

Mental Health Treatment Considerations for Working with LGBTQIA/SSA Mormons

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My Story

Let's Consider Biases

Coming out

Sexual orientation change efforts

Viability of mixed orientation marriage/celibacy/same-sex marriage

Participation in religion and spirituality

Plausibility on integration of sexual and spiritual identities



The Mormon Experience

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Organized by Joseph Smith in 1830

Christian church headquartered in Utah with a missionary force of 85,147 (Hales, 2015)

Worldwide membership of 15,372,337 (Hales, 2015)

60% of Utahns identify as LDS (Gallup, 2014)



Central Mormon Teachings

The afterlife

- “That same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:2)

The eternal family

- “The family is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995)
- Marriage is a “sacred covenant with God that can be binding in time and throughout eternity” (Bednar, 2006, p. 86)
- “But what of the many mature members of the church who are not married? ... In the Lord’s own way and time, no blessings will be withheld from his faithful Saints” (Nelson, 2008)

Gender roles

- “Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995)

Mormon Teachings on Homosexuality

Views on homosexuality

- Initially seen among church leaders as “perversion” and “repugnant” (Kimball, 1969; Packer, 1976)
- Later became categorized as a “grievous sin” and “dangerous lifestyle” (Hinckley, 1987; Packer, 1990)
- Contemporarily seen as a “trial of faith” (Anderson, 2014)

Homosexual attraction, identity, and behavior

- Homosexual attraction acceptable
 - Homosexuality should be viewed as “an adjective that describes feelings or behavior” (Oaks, 1995)
- Discouragement from using lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender labels
 - Preference in church literature for term “same-sex attraction” (Holland, 2007)
 - “Gay” and “lesbian” used to refer to those not part of the church
- Condemnation of same sex behavior
 - “Homosexual and lesbian behavior is a serious sin” (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011)
 - Celibacy or heterosexual marriage expected of queer Mormons



Mormon Culture

Perfectionism

- “Be ye therefore perfect, even as I, or your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48)

Guilt and shame

- Sexual metaphors of the “candy bar” and “chewed gum”

Dichotomous and absolutist thinking

- Absolute truth claims

Mormonism as a way of life

- Tithing, family home evening, home teaching, daily scripture study, daily prayer, worship services (Uchtdorf, 2013)
- Mormonism “permeates every day of life, and through the week, and night, and day, and it sets for you what your priorities and purpose in life is” (from a participant in Goodwill, 2008, p. 34)

The Queer Experience

Sexual Orientation Change Efforts (SOCE)

Therapeutic approaches aimed to change or diminish experiences of same sex attraction

APA Task Force (Glassgold et al., 2009)

- Sexual orientation change efforts have not been shown to be effective (see also Beckstead & Morrow, 2004; Beckstead, 2012; Schow, 1994)
- Serious reports of harm from attempted change (see also Bradshaw et al., 2015)
- Assumptions underlying SOCE are unfounded
- Secondary benefits of SOCE can be found in other approaches

Many queer individuals participate or have participated in change efforts (Dehlin et al., 2015)

- Experiential weekends
- Psychotherapy
- Church counseling
- Increased religious devotion
- Individual effort

SOCE: Clinical Considerations

Sexual orientation change efforts in a Mormon context

- Cultural support for sexual orientation change
- Lack of information about inefficacy of SOCE
- SOCE may play a developmental role in identity formation

Focus interventions on

- Providing empathy
- Understanding distress
- Empowering clients through active coping
- Increasing social support
- Facilitating identity exploration

Coming Out

Stages of LGB identity formation (Cass, 1979)

- Confusion
- Comparison
- Tolerance
- Acceptance
- Pride
- Synthesis



Coming out may lead to increased conflict for religious individuals (Rodriguez, 2010) and requires intense personal and interpersonal resources (David & Knight, 2008; Herek & Garnets, 2007)

Coming out as a queer Mormon (Bradshaw, Dehlin, Crowell, Galliher, & Bradshaw, 2015)

- Average age 22
- First disclosure in preparation for mission
- Failed attempts at personal righteousness
- Addressing attractions

Coming Out: Clinical Considerations

Coming out to self

- Sexual attraction vs. friendship
- Mormon sexual standards

Coming out to others

- Fear of rejection
- Increased likelihood of rejection

Developmental Considerations

- Emotional toll of coming out
- Coping resources/support
- SSA vs. LGBT

Internalized Homonegativity

“Negative attitudes and affects toward homosexuality in other persons and toward homosexual features in oneself” (Shidlo, 1994)

Sample items from internalized homonegativity scales (Curie, Cunningham, & Findlay, 2004; Mayfield, 2001)

- I am disturbed when people can tell I’m gay
- Gay individuals tend to flaunt their sexuality inappropriately
- Sometimes I get upset when I think about being attracted to men (women)
- It is important to me to control who knows about my homosexuality
- Most gay individuals prefer anonymous sexual encounters

I ❤️
my friend



Internalized Homonegativity as a Therapist

Repulsion

- Feeling like being queer is “gross” or “unnatural,” or that gay sex is “disgusting”

Pity

- Feeling superior and reinforcing that the ideal is for the queer individual to act true to society's expectations

Acceptance

- Feeling that there is something to accept. Often framed as understanding this as “I don't see you as gay, I see you as a person.” Leads to feelings of invisibility

Internalized Homonegativity

Consistently linked to negative psychological outcomes (See Dehlin et al., 2014; Feinstein et al., 2012; Newcomb & Mustanski, 2010; Wagner et al., 1994)

- Increased depression
- Increased anxiety
- Increased sexual identity distress
- Lower self-esteem
- Lower quality of life
- Later awareness of same sex attraction
- Delayed acceptance of feeling good about being gay

IH: Clinical Considerations

Recognition of IH

- Ego syntonic IH
- Resistance to challenging IH

Emotional undercurrent of IH

- Shame
- Vulnerability
- Rejection

Working with IH

- Identify
- Challenge
- Act



On the Intersection of Queer and Mormon

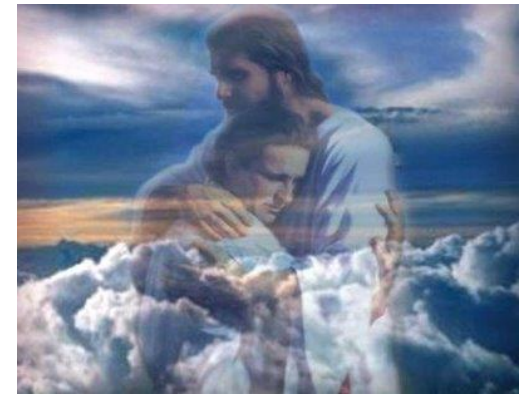
Spiritual Struggle

Three kinds of spiritual struggle (Ellison & Lee, 2010)

- Divine
- Intrapsychic
- Interpersonal

Religious affiliation and attendance

- Most common response is disengaging from faith (Dahl & Galliher, 2012a; Schuck & Liddle, 2001)
- Relatively less is known about those who stay engaged



Spiritual Struggle: Clinical Considerations

Understanding the source of conflict

- Divine
- Intrapsychic
- Interpersonal

Creating a space for spiritual struggle

- Allowing for negative emotions toward deity
- Normalizing spiritual struggle
- Accepting religious coping
- Religion vs. spirituality

Internalized Spirituonegativity



“Negative attitudes and affects toward spirituality in other persons and toward spiritual features in oneself” (adapted from Shidlo, 1994)

- Faith as a delusion
- Need to “cure” the world from religion
- Engaging in religious practices but feeling bad about them

IS: Clinical Considerations

Disbelief vs. IS

- Why is an individual disengaging from religion/spirituality?
- Interaction between facets of identity
- Difference in religiosity between therapist and client

Consequences for disengaging with faith

- Intrapsychic
- Familial
- Community

Mental Health Considerations

Experiences of queer Mormon women (Jacobsen & Wright, 2014)

- Mood disorders and anxiety
- Self-worth
- Suicidality
- Treatment attempts
 - Medication
 - Individual and group therapy
 - Reparative therapy
- Impact of family and community
- Mental health recovery



Mental Health Considerations

Correlates of positive mental health (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2015)

- Accepting an LGBTQ identity
- Coming out
- Pursuing same-sex relationships
- Reduction in LDS activity
- Seeking spiritual acceptance of same sex attractions
- Rejecting change efforts
- Living outside of Utah
- Biological views of the etiology of same sex attractions

Mental Health: Clinical Considerations

Environmental impact

- Plausibility of changing environment

Views of etiology of attractions

- Biological vs. environmental
- Choice

Mental health indicators

- Mood
- Suicide
- Sexual orientation at root of other symptoms

Conflicting Identities

Sources of conflict (Rodriguez, 2010)

- Fear of divine retribution
- Beliefs about incompatibility of homosexuality and religion
- Acceptance of anti-gay Christian doctrine
- Acceptance of others' negative outlooks on queer individuals
- Contradiction with religious beliefs of family and friends

Four identity choices (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2015)

- Reject LGBTQ identity (SSA)
- Reject religious identity
- Compartmentalization
- Integration



Conflicting Identities

Is there always a conflict?

- 57% of LGB Latino Catholics experienced conflict (Garcia, Gray-Stanley, & Ramirez-Valles, 2008)
- 80% of Utah LGBQQ youth experienced conflict (Dahl & Galliher, 2009)
- 25% of LGB adults attending the MCC experienced conflict (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000)

Why not? (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000)

- Never encountering or internalizing anti-gay rhetoric
- Devaluing church teachings
- Coming out at a late age
- Attending seminary
- God's all-encompassing love

Conflicting Identities: Clinical Considerations

Inescapability of conflict

- Internal
 - Difficulty finding a partner
 - Difficulty living the faith
- Interpersonal
 - Lack of sexual experiences
 - Lack of orthopraxy
- Societal
 - Not “queer” or “Mormon” enough

Living in tension

Identity Integration

Ways of integrating identities (Dahl & Galliher, 2009)

- Spiritual over religious
- No religious identification
- Not experiencing conflict
- Compartmentalizing identities
- Continuing to experience conflict

Factors aiding identity integration (Schuck & Liddle, 2001)

- Accepting self
- Knowledge of scriptural readings
- Support of friends at church
- Family, clergy, and therapist support
- Not attending church



Identity Integration

Developmental process (Dahl & Galliher, 2012b)

- Behaviorally focused religious participation
- Feeling different
- Denying attractions
- Internalized conflict
- Feeling religiously disconnected
- Change efforts
- Disengaging from faith
- Coming out
- Identifying autonomous values and beliefs

Identity Integration: Clinical Considerations

Integrating all aspects of experience

- SSA vs. LGBTQ
- Faith vs. lack of faith
- Other aspects of identity

In Conclusion

Empathy

Understanding

Creating a space where a client can explore **any** identity choice



Resources

Queer Mormon Organizations

- North Star: northstarlds.org
- Affirmation: affirmation.org
- Understanding Same Gender Attraction: <https://www.facebook.com/UsGaAtByu>

Informational Websites

- Official LDS church website: mormonsandgays.org
- Mormons Building Bridges: mormonsbuildingbridges.org
- Family Acceptance Project: familyproject.sfsu.edu

Peoples' stories

- Voices of Hope: ldsvoicesofhope.org
- Far Between Project: farbetweenmovie.com
- Gay Mormon Stories: gaymormonstories.org

Research

- www.surveymonkey.com/r/4options

AFFIRMATION
LGBT MORMONS
FAMILIES & FRIENDS

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