal scale of 0-7, 0= Gay; 1= Lesbian; 2= Bisexual; 3= Queer; 4= Heterosexual; 5= Pansexual; 6= Asexual; or 7= Other. Annual household income was measured as an interval variable with 7 choices, 0= Less than \$15,000; 1= \$15,000- \$29,999; 2= \$30,000- \$44,999; 3= \$45,000- \$59,999; 4= \$60,000- \$74,999; 5= \$75,000- \$89,999; or 6= \$90,000 and above. Respondents were given an open-ended option to fill in their religious affiliation and this was measured on a scale of 0-5, 0= High

Christian; 1= Low Christian; 2= Eastern religions (for example, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism); 3= Spiritual religions; or 4= No religious affiliation. Religions that were categorized as high Christian were conservative religious groups that favor the theology, worship and hierarchical structure of Anglicanism (Cairns, 2002; Erikson; 1986; Zink, 2008). High Christian included Roman Catholicism, Catholic, Christian, and Baptist. Religions that were categorized as low Christian were religious groups that desire the church structure to be more liberal, for example, by rejecting that the sacraments are the divine way of bestowing grace upon an individual (Wade Clarke Roof, 1999). Low Christian included Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Universalist.

3.6 Statistical Plan of Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the sample was run in order to get a better idea of what characteristics are represented in the sample. Demographics (gender, biological sex, race, education, annual household income, and religious affiliation), homosexual identity formation stage, and religiosity were used in this analysis.

A correlation matrix was conducted that includes gender, biological sex, race, education, annual household income, religious affiliation, Homosexual Identity Development stage, and religiosity. This allowed for identifying significant relationships among variables to determine what independent variables are influential.

A regression of religiosity and demographic variables on homosexual identity formation stage was performed to determine to what degree influential independent variables have an effect on the dependent variable, homosexual identity formation stage and to control for alternative explanations and spurious relationships.

Chapter 4

Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Sample Population

The total number of respondents was $N = 79$; however, because 10 respondents failed to meet selection criteria, the final sample total was $N = 69$. The number of respondents was smaller than expected, therefore nonparametric tests were run because gay men and lesbian women separately only accounted for half of the sample. Given the numbers of gay men ($n = 33$) and lesbian women ($n = 27$) were too close to the accepted value of $n = 30$, a normal distribution could not be assumed. A substantial majority of cases fell in stage 6, identity synthesis, of HIF ($n = 48$); thus, the distribution was skewed to the right. Table 1 shows the cumulative results of the demographics for this sample.

4.1.1 Demographics of Age

Respondent ages ranged from 19 to 71 years with a mean age of 41. The percentage breakdown of the cohorts indicated that the sample population was as follows: 34% aged 19-30 ($n = 23$); 19.4% aged 31-40 ($n = 13$); 14.9% aged 41-50 ($n = 10$); 14.9% aged 49-60 ($n = 10$); and 16.4 % aged 61 and above ($n = 11$).

4.1.2 Demographics of Biological Sex and Gender

Respondents were given the option to identify themselves as biologically male, biologically female, or intersexed. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 52.1% males ($n = 33$) and 47.8% females ($n = 36$).

The respondents were asked to identify their gender and were given the option to identify themselves as male, female, transgender or queer. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 52.2% males ($n = 36$); 42% females ($n = 29$); 2.9% transgender ($n = 2$); and 2.9% queer ($n = 2$).

4.1.3 *Demographics of Sexual Orientation*

Respondents were asked to identify their sexual orientation. They were given six options to choose from - gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, heterosexual, and other. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 47.8% gay individuals ($n = 33$); 39.1% lesbian individuals ($n = 27$); 2.9% bisexual individuals ($n = 2$); 2.9% queer individuals ($n = 2$); 5.8% heterosexual individuals ($n = 4$); and 1.3% who chose other ($n = 1$).

4.1.4 *Demographics of Annual Household Income*

Respondents were asked to identify their annual household income. Their options were less than \$15,000, \$15,000-\$29,999, \$30,000-\$44,999, \$45,000-\$59,999, \$60,000-\$74,999, \$75,000-\$89,999, and \$90,000 and above. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 8.7% who answered less than \$15,000 ($n = 6$); 4 individuals who answered \$15,000-\$29,999, 5.8%; 10 individuals who answered \$30,00-\$44,999, 14.5%; 10 individuals who answered \$45,000-\$59,999, 14.5%; 8 individuals who answered \$60,000-\$74,999, 11.6%; 7 individuals who answered \$75,000-\$89,999, 10.1%; and 24 who answered \$90,000 and above, 34.8%.

4.1.5 *Demographics of Education*

Respondents were asked to identify their highest level of education. The categories they had to choose from were high school degree/ GED, technical degree, some college, bachelor's degree, some graduate school, and graduate degree. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 5.8% with a high school degree or GED ($n = 4$); 2.9% of individuals with technical

degrees ($n = 2$); 23.2% of individuals with some college ($n = 16$); 15.9% of individuals with a bachelor's degree ($n = 11$); 10.1% of individuals with some graduate school ($n = 7$); and 42% of individuals with a graduate degree ($n = 29$).

4.2 *Religiosity and Religious Affiliation*

4.2.1 *Religious Affiliation- Raised*

Respondents were asked to identify the religion, if any, in which they were raised. Based on their responses, they were placed in one of four categories, high Christian, low Christian, Eastern religions, and no affiliation. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 49.3% of individuals raised in a high Christian religion ($n = 34$); 31.9% of individuals raised in a low Christian religion ($n = 22$); 1.4% of individuals raised in an Eastern religion ($n = 1$); and 4.3% of individuals raised without a religious affiliation ($n = 3$).

4.2.2 *Religious Affiliation- Current*

Respondents were asked to identify the religion in which they were currently affiliated. These answers were then placed in one of five categories, high Christian, low Christian, Eastern religions, spiritual religions, and no affiliation. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 18.8% of individuals currently in a high Christian religion ($n = 13$); 37.7% of individuals currently in a low Christian religion ($n = 26$); 2.9% of individuals currently in an Eastern religion ($n = 2$); 5.8% of individuals currently in a spiritual religion ($n = 4$); and 21.7% of individuals currently without a religious affiliation ($n = 15$).

4.2.3 *Religiosity*

The religiosity scale was categorized by response quartiles into four possible responses. Religiosity is determined based on the score an individual was given: The four categories are 1= highly religious (4-9), 2= religious (10-15), 3= somewhat religious (16-21), and 4= not religious

(22-28). The percentage breakdown of the sample included 30.9% of individuals who were highly religious ($n = 21$); 23.5% of individuals who were religious ($n = 16$); 13.2% of individuals who were somewhat religious ($n = 9$); and 32.2% of individuals who were not religious ($n = 22$).

4.3 *Homosexual Identity Formation*

Due to the large number of individuals in the sample that were identified to be in homosexual identity formation stage 6, a new category labeled homosexual identity formation stage weighted was created. The equation for this category was as follows:

$$\text{HIFSTAGE6} - (\text{HIFSTAGE5} * 1) - (\text{HIFSTAGE4} * 2) - (\text{HIFSTAGE3} * 3) - (\text{HIFSTAGE2} * 4) - (\text{HIFSTAGE1} * 5) = \text{HIF COMMITMENT}$$

By making this adjustment, we were able to identify which of the individuals in HIF stage 6 were in fact more committed to that strong homosexual identity formation stage than others. By weighting lower stages, such as stage 1 or 2 more, and weighting higher stages, such as stage 4 or 5 less, more points were deducted from the weighted score for responses that indicated that an individual was not as strongly committed to their stage 6 homosexual identity formation stage designation. HIF stage commitment answers ranged from -31 to 41.

A visual binning is a statistical method for categorizing data according to respondent answers. A visual binning was performed in order to categorize the HIF weighted variable into commitment levels. Cut points were made at the +/- 1 standard deviation. The four categories are 1= very low commitment, 2= somewhat committed, 3= committed, and 4= highly committed. The percentage breakdown of the sample included 16.9% of individuals who had a very low commitment ($n = 11$); 12.3% of individuals who were somewhat committed ($n = 8$); 54.4% of

individuals who were committed ($n = 43$); and 3.8% of individuals who were highly committed ($n = 3$).

4.4 Homosexual Identity Commitment

A Kendall's tau_b correlation matrix, Table 2, analyzed the independent variable effect on HIF stage commitment. While there were no statistically significant findings, the statistics did show that biological sex and gender both had the strongest effect on HIF stage commitment. The coefficient for biological sex was -0.105 which indicates that females were more likely to have a stronger HIF stage commitment. Also, with a coefficient of -.093 gender was shown to have the second strongest effect on HIF stage commitment. This also indicated that females were more likely to have a stronger HIF stage designation.

The regression that analyzed religiosity's effect on homosexual identity commitment approached significance, see Table 3, and yielded a $\beta = .233$ and t -statistic= 1.443. Additionally, the regression yielded a $\beta = .231$ and a t -statistic= 1.279 for highest level of education. Lastly, the regression yielded a $\beta = .155$ and a t -statistic= 1.049 for religion in which an individual was raised. These results, although not statistically significant, do show religiosity has the greatest effect on homosexual identity stage commitment.

4.5 Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis supposed individuals with a stronger religiosity will have a lower homosexual identity formation stage commitment. While the data approached statistical significance it did not yield results that support this hypothesis. The results confirmed religiosity had the strongest explanatory factor on homosexual identity stage commitment with a $\beta = .233$. Had the sample size been larger the results may have indicated statistical significance.

4.6 *Hypothesis Two*

The second hypothesis presumed that gay men with a strong religiosity will have a lower homosexual identity formation stage commitment than lesbians who also have a strong religiosity. Females trended toward a lower religiosity while males were shown to have a higher religiosity, as evidenced by the correlation coefficient of .349 ($p < .001$).

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion

Studies that have looked at non-homosexuals' perceptions of homosexual individuals have revealed a gender bias in acceptance of homosexual individuals. The studies, which have analyzed differences in perceptions and interactions between non-homosexuals with lesbian women and gay men, have found that non-homosexuals perceive and interact with lesbian women and gay men differently. Hequembourg and Brallier (2009) found that both gay men and women experienced threatening behavior from non-homosexual men. For women, the threatening behavior they experienced was more sexual in nature, and for the men it was more physically confrontational. Studies have also found that levels of support for homosexuality by both non-homosexual males and females was inversely associated with their levels of political conservatism, and religiousness and was positively associated with having "out" gay and lesbian friends (Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). These studies indicate that there is a gender and a religious/conservative bias when it comes to the support of individuals with homosexual identities.

Since gender plays a strong role in how homosexual individuals are perceived and interacted with by non-homosexuals, it could be posited that gender would have an influence on how comfortable individuals are with their homosexual identity. Since gay men do not have as much support and in fact experience stronger levels of physical violence and outright hatred, they are less likely to be committed and comfortable with their homosexual identity, especially

in conservative environments like religious institutions. Since research has shown that religion influences the development and levels of comfort that homosexual individuals experience with their homosexual identity, and no study to date has investigated differences between gay men and lesbian women, it was hypothesized that religion would have a differential influence on the degree to which gay men and lesbian women accept, maintain, and express their homosexual identity. Since lesbians do not experience as much physically threatening behaviors from non-homosexuals as gay men do, it was hypothesized that lesbians would be more likely to express their homosexual identity in a possibly hostile environment than gay men (Hequembourg and Brallier, 2009). Therefore, it was expected that while religion would still have an effect on the formation of homosexual identity development this would not be as pronounced in lesbian women as it would be in gay men. Based on these ideas the two hypotheses that were formed were that individuals with a stronger religious identity would have a lower homosexual identity formation stage designation and that gay men with a strong religious identity would have a lower homosexual identity formation stage designation than lesbians who also have a strong religious identity.

The results from this study supported the null hypotheses; that is, there were no differences between gay men and lesbian women on homosexual identity formation and no differences in homosexual identity formation due to religion and religiosity. While these results do not support the findings of previous studies or the theory about religiosity and the LGBT community, these results could have been a function of the methods of this specific study. While the results failed to support the hypothesis in both cases, there were some findings in this study that are worth noting.

A large portion of this sample had both high education and a high annual household income. Almost 45 percent of the sample population had an annual household income of \$75,000, and nearly 70 percent of the sample population had received at least a bachelor's degree. These percentages are much higher than the overall American population in which slightly more than 3 percent of households were found to have a household income of over \$75,000 in the 2009 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). This may indicate a different type of lifestyle and sense of priorities within the LGBT community. It is possible that in the LGBT community there is a focus on education and careers in lieu of building a family because of the extra steps that must be taken in order for gay and lesbian couples to get married and have children. Therefore, it may be possible that the high levels of education and possession of higher paying careers within this sample may have an effect on their high levels of homosexual identity comfort and commitment. These high levels of education and good careers may offer these individuals better opportunities to find a community that is accepting of their homosexual identity and also may show that they are meeting lifestyle goals and priorities that are possibly seen as beneficial within the LGBT community.

While 49 percent of the sample population was raised in a high Christian religion, only 19 percent still identified themselves as being a part of a high Christian congregation. Also, while 4.3 percent of participants stated that they did not have a religious affiliation in which they were raised, 21.7 percent claimed that they currently did not have a religious affiliation. This supports past research that has found that LGBT individuals who grow up in a conservative religious environment, including high Christian religions, often make the decision to change their religious affiliation once they are adults to a religion that is more accepting of their homosexual identity (Garcia, Gray-Stanley & Ramirez-Valles, 2008; Levy & Reeves, 2011; Mahaffy, 1996).

This is one factor that may have contributed to the high number of participants who had a high commitment to their homosexual identity.

While religiosity, as measured here, was not statistically significant in regards to having an effect on homosexual identity stage commitment, it was shown to have the largest effect on homosexual identity formation stage compared to all other demographics taken from the population sample. Therefore, individuals with a high level of religiosity were more likely to be less committed to their homosexual identity than individuals who had a lower level of religiosity. This could indicate that religiosity does in fact have an effect on homosexual identity stage designation but could not be found to be statistically significant due to the small population size and the large number of individuals in stage 6 of the homosexual identity formation model.

Gender also was not found to be statistically significant but was more so than biological sex, age, and race. Based on these results it appears that the female gender was likely to have a stronger commitment to the homosexual identity than males. This supports the idea that the male gender receives more negativity and hatred towards having a gay identity than the female gender. This could still have an effect on homosexual identity commitment based on gender but could not be found to be statistically significant due to the small sample size of this study.

While past research has indicated that gender has a strong influence on how an individual is treated within society it could be that this sociological phenomenon does not function in the same way in an especially conservative environment. Since level of religiosity was shown to have a stronger effect on homosexual identity commitment than gender, it is possible that in a conservative religious environment that would require individuals to have a stronger religiosity, an individual's homosexual identity overrides their gender as most important identity. More conservative religions have already been shown to have more negative message of

homosexuality than more liberal religions (Halkitis et al., 2009; Levy & Reeves, 2011). Instead of viewing individuals as gay men and lesbian women it could be possible that in conservative religious environments these individuals are simply grouped together as homosexuals, regardless of gender. This could be because most conservative religions state homosexuality itself is a more important classification of an individual than gender.

With past research indicating that gender is a strong influential factor in how individuals are treated in overall society, it would make sense for this same pattern to appear in a smaller social context, the institution of religion. The fact that this did not appear indicates that the institution of religion as a whole must have other factors that are more influential in how an individual is treated within that institution, such as their focus on religious text or sacraments. Since conservative religions view homosexuality as a sin and openly express this opinion to their members, all homosexual individuals, male or female, may experience the same sort of pressure to remain “in the closet” in these environments. When an individual, regardless of gender, makes the decision to disclose their homosexual identity to their religious community, this individual knows that they will face backlash. This backlash may be just as fearful to face for homosexual women as it is for homosexual men because the community has consistently expressed their negative viewpoints toward homosexuality and made it apparent that homosexuality will not be tolerated in their religious environment, regardless of gender. With the threat of the religious community looking down on them, homosexuals may all be affected equally by the fear of their homosexual identity not being accepted and the possibility of facing exile from the community.

Instead of gender being the explanation for how religiosity affects homosexual identity commitment it may be that gender influences the religion an individual partakes in and that this

religious choice in turn influences homosexual identity comfort. It is possible that individuals, based on gender, manage their cognitive dissonance differently. Females may be more likely to change their religious identity to one that is more accepting of their homosexuality while the males may be more likely to maintain their religious identity that may not be accepting of their homosexuality. Therefore, if lesbian women are more likely to change their religious orientation to one that is more accepting of their homosexuality they will have a stronger homosexual identity commitment than gay males who make the decision to remain in a religion that is not accepting of their homosexuality.

5.2 Limitations of the Research

The sample population of this research may have contributed to the inability to study individuals with a variety of homosexual identity formation stages. When studying homosexual individuals it is often hard, if not impossible, to sample individuals who are not “out of the closet,” meaning that these individuals have not yet disclosed their homosexual identity to others. This means that sample populations will mostly include individuals who are very comfortable with their homosexual identity. This does not accurately reflect all homosexual individuals but without access to homosexual individuals who keep their homosexuality a secret, researchers are left to sample from a population of homosexual individuals who are more comfortable with their identity.

The size of the population sample of this study limited the statistical analysis that could be used. Of 79 respondents only 69 met the selection criteria, thus, only nonparametric analyses could be used. A larger sample size would be required in order to run parametric analyses that would draw more significant conclusions from the population with a stronger degree of confidence.

There is a possibility that the measure of religiosity used for this study limited the ability to analyze the population accurately. The measure of religiosity that was used was created specifically for the present study and was not a field-wide agreed-upon measure. This measure had not been previously used or validated and could have affected the analysis. In the future it would be beneficial for other researchers to test this measure of religiosity in order to determine its strength and validity.

Also, in regards to measuring religious identity, this study allowed individuals to type in the religious identity in which they were raised and the religion that they were currently affiliated with. The researcher then went through and categorized these responses into either high Christian religions, low Christian religions, Eastern religions, spiritual religions, and no religious affiliation. This technique may have introduced researcher bias due to the researcher making the decision about which religions go under which category. Allowing the participants to select one of the five categories would have limited the potential for researcher bias.

Participants were not asked their geographical location for this study. This may limit the ability to analyze the distribution of education and household income based on an individuals' location. It is possible that the high amount of education and household income could be explained by geographical location if Virginia and Washington D.C. participants were able to be separated from Alabama and Georgia participants.

The measure of homosexual identity formation that was used for this study could have had an effect on the statistics. While Brady and Busse's Gay Identity Questionnaire maintains face validity and is often used in research on homosexual individuals, there may have been a measure that would have been more appropriate for this study in particular because of the small sample size and inability to access individuals who were still "in the closet" (Mayfield, 2001;

Rowen & Malcolm, 2003; King & Smith, 2004; Peterson & Gerrity, 2006; Harris, Cook & Kashubeck-West, 2008; Halpin & Allen, 2004). Brady and Busse's questionnaire asks questions on a true and false scale, which limits the categorization of individuals answering the questionnaire. If this study had used a measure of homosexual identity formation that used a Likert scale, it could have allowed the researcher to see a more detailed picture as to how committed an individual was to their homosexual identity than Brady and Busse's measure allowed.

5.3 Future Implications

Since the results of this study support past research that religiosity has a negative effect on the development of homosexual identity commitment, it is important that policies are implemented in order to counteract this effect. This study showed that religion, although not statistically significant, had one of the strongest effects on homosexual identity commitment in the predicted direction. In order to counteract the negative effect that religion is having on LGBT youth, it is important for schools and youth centers to make support available to these individuals through education about LGBT issues and support groups for LGBT youth. By doing this communities may be able to counteract some of the high depression, anxiety, and suicide in their LGBT youth.

5.4 Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers should attempt to collect a larger sample size than the one that was available for this study. The small sample size was a large factor in the limitations of this study, and by collecting a larger sample future researchers will be able to gain a better estimate of the population. It may be possible to obtain a larger sample by sampling individuals from locations that are more gay friendly. For example, instead of sampling from Alabama, a conservative state

with less open and affirming churches, future researchers may want to sample from states with more open and affirming churches. This would take more of a time commitment but would allow future research to have a more diverse and representative sample of the religious LGBT population.

It is also important that future researchers consider where the sample is derived from. This study was limited due to the large number of participants who were categorized as a stage 6 on the homosexual identity formation measure. If future researchers were able to obtain individuals for their sample who did not have as strong a commitment on the homosexual identity formation measure they would have a better representation of the LGBT population as well as the ability to run more detailed statistics. Instead of only sampling from organizations that are known to be accepting of LGBT individuals, future researchers should consider sampling from all churches within an area or from other religious organizations that do not advertise themselves as open and affirming. By doing this future researchers may be able to access some of the individuals that do not have such a high level of homosexual identity comfort and commitment.

Future researchers may also want to target specific religions to study instead of focusing on religion in general. There was a wide range of religious orientations in this study which did not allow for a complete analysis of how one religion may have had an effect on homosexual identity formation while other religions did not. By specifically focusing on one religion, future researchers may get a better idea of how some religions may affect the homosexual identity formation of individuals differently. Since past research has shown that homosexual individuals within more conservative environments experience less support of their homosexual identity and must deal with more negative messages of homosexuality, there may be a difference to look at

when you are able to break down the religions based on their level of conservatism (Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009; Kubicek et al., 2009).

This study used a cross-sectional design which may have limited the ability to analyze how religion affects homosexual identity commitment differently over an individual's life. Future researchers may want to consider using a longitudinal study in order to gain a better analysis of the interaction between religiosity and homosexual identity over the life course. This would require more time and money than this study but would provide a more in depth analysis of religiosity's effect on homosexual identity commitment.

5.5 Conclusion

Gender has been shown to be a strong influential factor in how homosexual individuals are viewed and treated by non-homosexual individuals (Hequembourg and Brallier, 2009; Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). Past research has also discovered that levels of support for homosexuality by both non-homosexual males and females were inversely associated with their levels of political conservatism and religiousness (Morrison, Speakman & Ryan, 2009). This indicates that a religious environment will affect a homosexual individuals ability to develop a healthy homosexual identity. Levy and Reeves (2011) found that homosexual individuals with a Christian upbringing took longer to accept their homosexual identity. Based on these findings it could be posited that the institution of religion mirrors these patterns that are found in society as a whole. Therefore, it could be expected that level of religiosity will affect an individual's development of a committed homosexual identity in a negative fashion and that this may be different for gay men and lesbian women.

This study found that there was not a difference in the effect of religiosity on homosexual identity commitment between the genders. While there was no difference found between the

genders, the research did support past findings that level of religiosity affects homosexual identity formation. There was also a relationship between an individual's annual household income and their level of homosexual identity commitment that was worth noting.

While this study was unable to find significant statistical differences of homosexual identity commitment between the genders, this does not mean that these differences do not exist. The sample size for this study was small and could have had an effect on the ability to accurately analyze the differences based on gender. Future research may be able to gain a better analysis by collecting a larger sample. Gender remains a strong influential factor on how individuals are viewed and treated regardless of their sexual orientation. Due to this fact it is important to keep in mind how and why gender matters in our society.

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Appendix A

Religiosity and Gay Identity Formation

Instructions: Please read each of the following questions or statements carefully and select the answer that most appropriately describes you at this point in time. Your answers are anonymous and subject to data protection.

Q1 What is your biological sex?

- Male
- Female
- Intersex

Q2 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Transgender
- Queer
- Other _____

Q3 What is your age?

Q4 What is your race?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Other _____

Q5 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some high school
- High school degree/ GED
- Technical Degree
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Some graduate school
- Graduate Degree

Q6 What is your sexual orientation?

- Gay
- Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Heterosexual
- Pansexual
- Asexual
- Other _____

Q7 What is your annual household income?

- Less than \$15,000
- \$15,000-\$29,999
- \$30,000-\$44,999
- \$45,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$89,999
- \$90,000 and above

Q8 In what religion, if any, were you raised?

Q9 What is your current religious affiliation, if you have one?

Q10 How often do you read your religious text? (eg. Bible, Torah, Koran)

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-5 Times a Year
- Never

Q11 How often do you attend religious services?

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-5 Times a Year
- Never

Q12 How often do you pray?

- Daily
- 2-3 Times a Week
- Once a Week
- 2-3 Times a Month
- Once a Month
- 2-5 Times a Year
- Never

Q13 To what extent is the following statement true about you? I am very active in my spiritual/religious community.

- Very True
- Considerably True
- Moderately True
- Somewhat True
- Slightly True
- A Little True
- Not At All True

Instructions: Indicate the extent to which you agree with each of the following statements.

Q14 I am a happy person.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q15 I feel lonely.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q16 I worry a great deal.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q17 I think I am a nice person.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q18 I am satisfied with my current sexual functioning.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Q19 I am a mentally healthy person.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Instructions: Please read each of the following statements carefully and then select whether you feel the statements are true or false for you at this point in time. A statement is selected as true if the ENTIRE statement is true, otherwise it is selected as false.

Q20 I probably am sexually attracted equally to men and women.

- True
- False

Q21 I live a homosexual lifestyle at home while at work/school I do not want others to know about my lifestyle.

- True
- False

Q22 My homosexuality is a valid private identity, that I do not want made public.

- True
- False

Q23 I have feelings I would label as homosexual.

- True
- False

Q24 I have little desire to be around most heterosexuals.

- True
- False

Q25 I doubt that I am homosexual, but still am confused about who I am sexually.

- True
- False

Q26 I do not want most heterosexuals to know that I am definitely homosexual.

- True
- False

Q27 I am proud to be gay and make it known to everyone around me.

- True
- False

Q28 I don't have much contact with heterosexuals and can't say that I miss it.

- True
- False

Q29 I generally feel comfortable being the only gay person in a group of heterosexuals.

- True
- False

Q30 I'm probably homosexual, even though I maintain a heterosexual image in both my personal and public life.

- True
- False

Q31 I have disclosed to 1 or 2 people (very few) that I have homosexual feelings, although I'm not sure I'm homosexual.

- True
- False

Q32 I am not as angry about society's treatment of gays because even though I've told everyone about my gayness, they have responded well.

- True
- False

Q33 I am definitely homosexual but I do not share that knowledge with most people.

- True
- False

Q34 I don't mind if homosexuals know that I have homosexual thoughts and feelings, but I don't want others to know.

- True
- False

Q35 More than likely I'm homosexual, although I'm not positive about it yet.

- True
- False

Q36 I don't act like most homosexuals do, so I doubt that I'm homosexual.

- True
- False

Q37 I'm probably homosexual, but I'm not sure yet.

- True
- False

Q38 I am openly gay and fully integrated into heterosexual society.

- True
- False

Q39 I don't think that I'm homosexual.

- True
- False

Q40 I don't feel I'm heterosexual or homosexual.

- True
- False

Q41 I have thoughts I would label as homosexual.

- True
- False

Q42 I don't want people to know that I may be homosexual, although I'm not sure if I am homosexual or not.

- True
- False

Q43 I may be homosexual and I am upset at the thought of it.

- True
- False

Q44 The topic of homosexuality does not relate to me personally.

- True
- False

Q45 I frequently confront people about their irrational, homophobic (fear of homosexuality) feelings.

- True
- False

Q46 Getting in touch with homosexuals is something I feel I need to do, even though I'm not sure I want to.

- True
- False

Q47 I have homosexual thoughts and feelings but I doubt that I'm homosexual.

- True
- False

Q48 I dread having to deal with the fact that I may be homosexual.

- True
- False

Q49 I am proud and open with everyone about being gay, but it isn't a major focus of my life.

- True
- False

Q50 I probably am heterosexual or non-sexual.

- True
- False

Q51 I am experimenting with my same sex because I don't know what my sexual preference is.

- True
- False

Q52 I feel accepted by homosexual friends and acquaintances, even though I'm not sure I'm homosexual.

- True
- False

Q53 I frequently express to others anger over heterosexuals' oppression of me and other gays.

- True

False

Q54 I have not told most of the people at work/school that I am definitely homosexual.

True

False

Q55 I accept but would not say I am proud of the fact that I am definitely homosexual.

True

False

Q56 I cannot imagine sharing my homosexual feelings with anyone.

True

False

Q57 Most heterosexuals are not credible sources of help for me.

True

False

Q58 I am openly gay around gays and heterosexuals.

True

False

Q59 I engage in sexual behavior I would label as homosexual.

True

False

Q60 I am not about to stay hidden as gay for anyone.

True

False

Q61 I tolerate rather than accept my homosexual thoughts and feelings.

True

False

Q62 My heterosexual friends, family and associates think of me as a person who happens to be gay, rather than as a gay person.

True

False

Q63 Even though I am definitely homosexual, I have not told my family.

True

False

Q64 I am openly gay with everyone, but it doesn't make me feel all that different from heterosexuals.

- True
- False

Appendix B

Recruitment E-mail

Dear _____,

I am a Graduate Student in the Department of Sociology at Auburn University. I would like to invite you and members of your organization, _____, to participate in my research study to investigate the relationship between religion and homosexual identity.

Participants will be asked to complete an electronic survey that will take approximately thirty minutes. Confidentiality will be guaranteed to the extent allowed by law. Information will be collected anonymously. No identifying information, including IP addresses, will be collected.

If you and your organization would be willing to participate in this study please email me back, and I will send you an email with a link to an informational letter and the link to the survey to pass on to members of your organization. Any participation is greatly appreciated.

If you would like to know more information about this study or have any questions, please contact me at sam0045@auburn.edu or my advisor, Dr. Allen Furr, at laf0014@auburn.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stacie Moss

Appendix C

E-MAIL INVITATION FOR ON-LINE SURVEY

Members of _____,

I am a Graduate Student in the Department of Sociology at Auburn University. I would like to invite you and members of your organization to participate in my research study to investigate the relationship between religious identity and homosexual identity. You may participate if you are at least 19 years of age and self-identify as a homosexual individual.

Participants will be asked to complete an electronic survey that will take approximately thirty minutes.

Breach of confidentiality for this survey is minimal and this risk has been minimized by collecting data anonymously (no identifying information will be collected including IP addresses).

If you would like to know more information about this study, an informational letter can be obtained by clicking on the link below https://auburn.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eMdTsArq1DiUgZu . If you decide to participate after reading the letter, **you can access the survey from a link in the letter.**

If you have any questions, please contact me at sam0045@auburn.edu or my advisor, Dr. Allen Furr, at laf0014@auburn.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Stacie Moss

Appendix D

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

INFORMATION LETTER for a Research Study entitled

“Competing Identities: A Quantitative Analysis on the Effect of Religiosity on Homosexual Identity Formation”

You are invited to participate in a research study to investigate the relationship between religious identity and homosexual identity. The study is being conducted by Stacie Moss, Graduate Student, under the direction of Dr. Allen Furr in the Auburn University Department of Sociology. You were selected as a possible participant because you self-identify as a homosexual individual and are age 19 or older.

What will be involved if you participate? Your participation is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete an electronic survey. Your total time commitment will be approximately thirty minutes.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The risks associated with participating in this study are breach of confidentiality. To minimize these risks, we will offer complete anonymity and no identifiers will be collected from participants, including IP addresses.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time by closing your browser window. Once you’ve submitted anonymous data, it cannot be withdrawn since it will be unidentifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Sociology.

Any data obtained in connection with this study will remain anonymous. We will protect your privacy and the data you provide by not collecting IP addresses and storing all data on a password protected computer in a locked

Appendix E

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of study variables

	%	Mean	N	Cronbach's α
<i>Age</i>		41.19		
19-30	34			
31-40	19.4			
41-50	14.9			
49-60	14.9			
61 and above	16.4			
<i>Sex</i>		0.48	69	
Male	52.1			
Female	47.8			
Intersex	0			
<i>Gender</i>		0.57		
Male	52.2			
Female	42			
Transgender	2.9			
Queer	2.9			
<i>Sexual Orientation</i>				
Gay	47.8			
Lesbian	39.1			
Bisexual	2.9			
Queer	2.9			
Heterosexual	5.8			
Other	1.3			
<i>Household Income</i>		3.84		
Less than \$15,000	8.7			
\$15,000-\$29,999	5.8			
\$30,000-\$44,999	14.5			
\$45,000-\$59,999	14.5			

\$60,000-\$74,999	11.6	
\$75,000-\$89,999	10.1	
\$90,000 and above	34.8	
<i>Education</i>		4.48
High school/GED	5.8	
Technical Degree	2.9	
Some college	23.2	
Bachelor's Degree	15.9	
Some graduate school	10.1	
Graduate Degree	4.2	
<i>Religion Raised</i>		21.62
High Christian	49.3	
Low Christian	31.9	
Eastern Religions	1.4	
No affiliation	4.3	
<i>Current Religion</i>		22.46
High Christian	18.8	
Low Christian	37.7	
Eastern Religions	2.9	
Spiritual Religions	5.8	
No affiliation	21.7	
<i>Religiosity</i>		0.922
Highly Religious	30.9	
Religious	23.5	
Somewhat Religious	13.2	
Not Religious	32.2	
<i>HIF Commitment</i>		
Very Low		
Commitment	16.9	
Somewhat Committed	12.3	
Committed	54.4	
Highly Committed	3.8	

Spiritual Religions	5.1
No affiliation	19

Religiosity 0.922

Highly Religious	30.9
Religious	23.5
Somewhat Religious	13.2
Not Religious	32.2

Household Income 3.84

Less than \$15,000	8.7
\$15,000-\$29,999	5.8
\$30,000-\$44,999	14.5
\$45,000-\$59,999	14.5
\$60,000-\$74,999	11.6
\$75,000-\$89,999	10.1
\$90,000 and above	34.8

Education 4.48

High school/GED	5.8
Technical Degree	2.9
Some college	23.2
Bachelor's Degree	15.9
Some graduate school	10.1
Graduate Degree	42

Sexual Orientation

Gay	47.8
Lesbian	39.1
Bisexual	2.9
Queer	2.9
Heterosexual	5.8
Other	1.3

HIF Commitment

Very Low Commitment	16.9
Somewhat Committed	12.3
Committed	54.4
Highly Committed	3.8

Table 2

Kendall's tau b correlation matrix of study variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. HIF Commitment									
2. Religiosity	0.044								
3. Gender (0 = male)	-0.093	.349**							
4. Biological Sex (0 = male)	-0.105	0.384**	1.000**						
5. Education	0.040	-.321**	-.186	-.230					
6. Race (0 = white)	-.036	-.094	-.173	-.138	.178				
7. Household Income	.049	-.156	-.166	-.170	.405**	.024			
8. Religion raised (0 = high Christian)	.045	.054	-.024	.043	-.298*	.234	-.063		
9. Religion current (0 = high Christian)	.003	-.100	-.268*	-.239	-.124	.190	-.087	.373**	

*p < .05, **p < .001

Table 3

Regression of demographics and religiosity on HIF Stage Commitment

	β	<i>t</i> - <i>statistic</i>	Sig.
Sex (0 = male)	-.030	-.191	0.849
Gender (0 = male)	-.038	-.264	0.793
Income	.037	.235	0.815
Education	.231	1.279	0.207
Age	-.007	-.046	0.963
Race (0 = white)	-.015	-.107	0.915
Religiosity	.233	1.443	0.155
Religion Raised (0 = high Christian)	.155	1.049	0.299
Religion Current (0 = high Christian)	.054	.354	0.725
R2	.072		
Adj. R2	-.053		
F ratio	.578		