

Fall 12-15-2012

The Use of Re-authoring to Reconcile Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs with Sexual Orientation: A Narrative Study

Karen Parker
University of New Orleans, kdp567@bellsouth.net

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>



Part of the [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Parker, Karen, "The Use of Re-authoring to Reconcile Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs with Sexual Orientation: A Narrative Study" (2012). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 1549.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/1549>

This Dissertation is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Dissertation in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Dissertation has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

The Use of Re-authoring to Reconcile
Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs with Sexual Orientation:
A Narrative Study

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Counselor Education

By

Karen Parker

B.A., English Education, Louisiana Tech University, 1989
M.A., Marriage and Family Therapy, University of Louisiana Monroe, 1992

December 2012

Copyright page

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the beautiful women who participated in my study. Thank you for taking time from your busy lives to share your stories with me. Thank you so much for letting me experience part of your lives through observations, pictures, songs and videos. Being able to see the way each of you experienced your spirituality helped my study tremendously.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee,—Dr. Barbara Herlihy- chair, and Dr. Lorelei Cropley - methodologist, and Dr. Zarus Watson. Thank you, Dr. Herlihy, for indulging my creative side, supporting me and guiding me through this process. You were always there for me when I needed to talk and blow off steam. You were supportive, caring and encouraging. You taught me so much and I will never forget you. Dr. Cropley, I would like to thank you for your support of my research. Thank you so much for “turning me on to” narrative research. It has become my passion! Dr. Watson, I would like to thank you for giving me a “hard time” and making it fun for me! You kept me from taking myself too seriously. I could not have done this without all of you. This was a wonderful journey for me!

I would like to acknowledge my family, Connie Parker, Darwin Parker, Sharon Parker Wheeler, Tommy Wheeler, Sarah Wheeler, Garland Parker, Kristi Parker, Ashley Parker, Marlon Parker and Karen Gilbert. To my mother- you have always been there for me. Thank you for saying, “Karen, if you think you are in Hell, keep walking.” I kept walking and here I am! I also want to thank you and Dad for fixing things around my apartment and encouraging me the entire way! I want to thank everyone in my family for making me laugh at holidays and keeping my mind occupied so that I didn’t obsess about this process.

I would like to thank my friends and family of choice, Donna Monteleone, Dottie Monteleone, and the friends and family I have met through them. I would especially like to thank Donna Monteleone for cooking for me and bringing the food to my house, for going to Kinkos at two o’clock in the morning to copy my dissertation, and for being supportive, loving and kind. I will never forget all you have done for me.

I would like to thank Bonnie Denova and Kathy Antoon for being “my girls.” Thank y’all for the back porch talks and great food and wine. Thanks for being there for me and loving me no matter what! You have always been so supportive of me. You are my family and I love you! I thank my boys, Reuben Garza, Phil Griggs, and John Desselle. I would also like to thank Dr. Hi Lang and Phyllis Scarsone for your support and friendship.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Latasha Clay for being a great research partner and colleague who has become one of my closest friends. Thank you for texting me, talking with me, encouraging me and laughing with me. You were a life-saver! Without you, I would have never made it.

I would also like to thank Lacey Chandler and Dottie Martin for being great colleagues as well as great friends. Thank you, Mike Saussaye and Bridget McKinney, for your encouraging words! I would like to thank all of my doctoral peers for their support. I will never forget you! I would also like to thank the graduate assistants in the Counselor Education Department for being so kind and always being do helpful. Chantrelle Varnado- Johnson, Kristen Dickens and Bonnie King, thank you for being the pulse of our program and helping me along the way.

I would also like to thank my dog, Cujo, for putting up with my “dissertation depression.” Thank you for putting up with my mood swings and crying spells. You always loved me no matter what! This has been a journey that has taught me much about myself. I learned that I could persevere through major changes in my life. I learned patience. I learned how to give up control. I learned who I really am and what I was meant to do for the rest of my life. All of the people I encountered while on my journey have become a part of me. I will never forget you!

I know I have not mentioned everyone I have encountered on my journey, but you know who you are. This has been a life-changing experience and I will never forget the people I have encountered.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	x
List of Tables.....	xi
List of Illustrations.....	xii
Abstract.....	xiii
Chapter One	1
Introduction.....	1
Problem Statement	2
Purpose of the Study	3
Significance of the Study	3
Conceptual Framework.....	5
Research Question	7
Methodology	7
Delimitations.....	8
Definition of Terms.....	8
Chapter Two.....	10
Review of Literature	10
Religion and Homosexuality.....	10
Fundamentalist Christians.....	13
Oneness Pentecostal Churches.....	14

The Process of Coming Out.....	16
Reconciliation of Religious Beliefs and Sexual Orientation	20
Questioning Religious Beliefs	20
Developing a Spiritual Identity	21
Participating in Gay Affirming Organizations and Churches	21
Non-reconciliation of Religious Beliefs and Sexual Orientation.....	22
Continuing to Participate in Religion of Origin.....	22
Changing Sexual Orientation	23
Lesbian Sexual Orientation and Religion	24
Conclusion	27
Chapter Three.....	29
Methodology	29
Purpose of the Study	29
Rationale for Qualitative and Narrative Methodology.....	30
Role of the Researcher	33
Researcher's Biases	33
Assumptions.....	34
Bracketing.....	34

Data Collection Procedures.....	35
Recruitment of Participants.....	35
Informed Consent.....	36
Participant Profiles	37
Pam	37
Shae.....	37
Ann.....	38
Field Notes, Pictures and Observations	38
Interviews	38
Data Analysis Procedures.....	39
Six-step Analysis	42
Credibility.....	44
Summary.....	44
Chapter Four	47
Results.....	47
Researcher Transparency	48
Participants' Definitions of Reconciliation of Religious Beliefs with Sexual Orientation.....	49
Pam	49

Shae.....	49
Ann.....	50
Three Unifying Aspects of Re-authoring.....	50
Re-authoring religious Beliefs	51
Stories of Past Religious Beliefs	51
Pam	51
Shae.....	52
Ann.....	53
Participants' Stories of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.....	54
Pam	55
Shae.....	57
Ann.....	60
Re-authoring Definition of Family	63
Participants' Stories of Past Familial Experiences	63
Pam	63
Shae.....	64
Ann.....	64
Participants' Stories of Re-authoring Definition of Family.....	64

Pam	66
Shae.....	68
Ann.....	70
Re-authoring Self	72
Participants' Stories of Re-authoring Self	72
Pam	74
Shae.....	74
Ann.....	75
Summary	76
Chapter Five.....	78
Discussion	78
Summary of Procedures	78
Discussion of Findings.....	79
Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.....	80
Re-authoring the Definition of Family.....	84
Re-authoring Self	85
Other Related Themes.....	87
Significance of the Study	88

Implications and Recommendations	89
Implications for Counselors and Other Mental Health Professionals	89
Implications for Researchers.....	90
Implications for Counselor Educators.....	91
Limitations	91
Chapter Summary	92
Final Note.....	92
References.....	96
Appendices.....	99
Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter.....	99
Appendix B: Consent Form	101
Appendix C: Participant Interview Protocol	104
Appendix D: Participant Thank You Email.....	106
Vita.....	108

List of Illustrations

Illustration 3.1 Painting Depicting Methodology.....	42
Illustration 4.1 Visual Representation of the Three Unifying Aspects of Re-authoring.....	52
Illustration 4.2 Visual Illustration of the Overlapping Themes of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.....	56
Illustration 4.3 Visual Illustration of Pam’s Process of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.....	58
Illustration 4.4 Visual Illustration of Shae’s Process of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.....	61
Illustration 4.5 Visual Illustration of Ann’s Process of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.....	64
Illustration 4.6 Visual Illustration of Common Themes of Re-authoring Family.....	66
Illustration 4.7 Visual Illustration of Pam’s Process of Re-authoring Definition of Family.....	69
Illustration 4.8 Visual Illustration of Shae’s Process of Re-authoring Definition of Family.....	71
Illustration 4.9 Visual Illustration of Ann’s Process of Re-authoring Definition of Family.....	73
Illustration 4.10 Visual Representation of Common Themes of Re-authoring Self-identity.....	74
Illustration 4.11. Visual Representation of the Journeys of the Three Participants.....	78

Abstract

A narrative qualitative research design was used to understand the journeys of three lesbians with Oneness Pentecostal backgrounds who have reconciled their religious beliefs with their sexual orientation. Three participants were selected who met the following criteria: (a) the participant is a lesbian female who (b) grew up in a Oneness Pentecostal church and (c) has reconciled being a lesbian with her religious beliefs, and who is (d) willing to discuss her outing process. These participants were interviewed. The interview questions were submitted to participants prior to the scheduled interviews. The interviews began with an open-ended inquiry. In answer to the research question, the three participants' stories revealed that reconciliation journeys are unique and complicated. The motivation to embark on a journey of reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation stemmed from the participants' same-sex attractions. Further motivators for the participants to explore and reconstruct religious beliefs were feelings of shame and guilt. The participants arrived at a place where they could no longer deny their feelings. As I read the participants' stories, I analyzed the stories by utilizing the narrative therapy term of "re-authoring." I found that the three unifying aspects of re-authoring in the participants' stories were re-authoring religious beliefs, re-authoring definitions of family and re-authoring self.

Keywords: re-authoring, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, lesbian, narratives, reconciliation

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and allies (LGBTQQIA) face a host of obstacles in their identity development (Cass, 1979), including homophobia. For some LGBTQ individuals, this irrational fear may manifest itself as fear or hate of themselves, which is termed internalized homophobia. Society, family, and religion also may be sources of homophobia. One result of facing- these obstacles is that individuals who are members of sexual minority groups seek counseling approximately five times more frequently than their heterosexual counterparts (Rutter, Estrada, Ferguson, & Diggs, 2008).

Discrimination against homosexuals is accepted by some people because of religious beliefs concerning the LGBTQQIA community. Religious homophobia exists in many churches and it is profound in fundamentalist religions (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2010). For instance, some religious organizations are at the root of the current outcry against gay marriage (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2010). Leaders of many fundamentalist religions are very outspoken about their disapproval of gay marriage. These religions teach that men are heads of the household and that women are second in command. Many have distinct roles for men and women; men should be very masculine and women should be feminine (United Pentecostal Church Position Papers, 2006). In fact the Oneness Pentecostal churches, a fundamentalist Christian organization, has a dress code for women. For example, women are not allowed to wear pants and makeup and are not allowed to cut their hair (United Pentecostal Church Position Papers, 2006). Society, in general, promotes certain constructs about women, men, gender roles, and heterosexuality and homosexuality. LGBTQQIA individuals are born into

a society filled with heterosexual stories about marriage, relationships, family, and gender expectations. Coupled with religious beliefs, constructs about marriage, relationships, family, and gender expectations are very difficult for LGBTQ individuals to question and reconstruct so that their story matches what they are experiencing inside (White & Epston, 1990).

Stages of coming out for LGBTQIA individuals were explored and defined by Vivian Cass in the late 1970s. Cass (1979) proposed a six-stage model. Stage one is identity confusion, wherein the person first realizes his or her attraction for the same gender. Stage two is identity comparison, wherein the individual begins to deal with social stigmatization. Stage three is identity tolerance, when the individual seeks out other sexual minority group members. Stage four is identity acceptance, a stage in which the individual begins to see himself/herself in a positive way. Stage five is identity pride, when the individual focuses on activities that relate to his or her sexual minority status. In Cass's last stage, identity synthesis, LGBTQIA people begin to judge themselves according to personal qualities instead of their LGBTQIA status (Cass, 1979). Cass's work helped researchers understand that being a member of a marginalized group is very difficult when majority social constructs are deeply embedded in all of the cultures and contexts into which a person is born.

Problem Statement

Coming out is defined by Cass (1979) as the process through which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people go to arrive at self-acceptance and the stages of telling significant others about their sexual orientation. This process can be difficult in general, and is further complicated when an individual grows up in a fundamentalist Christian home. A major complicating factor in the context of fundamentalist religions is the fact that many people in fundamentalist religions believe that homosexuality is a sin (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2010).

Counselors who work with clients struggling with the coming out process need to consider all the contexts in which these clients function and have functioned in the past.

Whereas the outing process is complicated for any LGBTQQIA individual attempting to define and come to terms with his or her sexual orientation, it is even more frustrating for those with value systems rooted in fundamentalist philosophies (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

Counselors, therefore, may find it challenging to work with this population, particularly as little is known about the confluence of the coming out process and fundamentalist religious philosophies and their impact on identity development (Anderton, 2010). In this proposed study, I explored how three lesbian women journeyed through this process and came to a place of reconciliation of the dichotomous relationship between religious beliefs and their LGBTQQIA status.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the journeys of reconciliation of religious beliefs with same-sex attractions among lesbian women with Pentecostal backgrounds. The study will describe the lived experiences of three women and how they “re-authored” their stories in order to arrive at this reconciliation (White & Epston, 1990).

Significance of the Study

Religions of origin can play an important role in the emotional development of individuals. The importance of religion in people’s lives has been addressed in several studies. According to Rosario, Hunter, Yali, and Gwadz (2006), 90% of adults and nearly 60% of youth say religion is important in their lives. In a study conducted by Schuck and Liddle (2001), 66 adults who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were questioned about their religious backgrounds. Two-thirds of the respondents stated that they had experienced a conflict

between their sexual identity and their religion. These participants specifically stated that they experienced depression, suicidal ideations, and shame in relation to their sexual orientation and religious beliefs. Dahl and Galliher (2009) found a similar trend in their study of young adults who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning. In their study of 105 participants, two-thirds stated that they experienced conflicts between sexual minority identification and religious beliefs, such as feeling depressed because the ministers in their churches of origin taught that homosexuality was a sin. It is important for counselors and other mental health professionals to understand identity development of LGBTQQIA people within different contexts (Dahl & Galliher, 2009). Because fundamentalist religions view homosexuality as a sin, an in-depth study of coping mechanisms of LGBTQQIA people who grew up in the contexts of these fundamentalist religions may increase understanding of LGBTQQIA identity development as it relates to religious beliefs. In fundamentalist religions, the women are to be the nurturers and caregivers and submissive to the men. The husband makes the important decisions in the household. According to McCarn and Fassinger (1996), when a woman comes to terms with her identity as a lesbian, she questions her identification with her original group of heterosexual people. Furthermore, how she views herself as a sexual being and how she relates to others come into question. According to McCarn and Fassinger (1996), lesbians come to terms with their identity in a parallel process that is not based solely on intimate relationships. Their sexual identity development has at least two dimensions that are parallel: the self-acceptance of same-sex sexual desires, and redefining identification with their social group.

Dahl and Galliher (2009), and Sherkat (2002) found that lesbians were less likely to practice religion. Sherkat (2002) concluded that these women may see religion as a patriarchal system and this negatively influences their participation.

Conceptual Framework

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a conceptual framework is the explanation of the topic and purpose of the study. The topic to be addressed in the proposed study is the lived experiences of three women who grew up in a cult-like religion and discovered that they were lesbian. An exploration of the participants' journeys from cult-like beliefs to coming out and how they reconciled their religious beliefs and sexual orientation was the focus of the study. Because this study is an exploration of women's ability to overcome oppression and the power of the personal story, my conceptual framework is grounded in two theories of therapy. Feminist counseling theory served as the lens for the study and narrative therapy was used to frame the analysis. Because the Pentecostal faith is oppressive to women, a feminist lens will be used. Women who are members of the Oneness Pentecostal churches have a dress code and other rules that limit personal expression (rules for members of this church will be further described in chapter two). Feminist counseling focuses on oppression of women; therefore, a feminist lens highlighted "re-authoring" as a way of overcoming oppression. The narrative therapy concept of "re-authoring" will be used to guide the analysis of the three women's stories. In the following paragraphs, I discussed the tenets of feminist counseling theory and the narrative therapy concept of "re-authoring."

Although feminist counseling is difficult to define because it draws from different theories and approaches, the theory is based in five tenets (Herlihy & Corey, 2001). *The personal is political* is the first tenet: personal issues arise from the political oppression of women in the White male dominated society. In other words, equity is the goal of feminist counseling theory (Herlihy & Corey, 2001; Herlihy & McCollum, 2003). The other tenets of this theory are closely related to this core belief. According to Herlihy and Corey (2001), the second tenet is that *the*

counseling relationship is egalitarian. The client is seen as an expert in his or her own issues and context. Because of the power differential in society, women have been oppressed and labeled; an egalitarian relationship between the counselor and client builds trust. The personal narrative is honored, and this, in turn, empowers the client to navigate his or her context.

The third tenet is closely related to the second tenet in that it focuses on *honoring women's experiences*. A woman's personal story becomes her strength, because her belief system is acknowledged and appreciated (Herlihy & McCollum, 2003). According to Gilligan (1982), a woman's perspective should be appreciated because of its complexity. The fourth tenet relates to the basic tenet that the personal is political. According to Herlihy and Corey (2001), the fourth tenet is *reformulating the definitions of psychological distress and pathology*. By looking at the oppression caused by labeling women, the feminist therapist is able to reframe some pathology by emphasizing that labeling is a way of further oppressing women. Some responses to oppressive contexts are reasonable and should not be labeled as pathological.

The last tenet takes the feminist approach to a broader level by *recognizing all types of oppression*. When therapists become multiculturally aware, they recognize that men are also oppressed by a society in which gender inequalities exist. Feminist therapists strive to be aware of all types of oppression, whether they are within a religious, racial or ethnic, or familial culture. The context of a person's therapeutic issue should always be considered. In counseling the LGBTQQIA population, oppressive contexts and the client's personal perspective and belief system should be explored. The fact that LGBTQQIA people do not fall into the "norm" of gender expression complicates their response to a sexist society.

When establishing narrative therapy, Michael White and David Epston (1990) also considered the oppression of societal constructs on people. The basic tenets of feminist

counseling theory influenced the way narrative therapists formed hypotheses. Narrative therapists honor personal stories, consider the context of a problem, and consider how societal constructs influence how people view themselves. White and Epston (1990) believed that identities are shaped by accounts found in our personal stories. They believed in helping clients reclaim their reality by “re-authoring” conversations about values. The therapist acts as an investigative reporter in order to get the client to tell more detailed, richer stories. White and Epston (1990) believed that our stories come from established norms and cultures and sometimes the stories are problem-saturated. These problem-saturated stories also come from cultural narratives such as capitalism, patriarchy, hierarchy, and heterosexism. Stories told by society influence the way a person sees him or herself.

Research Question

The central question for this study was: How do lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds describe their journeys through the coming out process and the process of reconciling their religious beliefs and sexual orientation?

Methodology

I conducted a qualitative narrative study of three lesbians who grew up in Oneness Pentecostal homes. Researchers employing the narrative approach capture detailed stories of life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals (Creswell, 2007). To obtain the rich experiences of the three individuals chosen for the study, a narrative approach is best suited to provide the detail needed to gain the appropriate insight. A narrative study is a qualitative approach in which individuals tell their stories and the researcher makes sense out of the chronology and context told in the storyteller’s own words (Creswell, 2007).

I conducted interviews with the participants, observed them in the context of their religious expression, collected photographs, and information about the contexts of the personal stories. By situating the individual stories within their personal experiences, their culture, and their historical contexts, common themes were discovered and noted as part of the overall narrative. Although the themes were a part of the analysis, this study focused on the strength of each person in overcoming obstacles and reconciling her religious beliefs and her sexual orientation.

Criteria for participation in this study were: (1) the participant is a lesbian female who (2) grew up in a Oneness Pentecostal church and (3) has reconciled being a lesbian and her religious beliefs, and who is (4) willing to discuss her outing process.

Delimitations

Although qualitative research increases the quality of the data collected, it also presents some delimitations. Participants were delimited to lesbians who grew up in the Oneness Pentecostal church and have reconciled being lesbians and their religious beliefs.

Definition of Terms

Below, terms are defined as they were used within the context of this study.

Coming out: Coming out is generally defined as the process through which lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people arrive at self-acceptance and the stages of telling significant others that they are sexual minorities (Cass, 1979).

LGBTQQIA: LGBTQQIA will be used to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer questioning, intersex, and ally (Bigner, 2006; Dahl & Galliher, 2009).

Re-authoring: Re-authoring is a term used by narrative therapists to describe a process in which clients question the stories they were given at birth. A narrative therapist guides the client in looking at his or her perception of his or her personal history and how that affects the here and now perceptions (White & Epston, 1999). In this study, this definition will be expanded to include the natural process LGBTQQIA individuals go through to make sense of being different and reconstructing their stories to resolve internal conflicts.

Reconciliation: Reconciliation in this study will be defined as the process of settling the inner conflict of growing up in a fundamentalist Christian church and coming out as a sexual minority (Hanway, 2006).

Restorying: Restorying is the process in which a researcher takes the stories of the participants and makes sense of the stories by putting them in chronological or space and time sequence (Creswell, 2007)

Sexual minority: Sexual minority is a person whose sexual practices are outside the societal majority. It usually is used to describe people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (American Counseling Association, 2005).

Social constructs: Social constructs are beliefs that exist as a result of social interactions, such as money, gender, language, race, and for this study, heterosexism (White & Epston, 2007).

United Pentecostal Church: United Pentecostal Church is a fundamentalist Christian denomination that is a part of the Oneness or Apostolic Pentecostal movement. Oneness theology is the adherence to the use of baptism in Jesus' name as opposed to the Trinitarian formula, and an emphasis on holiness living and a dress code. Another aspect of this religion that sets it apart is the fact that salvation is obtained by speaking in tongues (United Pentecostal Church Position Papers, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter, a review of the literature is presented to provide a context for the proposed study. To provide a backdrop, general religious beliefs about homosexuality are first described. Then, fundamentalist beliefs about homosexuality and the Oneness Pentecostal churches' beliefs concerning homosexuality are explored more specifically. Two sexual orientation identity models are discussed to iterate the complexity of the process of coming to terms with sexual orientation. Next, relevant literature on reconciliation of homosexuality and religion is discussed, to demonstrate the existence of a gap in the literature. Scant research has been conducted with lesbians concerning religion and sexual orientation. At the conclusion of this chapter, a brief discussion of the concepts of re-authoring and reconciliation is included.

Religion and Homosexuality

World-wide religious oppression of homosexuals has been well documented, including oppression in the United States (Haldeman, 1996). The vast majority of Americans have religious affiliations; according to Princeton Religion Research Center (1996), ninety percent of U.S. Americans report having some religious preference. However, very few of the 2500 American religions have a belief system that is supportive of the LGBTQQIA community (Sherkat, 2002). Researchers have explored the differences in the ways that members of some religions resolve sexual orientation with religious beliefs. Smith and Horne (2007), in a study using internet surveys, explored the differences between gays and lesbians who were in an Earth-spirited religion and those who were involved in a Judeo-Christian religion, and the ways each group resolved spirituality and sexuality. The researchers found that participants from the

traditional faiths such as Catholic or Baptist had more conflict with reconciliation of religious beliefs than those who were in the Earth-spirited religions such as Pagan or Wiccan.

In 2008, Harris, et al. explored relationships among various religious variables. They hypothesized that scriptural literalism increased internalized homophobia and negatively affected sexual identity. They also hypothesized that post-conventional religious meaning would decrease internalized homophobia and help people come to terms with their sexual identity by introducing alternative interpretations of religious beliefs. Harris et al. (2008) also examined religious commitment as a factor in sexual identity and internalized homophobia. Their second hypothesis, which stated that post-conventional religious meaning would decrease internalized homophobia, was found to have some support. In 2009, Henrickson surveyed 2,269 participants, 45.3 % of whom were female and 54.7 % of whom were male. This study, conducted in New Zealand, indicated that LGBTQQIA participants were leaving Christianity at a rate 2.37 times greater than heterosexual participants.

As stated in chapter one, religious practices and beliefs influence the process of a LGBTQQIA person's journey. Most Christian faiths believe that homosexuality is a sin, which increases feelings of shame. In three different documentaries (Maniaci & Rzeznik, 1993; Murray, 2005; Karslake, 2007) produced in the past twenty years, LGBTQQIA individuals have been interviewed as they recounted their experiences with growing up in a religious home and coming out as an LGBTQQIA person. During the interviews, many of these people discussed their experiences with rejection in the context of religion. They also discussed the influence their religions of origin had on the families' beliefs about morality. Religion was powerful in the identity development of the LGBTQQIA participants, in that these participants hesitated in their sexual identity due to the belief systems of their churches of origin. The participants stated that

they hesitated to accept themselves as gay or lesbian, come out to friends and loved ones, and to question their original religious belief systems.

The importance of religion in LGBTQIA identity development has been captured in two studies conducted in the past 15 years. In a study by Schuck and Liddle (2001), 66 adults who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual were questioned about their religious backgrounds; two-thirds of the respondents stated that they had experienced a conflict between their sexual identity and their religion. These people stated that they experienced depression, suicidal ideations, and shame in relation to their orientation identity and religious beliefs. Dahl and Galliher (2009) found a similar trend in their study of young adults who identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning. In this study, approximately two-thirds of the participants reported that they had difficulties with depression and shame concerning their sexual orientation. The context of religion makes the coming out journeys for some LGBTQIA people very difficult (Boellstorff, 2005; Doyal et al., 2008; Garcia, et al., 2008; Harris, Cook, Kashubeck-West, 2008; Henrickson, 2009; Kirkman, 2001; Love, et al., 2005; Miller, 2007; Minwalla, et al., 2005; ; Schnoor, 2006; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Smith & Horne, 2007; Sullivan-Blum, 2004).

Although the religious oppression of homosexuals in the United States is widespread, the present study focused on only one fundamentalist, Christian religion, the Oneness Pentecostal churches. This church has extreme views on many issues including homosexuality. People who choose to leave extremely fundamentalist churches often have difficulty creating an identity outside the context of the structured atmosphere of the church. The journeys of the participants in my study were two-fold. Coupled with the issues created by leaving a context in which one is

told what to think, feel and do was the complex journey of coming to terms with being oriented towards the same sex.

Fundamentalist Christians

A brief discussion and definition of fundamentalist Christian faith is presented to describe the larger context of the Oneness Pentecostal churches, some of the most fundamentalist churches. Fundamentalist Christianity is defined by a belief that the Bible should be taken literally. According to Wacker (2000), historic fundamentalism seeks to recover beliefs of the past and sees the secular state as the enemy. At the turn of the 19th century, the fundamentalist movement was fueled by an influx of non-Protestant immigrants into American cities. Fear of the unknown and of change, in general, has been suggested as the impetus for a conservative religious and political movement (Wacker, 2000).

Wacker (2000) stated that fundamentalism was created by the “old stock whites” who were fearful of the world becoming modernized. This fear is evident in today’s argument about LGBTQ people’s right to marry. People who take the Bible literally cling to traditional ways of looking at sexuality and marriage. For instance, Southern Baptists are considered fundamentalists and, according to the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (2010), this religious organization believes that homosexuality is a chosen behavior, not a discovered sexual orientation; that children, as a result of poor parenting, are more likely to choose to become homosexual; that a homosexual orientation is intrinsically disordered; and that homosexual activity is immoral irrespective of the nature of the relationship or the sexual orientation of the participants. Southern Baptists also believe that homosexuals can change. Although they usually do not define how change is achieved, in practice it generally involves choosing celibacy. Further, Southern Baptists believe that homosexuals can convert to heterosexuality through

prayer, becoming saved, and perhaps by undergoing reparative/conversion therapy. In the view of members of this denomination, same-sex marriage represents a major threat to the stability of opposite-sex marriage.

Oneness Pentecostal Churches

The Baptist faith described above is an example of a mainstream fundamentalist church. By contrast, Oneness Pentecostal churches are strict fundamentalist churches. Its views are more extreme in that its adherents believe that homosexuality is a demonic possession. The United Pentecostal Church International (2006) issued the following statement about homosexuality: “Let us therefore resolve that the United Pentecostal Church International go on public record as absolutely opposed to homosexuality and condemn it as a moral decadence and sin, and do hereby encourage prayer for the deliverance of those enslaved by that satanic snare.” Rather than utilize conversion therapy, the United Pentecostal Church believes that the “demon” of homosexuality can be “cast out” of the LGBTQQIA person through exorcism.

Because my study is situated within the Pentecostal church, I briefly discuss the church’s history and doctrine. According to the United Pentecostal Church International (2006), the history of the Oneness Pentecostal churches began in Topeka, Kansas in 1901, and continued in the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles in 1905 and 1906. The Pentecostal movement was an organization in which Caucasians and African Americans joined in worship and began a very large charismatic movement. The Oneness Pentecostal churches trace their organizational roots to 1916 when a group of ministers withdrew their membership from the Assemblies of God due to a disagreement regarding baptism in Jesus’ name. The Oneness Pentecostal churches claim to be a “oneness church” because they do not believe in the Holy Trinity. One must be baptized in

Jesus' name, not in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. One must also speak in tongues as evidence of the Holy Spirit and must do this in order to go to heaven.

In addition to the strict adherence to a baptismal formula and speaking in tongues as a requirement for salvation, this church organization has strict standards which include a dress code. Women in the Oneness Pentecostal churches cannot wear pants, make-up, or jewelry, nor are they allowed to cut their hair. The men must be clean-shaven and modestly dressed. Watching television, going to movies, and listening to secular music are discouraged. The dress code for the Oneness Pentecostal churches sets the women apart from mainstream society. The dress code was established to ensure that the women of the church remain modest. Although there is a dress code for men in the Oneness Pentecostal churches, their apparel is not as different and they can blend into society. Pentecostal women are identifiable by long skirts, long hair, and the absence of make-up or jewelry (United Pentecostal Church Position Papers, 2006).

Because of the strict rules and the authoritarian leadership of the Oneness Pentecostal churches, some consider this type of religion a cult. According to Ross (1999), a cult specialist, the following characteristics of a cult apply to the Oneness Pentecostal churches:

1. Absolute authoritarianism without meaningful accountability.
2. No tolerance for questions or critical inquiry.
3. No meaningful financial disclosure regarding budget or expenses, such as an independently audited financial statement.
4. Unreasonable fear about the outside world, such as impending catastrophe, evil conspiracies, and persecutions.
5. There is no legitimate reason to leave; former followers are always wrong in leaving, or even evil.

6. Former members often relate the same stories of abuse and reflect a similar pattern of grievances.
7. There are records, books, news articles, or television programs that document the abuses of the group/leader.
8. Followers feel they can never be "good enough."
9. The group/leader is always right.
10. The group/leader is the exclusive means for receiving information.

Whether or not Oneness Pentecostal churches are a cult is debatable, but it is clear that the culture of this religion is oppressive to women. According to Ross (1999), people who leave this religion sometimes have to submit to deprogramming, because of the fear instilled in its members.

The Process of Coming Out

Because the participants in the present study were women who identified as lesbian, McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) lesbian identity development model was used as a guideline to help navigate their stories. According to McCarn and Fassinger (1996), a lesbian's identity development is embedded in her social group. The process of identifying as a lesbian is two-fold for woman due to their statuses in family and community. Many women see their identities in relation to others. In their families, they see their roles as mothers, sisters, and wives as very important. In their communities, such as church and social groups, their identification as a heterosexual, married woman becomes very important. Many women who discover that they are lesbian worry about the effects their new identities will have on the people who are important to them. Issues that must be addressed include the relationships the women have with others and the expression of their sexuality. Sometimes a woman chooses to stay in a heterosexual relationship

rather than give up her social and familial statuses. In addition to the social and familial statuses, religion further complicates identity development. The difficulties inherent in reconciling religion and sexual orientation may lead LGBTQQIA individuals on a different trajectory from that of a heterosexual person with the same religious beliefs. For many LGBTQQIA people with strict religious backgrounds, internal struggles concerning their sexual orientations and religious beliefs may lead them to try to change their sexual orientation (Karslake, 2007; Maniaci & Rzeznik, 1993; Murray, 2005). In the Oneness Pentecostal churches, women's identity is embedded in appearance as well as relationships with others. They are taught that they must dress, look, and act "as a woman should." This means that they are to wear dresses, be meek, be obedient to men, and care for the children. Considering these roles for women in this church, evolving from a rigid and limited identity to coming out as a lesbian would likely be complex and multilayered. As a guide for this developmental journey, two identity models are discussed. The first model to be discussed is Cass's (1979) sexual identity model, which was one of the first models developed. The second identity model, which was used as a guide for the participants' stories, was created by McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and is then discussed.

Although the focus of this study was not the stages of coming out, two stage models are explained herein to provide a frame of reference. Coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning is a complex journey during which a person acknowledges that his or her sexual orientation is different than that of a heterosexual person (Cass, 1979). Although each person's journey is unique, theorists agree that people come out in stages. These stages are not always sequential due to the contexts in which people come to terms with sexuality (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). For most people, family is their primary support system and this system can help a person evolve and navigate through the stages or it can prevent progression to self-

identity. Adding to the complexity of the coming-out process are the religious practices and beliefs of the family, because religious traditions may have a significant influence on the family's view of morality and perception of the world (Anderton, 2010). These religious beliefs may influence the way a family accepts an LGBTQQIA individual member of that family.

Several stage models have been offered to describe the process of coming out as an LGBTQQIA person, but Cass's (1979) model is the most well-known. In 1979, Cass described the coming out process in six stages. Stage one is identity confusion, when the person first realizes his or her attraction for the same gender. Stage two is identity comparison, when the individual begins to deal with social stigmatization. Stage three is identity tolerance, a period of time when the individual seeks out other sexual minorities. Stage four is identity acceptance, which occurs when the individual begins to see him or herself in a positive way. Stage five is identity pride; in this stage the individual focuses on activities that relate to his or her sexual minority status. Cass's last stage is identity synthesis, when the individual begins to judge him or herself according to personal qualities instead of sexual minority status (Cass, 1979).

The main criticism of the Cass model (1979) that is found in the literature is the fact that it is linear and leaves very little room for variation (Degges-White, et al., 2000; Kahn, 1991). Another criticism of Cass's (1979) model is that the study on which she based her model was conducted with gay males and the fluidity of female sexual expression and nonlinear progression through the stages were not considered (Diamond & Savin-Williams, 2000; Maguen, Floyd, Bakeman, & Armistead, 2002; Parks, Hughs, & Mathews, 2004; Rosario, Scrimshaw & Hunter, 2004).

McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) lesbian identity model integrates racial/ethnic identity, gender identity, and gay and lesbian identity models. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) theorized

that coming out is a dual process and that identity development along with a woman's experiences during this process can cause her to question her group membership. In other words, as a lesbian's identity evolves, she may transition from a predominantly heterosexual to a predominantly LGBTQQIA community. McCarn and Fassinger (1996) saw identity development as a circular process involving phases rather than linear stages. . Their identity development model includes four phases and each phase includes three attitude areas: attitudes towards self, attitudes toward other gays and lesbians, and attitudes toward heterosexuals.

According to McCarn and Fassinger (1996), four phases to this process are: *awareness*, *exploration*, *deepening/commitment*, and *internalization/synthesis*. *Awareness* is the realization that one's desires are different than those of a heterosexual. During this phase, the woman becomes confused about her identity, but is unaware of the oppression associated with her new identity. In other words, she is not aware of the extent of oppression against the LGBTQQIA community, because she has not experienced the oppression. In the *exploration* phase, the woman explores the questions that surfaced in the first phase and explores stronger feelings for women. During this phase, she begins to acquire knowledge of her new identity group. According to McCarn and Fassinger, this phase produces excitement for some, and more questions for others, due to previous homophobic feelings. *Deepening and commitment* takes the woman to a deeper understanding of her emerging identity. A woman experiencing this phase begins to understand that her forms of intimacy help define her identity. Her commitment to her self-fulfillment as a sexual being will have a possible effect on her identification with her original group association (heterosexual). During the last phase of *internalization/synthesis*, the woman accepts her lesbian identity and begins to make decisions about her original group identity. She begins to form a public identity that is congruent with what she feels inside. She

also redefines what she thought about being part of the LGBTQQIA community by viewing homosexuals as individuals instead of stereotypes (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

In the present study, the identity development models served as a backdrop for the in-depth stories of the three participants. Understanding stages of sexual identity development is a prerequisite for understanding the complexity of the process of coming out in an oppressive religion.

Reconciliation of Religious Beliefs and Sexual Orientation

Research that has been conducted in the past ten years indicates that LGBTQQIA people who have reconciled their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation have used several coping techniques. Some questioned the beliefs held by their religion concerning homosexuality, whereas others developed a spiritual identity by transcending religious beliefs. Finally, some LGBTQQIA people participated in gay affirming organizations and churches (Garcia, 2008; Love, 2005; Miller, 2007; Minwalla, et al., 2005; Rodriguez and Ouelette, 2000; Schooner, 2006; Sullivan-Blum, 2004).

Questioning Religious Beliefs

Sullivan-Blum (2004) conducted a small qualitative research project interviewing four drag queens, who identified themselves as gay, on the subjects of religion and sexual orientation. Three participants, after soul searching and re-evaluating the way some religions view homosexuality, embraced spirituality and sexuality. Although “re-authoring” was present in the stories of these participants, this was not the focus of the study. The three participants who embraced spirituality and sexuality questioned the original stories given to them at birth. This questioning brought growth in their identity development process. Minwalla, et al. (2005) found

similar coping mechanisms, such as distancing oneself from Allah and the Qur'an or questioning the way one interpreted it, with gay Muslim men in North America.

In a qualitative research study conducted with gay Jewish males in Toronto, Schooner (2006) explored how 30 participants negotiated their gay and Jewish identities. Twenty-four of the participants found ways to integrate the gay and Jewish identities, which included questioning theological views of homosexuality. Miller (2007) interviewed 10 Black gay men about their reconciliation of sexual orientation and religious beliefs, and found that these men eventually rejected their churches' views on homosexuality. Schooner (2006) and Miller (2007) found similar themes of questioning religious beliefs and making sense of same-sex attractions by distancing oneself from religions.

Developing Spiritual Identity

Some LGBTQIA people reconcile their religious beliefs with their sexual orientation by transcending the confines of organized religion. Love, et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study with 12 college students (five gay males and seven lesbians) at two different Midwestern colleges. Five of the 12 reported that they had reconciled their religious beliefs and their orientation and they reported believing in a higher power beyond the confines of religious beliefs. Garcia (2008) interviewed 77 gay males, 3 bisexual males, and 5 transgender individuals to investigate how they reconciled their Catholicism and sexual orientation. Garcia (2008) found that 27 of his participants developed a spiritual identity without affiliating with any organized religion.

Participating in Gay Affirming Organizations and Churches

Some LGBTQIA people find comfort in gay affirming churches or organizations in assisting them to reconcile religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Schooner (2006) discovered

that 24 of 30 participants found ways to integrate their gay and Jewish identities, such as participating in gay Jewish organizations. According to Garcia (2008), finding a church that accepted LGBTQQIA people was one of the ways that some participants reconciled their religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Rodriguez and Ouelette (2000) conducted a study with members of the Metropolitan Community Church in New York (a gay positive church) to explore the participants' integration of religious beliefs and sexual orientation. The researchers interviewed 22 gay males and 18 lesbians and found that the participants who had more involvement in the Metropolitan Community Church reported being totally integrated.

Non-reconciliation of Religious Beliefs and Sexual Orientation

The literature also indicated that some LGBTQQIA people did not reconcile their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation (Boellstorff, 2005; Garcia, 2008; Sullivan & Blum, 2004), and instead used the following coping mechanisms. Some LGBTQQIA people chose to continue participating in their religion of origin while not disclosing their sexual orientation, while others decided to try to change their sexual orientation.

Continuing Participation in Religion of Origin

Many LGBTQQIA people continue to participate in their religions of origin and choose not to disclose their sexual orientation. Boellstorff (2005), who conducted a study on Muslim gay males in Indonesia, found that the participants planned to get married to women and continue their gay relationships. They did not view being gay as a sin as long as they married women and had children. Garcia (2008) found that 26 of his 80 participants remained in their religion of origin.

Changing Sexual Orientation

Some LGBTQIA people continue to believe in the teachings of their religions of origin and attempt to change their sexual orientation. Some of the men in the Boellstorff study (2005) believed being gay made them unfit for marriage. These men tried to control their behaviors by participating in sex with men less often and by putting energy towards their careers. In Sullivan and Blum's (2004) study, three of the four participants questioned their religion's view of homosexuality, but the fourth participant stated that he thought homosexuality was wrong and believed that people need to try to become heterosexual.

The fundamentalist belief that homosexuality is a choice and a sin is the foundation of a therapy called conversion therapy. Conversion therapy promises to change sexual orientation. According to Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (2009), conversion or reparative therapy is a therapy that attempts to change a person's sexual orientation. In one version that many churches use, an individual is assigned a same-sex mentor with whom to be in a nonsexual relationship. This relationship supposedly heals a childhood wound that occurred because this person was not sufficiently or adequately bonded to his or her same-sex parent. All other therapeutic endeavors to change one's sexual orientation are also called conversion therapies (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2010). In three documentaries, (Karlslake, 2007; Maniaci & Rzeznik, 1993; Murray, 2005) about religion and homosexuality, available on DVD, conversion therapy was discussed in detail. Some interviewees stated that they went through a conversion program conducted by their fundamentalist churches of origin. The pain of these experiences was iterated throughout the documentaries (Karlslake, 2007; Maniaci & Rzeznik, 1993; Murray, 2005). In Murray's (2005) documentary, the participants described their struggles with religion and sexual orientation as being extremely painful. The participants in this

documentary were chosen because they had taken part in reparative/conversion therapy due to their religious beliefs about homosexuality. They stated that they believed that their sexual orientation was a sin. This belief caused internal conflict, because they continued to have same-sex attractions. The process of conversion therapy caused depression and suicidal ideations because they believed that the therapy was going to take the attractions away. Many of the participants discussed the fact that they had to question their own core beliefs and change them in order for the core beliefs to be congruent with their same-sex attractions.

Lesbian Sexual Orientation and Religion

The gender disparity in studies of sexual minorities is worth noting. Most studies conducted on sexual minorities have included male participants only (Boellstorff, 2005; Doyal et al., 2008; Garcia, et al., 2008; Harris, Cook, Kashubeck-West, 2008; Henrickson, 2009; Kirkman, 2001; Love, et al., 2005; Miller, 2007; Minwalla, et al., 2005; Schnoor, 2006; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Smith & Horne, 2007; Sullivan-Blum, 2004). In the last ten years, only one study (Anderton, 2010) has been conducted with lesbian participants exclusively on the topic of reconciling religion and sexual orientation. One other study with lesbians only was conducted almost a decade before that; Kirkman (2001) interviewed 30 Pakeha women in New Zealand. Some of Kirkman's participants reported having conflicts concerning sexual orientation and religion. These conflicts were associated with the inequality of women in a patriarchal religious system. All the women in this study stated that they had to re-evaluate and change the way they interpreted Christianity in order to reconcile religion and sexual orientation. Kirkman was not focusing on the process of re-authoring, but the women discussed the process of re-evaluating the way they perceived the constructs of their religions. In fact, all researchers discussed herein, including those who studied gay males only and those who studied lesbians, found that

reconciliation was accomplished by renegotiating the beliefs of their religions of origin (Anderton, 2007; Boellstorff, 2005; Doyal et al., 2008; Garcia, et al., 2008; Harris, Cook, Kashubeck-West, 2008; Kirkman, 2001; Henrickson, 2009; Love, et al., 2005; Miller, 2007; Minwalla, et al., 2005; Schnoor, 2006; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Smith & Horne, 2007; Sullivan-Blum, 2004).

Anderton's (2010) study is similar to my study in that she conducted a phenomenological study of women who grew up in fundamentalist religion. Her participants were ten Mormon women who grew up in Utah or Idaho and were born into the LDS (Latter Day Saints) religion. She explored how women described their experiences with growing up in the Mormon Church while experiencing same-sex attractions. She further explored how these women reconciled their religious beliefs and sexual attraction for other females. Four of the 10 women identified themselves as lesbian, three as gay, and one as bisexual. Anderton (2010) explored their present involvement with the LDS church and found that two of the women had remained members of the LDS church, while four had formally resigned and four were inactive. Three themes that emerged during Anderton's exploration were self-acceptance, struggles with religion, and others finding out about their sexual orientation.

Anderton (2010) found that eight of the 10 women knew at a young age that they were different from other girls. Seven of the ten women did not understand what this difference was. All participants struggled with religion and their same-sex attractions. Although all of the women stated that they had accepted that they were non-heterosexual, the acceptance varied with each story. Seven of the ten women struggled with their sexual orientation in general. Although three women stated that they accepted themselves at an early age, nine of the ten women reported having difficulty questioning LDS church beliefs about homosexuality. All ten women had

intense fears about the way significant others would respond to their non-heterosexual status. Anderton found that the families had various reactions to the women's sexual minority status. Half of the families changed significantly in their interactions with the women. Some of the participants were not allowed to be around their nieces and nephews without another adult, were compared to pedophiles, and were reminded constantly of religious repercussions. Some family members refused to be around them if they were in a relationship with a woman. Anderton also found that two of the 10 women had a negative experience with a counselor. One reported that the negative experience with a counselor was extremely traumatic and affected the rest of her experiences with counseling.

As was found in the earlier study by Kirkman (2001), the women had to change some of their beliefs to reconcile their orientation and spirituality. The women described struggles with changing their religious constructs and reconciling those constructs with what was going on inside (Anderton, 2010). The dearth of research with lesbian participants supports a need to further explore the process of reconciliation of religious constructs and same-sex attractions among lesbians. Mental health professionals will be better able to assist lesbians who were raised in fundamentalist religions if they understand the struggles as well as the journeys of reconciliation. I explored how three women journeyed from the extremist views of a cult-like religion to self-acceptance of their LGBTQIA status. I hope that counselors and other mental health professionals will be able to apply knowledge gained from exploring these journeys to their treatment of LGBTQIA clients. The participants in the present study have journeyed from one marginalized group to another. Narratives are powerful and are the keys to social change (White, 2007). I hope that participating in this study has empowered the participants to take control of the retelling of their stories.

Conclusion

A review of the literature illuminated a dearth of research on reconciling religious beliefs that has been conducted with lesbian participants. Creswell (2007) described narrative research as an exploration of detailed stories. I explored the stories of three women using a two-way approach to research in which the participant is considered the co-researcher in the telling of the story. The relationship between the researcher and the participant creates a dyadic account of the participant's story (White, 1997). My conceptual framework involves narrative as well as feminist therapy theories. These two theories coincide with my epistemological view that the retelling of a story is a collaborative effort. Although narrative approaches to inquiry have gained acceptance in the past 15 years, researchers still may hesitate to use this approach (Plummer, 2001; Richardson, 2000). This study has made a contribution to expanding the scant research on lesbians who were raised in fundamentalist religions and to furthering the use of narratives in qualitative inquiry. The participants in my study grew up in a cult-like atmosphere and journeyed to a place where they were comfortable with their lesbianism.

Although the primary findings in each of the studies discussed in this chapter suggested that re-authoring was a process that facilitated reconciliation, the process was not discussed in detail. The focus in previous studies has been the disparate lives created by the internal struggles of the participants. Anderton (2010) asserted that reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation was missing from the literature and that detailed stories are needed to fill the gap in the literature. In designing my study, I anticipated that re-authoring would be found to be an avenue to reconciliation that is worth further exploration.

Although researchers have discussed the obstacles involved in coming out and

overcoming these obstacles in the context of religion, they have not specifically addressed the process that White and Epston (1990) call “re-authoring.” This process involves questioning of one’s constructs about sexual orientation inculcated by religion and society and restructuring those constructs to include different ways of expressing one’s sexual identity. In a Oneness Pentecostal church, women have distinct roles that are a result of a strict adherence to the patriarchal structure (United Pentecostal Church Position Papers, 2006). Oneness Pentecostal churches’ dogma maintains that women are second-class and should obey the men in the church (United Pentecostal Church Position Papers, 2006). In addition to strict beliefs espoused within the church, society’s constructs are majority and heterosexually driven (White & Epston, 1990). These two structures, fundamentalist religion and the LGBTQQIA community, intersect in my study of women who were born into a church that has maintained the patriarchy of society’s past through the twentieth century (White & Epston, 1990). A unique aspect of the present study is the strengths-based approach to analysis of the personal story. “Re-authoring” is a powerful process (White, 1997). I looked for patterns of “re-authoring” as a method of reconciling religious beliefs and sexual orientation.

In designing and conducting this study, I hoped to enhance the practice of narrative therapy, family therapy, feminist therapy, and social work by discussing, in narrative form, the importance of the personal story told in the voice of the storyteller. Because women’s identity is so complex, the journeys of three women from extremist religious views to self-acceptance may help mental health professionals understand the struggles of LGBTQQIA people with religious beliefs and self-acceptance.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present a discussion of the qualitative methods that were used in this study. The purpose is reiterated. Then, the rationale for using qualitative methodology is presented, followed by an explanation of narrative research. I describe my role as a researcher including biases, bracketing, and assumptions. I provide a detailed discussion of the data collection and analysis procedures and research methods. Before summarizing the chapter, I provide information about credibility of the study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand the coming out stories and the process of reconciliation of religion and sexual orientation for lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds. Coming out was defined as the process by which lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered people arrive at self-acceptance and the stages of telling significant others that they are sexual minorities (Cass, 1979). The central question for this study was: How do lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds describe their journeys through the coming out process and the process of reconciling their religious beliefs and sexual orientation?

This study was intended to contribute to the literature by collecting in-depth stories of women who grew up in fundamentalist Pentecostal homes. Although Anderton (2010) conducted her study with LDS women, more in-depth studies need to be conducted with women who journeyed to a place of reconciliation of their religious beliefs after realizing they were lesbians. The findings of this study may help counselors and counselor educators understand the difficulties inherent in reconciliation of sexual orientation and religious beliefs. Schuck and Liddle (2001) conducted a study with 66 sexual minority participants, two-thirds of whom stated

that they had difficulty in reconciling their religious beliefs and their sexual minority status. The intent of the present study was to track the process of three women's personal accounts of "re-authoring" their own stories. No previous studies have addressed reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation by examining the process of "re-authoring."

Creative ways of coping are not always addressed in studies conducted on the LGBTQQIA community (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), although the rates of use of counseling by the LGBTQQIA community have been reported in the literature. For instance, Rutter, Estrada, Ferguson, and Diggs (2008), stated that members of the LGBTQQIA community are five times more likely to seek counseling than their heterosexual counterparts. A central focus of this study was the coping mechanisms of the three women who participated and their innate ability to "re-author" their stories and overcome the oppression of societal, religious and familial constructs.. LGBTQQIA people have to reformulate their own realities in order to balance what is going on internally and what society says is normal (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

Rationale for Qualitative and Narrative Methodology

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research is based on inductive reasoning that allows the researcher to discover themes through the participants' descriptions of their realities and the researcher's observations. Qualitative research focuses on the process rather than the outcome, and the researcher becomes the instrument for collection and analysis of the data. Consistent with the purpose of this investigation, I utilized a narrative approach to explore and uncover how each participant described and conceptualized her experience.

Qualitative research is designed to obtain in-depth detail about the participants and the way they view themselves in their personal contexts. According to Creswell (2007), narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories and life experiences of a single life or several

lives; therefore, I used personal narratives to capture the in-depth stories of three lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of three women who have journeyed from the oppression of a fundamentalist religion to reconciliation of expression of sexuality and spiritual beliefs. Narrative research coincides with my epistemology in that I believe that people construct their own realities (White, 2007). The internal themes of each story emerged as the story teller chose what was important to her. The participants were considered co-researchers and were asked for meanings and personal interpretations of life events. It was not necessary for me, as the central researcher, to juxtapose my personal meaning onto this story. My role was to gather the information from the participants and then, through asking for clarification, piece the stories together. This study was designed to help counselors and other mental health professionals understand the importance of people's ability to re-author their journeys. It was impossible to understand the journeys of the three women participants without the details told in their own voices (Creswell, 2007). According to White (2007), counselors and other mental health professionals are collectors of the personal story. Clients evolve and take control of their realities through the act of telling their stories. Narrative research is similar, in that the participants are the ones in control of the telling of the stories (Creswell, 2007).

Because the approach to this study was narrative, the narrative therapy concept of "re-authoring" was used to analyze the stories (White & Epston, 1990). The participants took control of their own stories by choosing what was important to tell me. They were asked to tell how they made sense of their lives. Through the participants' telling of their stories, the analysis began to evolve. The choices of segments and personal truths created the themes necessary for the final analysis.

When people are born they inherit stories such as getting married and having children. These stories are given to us by society and our families of origin (White & Epston, 1990). Because LGBTQQIA community members must re-evaluate what their lives are going to look like, they have to rewrite the realities around those stories (Cass, 1979; Cass, 1979; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). For instance, most people are considered heterosexual at birth and the construct of heterosexuality is assumed (Rees-Turyn, Doyle, Holland, & Root, 2008). Through the telling of the story, each participant iterated the renegotiation of the constructs with which she had a relationship. In other words, she described how she dealt with heterosexual assumptions while coming to terms with being lesbian. The relationship that was formed with heterosexual constructs at birth was examined by the co-researchers and the individualized “re-authoring” was co-constructed into a narrative that integrates three individual stories.

The researcher has a richer, more compelling study if the individual who experienced a cult-like religion and the process of reconciling religious beliefs with sexual orientation is given a voice to express her reality. According to White and Epston (1990), narrative therapy centers on the person’s view of his or her “truth.” Personal stories contain themes of difficult times, personal timelines, coping mechanisms, personal perspectives, and individual conceptualization of one’s reality and the context of that reality (White, 2007).

According to Creswell (2007), narrative research is an in-depth exploration of one or more participants’ lives. This approach was challenging but was appropriate for my study, because I explored the context of three women’s journeys to a place of reconciliation. According to Claunidin and Connelly (2000), a key theme in narrative research is the relationship between the researcher and the participants, through which both parties are changed by the experience. The participants were considered co-researchers, thus giving the power to the participants and

alleviating some of the perceived power differential between the researcher and participant. It was necessary for both the main researcher and the women telling their life stories to acknowledge the relationship that is formed when a story is retold and conceptualized in a dyadic discussion. According to White (2007), when two people are creating and recreating the turning of events in the life of one of them, a dyadic system is formed. The researcher must remain aware of the forming of the relationship and remain transparent so that the participant is the explorer of her own story and the researcher is a guide for that exploration. Narrative research tracks the lived experience and the personal conceptualization of one's own story (Creswell, 2007). I chose narrative research because of the descriptive nature of the inquiry. I believe that a personal journey needs in-depth exploration so that understanding is possible.

Role of the Researcher

As stated previously, the role of the researcher in narrative research is that of a co-researcher who guides the personal exploration of the participant's own story. The research becomes a collaborative effort, which is the strength of narrative research (Creswell, 2007). This gives the participant an active part in the evolution of the analysis. According to Ellis (2004), narrative analysis is based on the person telling the story. Ellis posits that the story *is* the analysis.

Researcher's Biases

I grew up in the United Pentecostal Church and have an insider's view of the context of this religious system. Although this insider's view helped me understand the context and the participants' willingness to share, my history with the United Pentecostal Church and coming out as a sexual minority could have created a bias in the interpretation of the data and the direction of the interviews. It was imperative that I remained transparent and that throughout the discussion

of the personal stories, the participant was in control of the interpretation of life events. It was also imperative that I employed strategies to minimize any effects of my bias. According to family systems theory in which my epistemology is grounded, when a person enters a relationship with another person, it creates a system. Narrative therapy was created with this belief as a basis (White, 2007).

Assumptions

Throughout the research process, I remained aware of the following assumptions which possibly could have arisen from my own past experiences:

- 1) I could have assumed that the participants' experiences were similar to mine. As stated in the section above, the researcher's inside view of the context of this study could have affected interpretations of the story. Constantly checking with the participants about meanings of certain events helped guard against these assumptions.
- 2) I could have made assumptions that emotions surrounding issues were similar to mine. It is difficult for a researcher to bracket when co-constructing a story with a participant. Bracketing is further discussed in the following section.

Bracketing

According to Creswell (2007), bracketing is the researcher's ability to set aside her pre-conceived ideas and look at the data in an objective manner. It is important for a researcher to be sufficiently self-aware to recognize when personal experiences influence the interpretation of the data. Although I believe that narrative studies create an atmosphere in which bracketing is difficult, I attempted to bracket by getting feedback from my peer reviewer and by talking with a therapist who has an outsider's view. Another method of bracketing was to make explicit my reflections on my experiences with the United Pentecostal Church. I discussed these experiences

with my therapist and a peer once a week to debrief. As each participant told her story, I let the story evolve. Transparency and clarification remained at the forefront of this process.

During the analysis phase of the research, I reflected on the parts of each story that reminded me of my past. I think it was very important for me to engage in personal reflection, although this was difficult, to prohibit my personal biases from affecting the analysis phase (Creswell, 2007). In addition to debriefing with my therapist and a peer, I kept a journal in order to remain aware of my personal biases. My twenty years' experience as a family therapist also helped me separate from the participants' stories. Therapists must negotiate boundaries to shield themselves from the personal stories of clients. This skill, developed early in my career, aided me in bracketing. Because the telling of each story was a co-construction, I member checked by reviewing my findings with the participants. According to Creswell (2007), narrative research requires a close connection between the researcher and the participants so they can clarify any misconceptions and interpretations of the researcher. Through this form of member checking, analysis evolved.

Data Collection Procedures

Recruitment of Participants

Because ministers of gay accepting churches were a connection to the gay church community and were aware of their congregants' religious backgrounds, they served as the gatekeepers for this study. Ministers were asked to identify people who were lesbian and who grew up in a Oneness Pentecostal culture, and ask them if they were willing to be interviewed for the research project. I asked the ministers to give my email address to these individuals, so that they could make the choice to contact me. In the first three week several ministers contacted me by email, stating that they planned to discuss with several women in their congregations and

organizations their willingness to participate in my study. After the ministers gave their congregants my contact information, I began to receive emails from several women who stated that they were willing to be interviewed for my study. Criteria for participation in this study were: (1) the participant is a lesbian female who (2) grew up in a Oneness Pentecostal church and (3) had reconciled being a lesbian and her religious beliefs, and who was (4) willing to discuss her outing process. I conducted a preliminary interview with six women. Two of the women were not comfortable with face-to-face interviews. One woman declined to participate because she did not feel comfortable with the emotions that could surface when telling her story. The other three candidates were willing to be interviewed and observed.

Informed Consent

After I obtained approval from the University of New Orleans Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), I obtained informed consent for inclusion in the study and for use of interviews from all participants. I protected the participants' identity by: (1) assigning pseudonyms to the participants in written reports of the interviews, and (2) storing all data in a password protected computer and program. Interviews were conducted at the participants' homes, churches, and public libraries with private rooms. The interviews were audiotaped and were transcribed verbatim. At the end of each interview, I processed with the participant, so the participant could express how she felt when sharing. I was aware that issues may have arisen during the telling of one's story. Each participant signed a consent form (see Appendix B) stating that she understood that telling one's story may bring about emotional responses and that she was willing to participate and if needed, she would take care of herself by attending counseling. I informed each participant that I had a name of a counselor willing to do debriefing counseling for no charge. I shared the preliminary findings with the participants to ensure

agreement and give the participants the opportunity to provide clarification and correction of any misrepresented ideas or interpretations. I provided the participants with a copy of the transcript of the first interview for review before interviewing them for the second time.

Participant Profiles

Three lesbians, ranging in age from 35 to 65, with Oneness Pentecostal backgrounds were recruited. Although all participants were from similar backgrounds, they described being at different places in their reconciliation journeys. The three participants were given pseudonyms for anonymity. The participants are introduced below.

Pam. Pam was a 35- year-old lesbian who grew up in an independent church that had beliefs similar to those of the United Pentecostal Church and Oneness Pentecostal churches. Her father was the minister of her church, and it was difficult for her to leave the church. She stated that her journey of reconciliation began six years ago. She had just received an email message from her father asking her if she was a lesbian. Although Pam stated that she felt somewhat reconciled, she was nervous about what her father would say. She had lost her mother and sister in a car accident several years ago and was afraid that she was going to lose her relationship with her father.

Shae. Shae was a 35-year-old lesbian who grew up in a United Pentecostal Church. Her mother is a piano player in her local Pentecostal church. She stated that her journey of reconciliation began a few years ago. Shae stated that she was still in the process of reconciliation. She also stated that she continues to struggle with shame and guilt. Shae expressed that her mother was concerned with anonymity, because her mother did not want the

identity of their family revealed. She also asked about reading materials on changing one's sexual orientation.

Ann. Ann was a 65-year-old lesbian who grew up in a Oneness Pentecostal church. Her parents did missionary work, sending clothes to Africa and other countries in need. She stated that her reconciliation journey began about 15 years ago. Ann was a Oneness Pentecostal preacher until she was about 50 years old. She described her journey as difficult, because she loved being in church and loved being a preacher.

Field Notes, Pictures and Observations

In addition to interviews other forms of information, such as field notes, pictures, and observations were used to complete the stories of the individuals. I attended church services with two participants who were willing to let me observe. I observed Pam and Shae in a worship service, and after the church service was over, we discussed their feelings about their spiritual expression. Both of them were thankful that they had found a church that accepted them. I observed Ann via the Internet. Ann was a traveling minister, so it was difficult for me to observe her in a live situation. Ann's initial interview was longer than the other interviews because we discussed the fact that I had observed her in the process of worship, doing so over the internet. I observed her ministry and listened to her preaching and singing. We also discussed pictures of her on the Internet. I was able to obtain sufficient materials from each participant to retell their stories.

Interviews

Each participant was asked at what age she realized she was a lesbian, at what age she told family and friends, the emphasis of religion was within the family system, what the religion

of origin thought about the LGBTQQIA community, her religious experiences growing up and coming out as a lesbian, and how she reconciled her religious beliefs and her sexual orientation. The interview questions were submitted to participants prior to the scheduled interviews. The interviews began with an open-ended inquiry: “Tell me about the religion your family practiced as a child.” Each participant was able to talk uninterruptedly to give the researcher background information. A further question that was asked was, “How did you reconcile your religious beliefs and your sexual orientation and what does reconciliation mean to you?”

Data Analysis Procedures

According to Creswell (2007), many narrative researchers use plot structure to analyze data. Good narratives have characters, setting, problem, actions, and resolution. Although plot structure was used in the retelling and organization of the three stories, I analyzed the data by including the narrative therapy concept of “re-authoring.” I used an established narrative therapy concept to analyze the stories. I used a technique I created, in which I took the three individualized stories and tracked themes within each story that were apparent in the other stories. I also acknowledged the differences in the stories. According to Reid (2008), “re-authoring” was used in the Queer Families project to co-explore the meanings of families. In this project, the participants described their definitions of families and how they “re-authored” what was considered “family” in society so that it would fit the way they were “doing” family. Reid (2008), when describing the stories of her participants, did not discuss their individual stories nor did she indicate how many participants she interviewed. Instead, she chose to discuss the themes as a whole. Edwards (2005) interviewed seven lesbians about their identity development. According to Edwards, through the re-accounts of their past experiences these women assigned

new meaning to past behaviors and events in their lives. They discussed events, thoughts, and behaviors that were indicators that they were lesbians. In the present study, I focused on the individual themes as well as the emerging common themes in all three stories.

The following painting represents the structure of my analysis. I structured the analysis in a way that wove the concepts into three threads that overlapped and interacted, which was represented by a braid, an image that has meaning within the Pentecostal population. The three strands represent the three individualized stories. As I told the three stories, I tied the common themes together as well as acknowledged the individual themes within each story. The background in the painting represents the complexity of the outing process. The rectangles and squares represent the different systems within a person's life and the triangles turned upside down represent the oppression of the LGBTQQIA community. The triangle turned upside down was used in the concentration camps in World War II to identify gays. The fact that there are many systems within an individual life complicates the outing process. The circle in the center of the painting represents the female participants. The circle is used to represent females in genograms used by family therapists.



Illustration 3.1 Painting Depicting Methodology

According to feminist counseling theory (Herlihy & McCollum, 2003) and narrative therapy (White & Epston, 1990), an individual's personal experience should be honored. Using this approach for analysis, I wove the stories to honor both the themes that were alike within the stories and the themes that were different that made each individual participant the author of her own story. I organized the themes that were common among the three participants and the themes that were unique for each participant. As I narrated the three stories, I connected the common themes as I honored differences.

The social, religious and familial constructs that were questioned during each participant's story were highlighted as themes of personal attributes emerged (White & Epston, 1990; White, 2007). It is my belief that a story is not always told in chronological order; therefore, my analysis focused on "re-authoring" as the guideline for the order of the narrative. Narrative segments and categories were evaluated within the context of the interview (Creswell, 2007). Such issues as the age the participant realized she was a lesbian, age she told family and friends, the meaning the participant's family put on the religion of origin, what the religion of origin thought of sexual minorities, the participant's religious experiences, the participant's journey in reconciling religious beliefs and sexual orientation, and how the participant defined reconciliation were considered while analyzing the use of "re-authoring" within each story (White & Epston, 1990). Coding evolved as the stories evolved. I used line by line analysis and coded in three colors. I used the words of the participants while weaving the stories together. This helped to provide credibility in the research analysis (Creswell, 2007).

Six-step Analysis

Preliminary step. The preliminary step was transcribing the data verbatim. The transcription set the stage for the seven step process. I transcribed each interview verbatim in preparation for the first step.

Step one: analysis of context. Each participant described her church of origin. I requested the description of each church because each church was different. Although Oneness Pentecostal churches have basically the same beliefs, each participant was able to describe her own experience. The participants' descriptions of their churches of origin formed the basis of the analysis of the context.

Step two: looking for the process of “re-authoring” in the first story. After transcription and reading the field notes on observations, the process of “re-authoring” was analyzed in the first story. I looked for individual “re-authoring” themes throughout the story. I accomplished this with line by line analysis. I used highlighters to assist me with identifying the major themes and sub-themes in the first story.

Because the participant was asked to narrate how she reconciled her religious beliefs and sexual orientation and her definition of reconciliation, the story followed the pattern established by the participant. So that the participant could engage in the analysis and member checking, I gave her a copy of the transcript of the first interview to review before the second interview. The second interview was conducted for clarification.

Step three: looking for the process of “re-authoring” in the second story. After transcription, the process of “re-authoring” was analyzed in the second story. The same process was followed with the second story as was followed with the first.

Step four: looking for the process of “re-authoring” in the third story. After transcription, the process of “re-authoring” was analyzed in the third story. The same process was followed with the third story as was followed in the first and second stories.

Step five: connecting the common themes and honoring individual themes. After individual analysis was conducted with each story, the areas of self-exploration that were common in the three stories were organized in a visual illustration. Because the stories were a process, I used a visual illustration to organize the common areas of re-authoring. Individual patterns of re-authoring were then organized in visual illustrations.

Step six: writing up the findings. The findings were written in a pattern that took each story and overlapped the common themes while honoring the differences. I began the process of

re-storying with a description of my experiences with Oneness Pentecostal churches. I then honored the individuality by having each participant define reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation. As the writing of the narrative continued, three unifying aspects of re-authoring were identified. I then identified the common themes as well as the individual themes in each story. The common themes were joined in a pattern that crossed the other stories, followed by individual themes.

Credibility

According to Creswell (2007), it is imperative that qualitative research is credible. I used triangulation and member checking in my research analysis. Triangulation consisted of the review of the literature and peer debriefing. Field notes for the observations and interviews were used to clarify the participants' stories. Member checking was the most important validation strategy in this study due to the fact the analysis evolved out of the story. I member checked with a lesbian who had a Oneness Pentecostal background to check information concerning her church of origin and her areas of re-authoring. The participants were consulted as the stories were woven. Each participant was asked to view her interview and was given the opportunity to clarify her story. I then took the three stories and crossed the similarities followed by a description of the different coping strategies of each participant. During the analysis phase of my research, I consulted a peer to bracket my personal perceptions of the stories. Because the stories were co-constructed, bracketing was important during the analysis phase.

Summary

According to Creswell (2007), metaphor is used frequently in narrative research. I used the image of a weave that looks like the braid of hair. Pentecostal women often wear their hair braided or tied in a knot at the base of their necks. In the Oneness Pentecostal churches, the hair

is considered sacred and is not to be cut. The stories of these three women were considered sacred, but were free to flow as the story evolved.

In the Oneness Pentecostal churches, women's identities are embedded in a strict dress code. The dress code includes wearing dresses at all times and having long hair. The weave or braid in this study has several metaphorical meanings. The first involves the loosening of the ties of a cult. When one loosens braided hair, it becomes free to flow in many directions. This can be liberating as well as frightening. After the initial letting go of the ties, questions about identity sometimes surface. In a cult-like atmosphere, one's identity is dictated and multiple questions emerge when freedom is introduced.

A second way of interpreting the metaphor is the joining of the three stories. The three women in this research study told their stories of gaining freedom and this was the metaphor used for the analysis. As they chose the portions of their own stories to tell, the analysis evolved from their choices. As a researcher I wove the three stories with similar themes while honoring the individuality of each story. The process of weaving the stories strengthened the credibility of this study. As the similarities crossed to tie the overall narrative, the study gained strength. The individual stories were given power. Ropes are usually made in weave form and the connecting of the three strands builds the strength. The connection is strength building, but it must be remembered that it takes each strand to build on the other two strands to make the rope sturdy and trustworthy. In this interpretation, the braid represents choices. Each participant chose what she wanted to narrate and was in control of the interpretation. The weaving of the stories emphasized the strength of commonalities and the beauty of differences.

Although many stage models for the coming out process have been developed, very few have been evaluated in the context of religion. In the present study, the outing experiences of

three women were described within the context of the Oneness Pentecostal religion and their journeys to reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation. As many LGBTQQIA people have been victimized by a religious system, research needs to be conducted on reconciliation and the ability of these individuals to cope (Anderton, 2010). Through the telling of their stories, the three people interviewed helped further understanding of the use of narratives and reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

As I gained understanding of the role that reconciliation journeys play in the lives of with Oneness Pentecostal backgrounds, it became evident to me that the stories of the three participants involved similar journeys and were characterized by similar as well as individualized themes. This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the importance of my transparency in the re-telling of the participants' stories is described. In the second section, I discuss the participants' definitions of reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation. Because reconciliation is a personal journey, I thought it was important to have each participant explain what reconciliation meant to her. Third, I discuss the three unifying aspects of re-authoring that occurred in all three stories. I include a visual representation that depicts these three unifying aspects of re-authoring. In the same section, the three unifying aspects of re-authoring are described in detail. Each of these three subsections begins with the individual backgrounds of each participant, and then the common themes of re-authoring are presented followed by the individual themes. Visual illustrations are included for the common themes as well as the individual themes.

Although stories with the usual defined plot structure are the most common means of conveying narrative results, there are no set conventions for writing or presenting narrative data (Thody, 2006). Because narrative language can be colorful and engaging, choices are unlimited. I chose to tell the stories of the three participants by focusing on the narrative therapy concept of re-authoring. While re-telling the context of the process of re-authoring, I was able to create a chronology that encompassed all three stories while honoring individual experiences and context. To protect participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, identifying

information was altered and all data was stored in a password protected computer and program. The chapter concludes with a summary of the re-telling process.

Researcher Transparency

Because narrative research is a methodology in which the participants are the co-researchers and bracketing is difficult, I briefly discuss my experience with Oneness Pentecostal churches so that I can remain transparent when telling the stories of the three participants. I grew up in a very small town in northern Louisiana as a member of a Oneness Pentecostal church. I did not leave the religion until I went to college. After leaving for college, I realized I was attracted to women and this realization was one of the most troubling experiences of my life. At first, I didn't even know what the word "lesbian" meant. I was afraid even to write about my feelings in my journal. I was afraid of going straight to hell, a place where you fall forever and burn for eternity. In my church, women could not wear pants or make-up or cut their hair, so being attracted to other women was surely a sin.

As I began to come to terms with being attracted to other women, I began to question my religious beliefs and change my appearance, and I began reading everything I could find about same-sex attractions. For a while I wore pants two days a week and skirts three days a week to ease into my change in appearance. The way I dressed was a huge part of my Pentecostal identity. I began backing away from church altogether. During my period of backing away from the church, I was able to figure out who I was. I figured out that I was a lesbian and if there is a God, that God made me a lesbian. My journey is much more detailed and much longer, but this brief description is intended to validate my transparency as a researcher and the "re-teller" of the participants' stories.

Participants' Definitions of Reconciliation of Religious Beliefs with Sexual Orientation

In this section, the participants individually define reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation. Pam and Ann stated that they felt reconciled, whereas Shae felt that she was still in the process of reconciliation.

Pam

Pam claimed that her religious beliefs and sexual orientation were reconciled. She defined reconciliation as:

That means...I am saying that I am concerned about the way my Dad felt, but I am not concerned with the way I feel or Jesus feels. I feel like Jesus accepts me and loves me for who I am and what I express and experience. I don't have any problem within myself spiritually. Jesus loves me and His grace is there. When we get to heaven there are going to be all kinds of people in heaven. Anyone who has made a dedication and commitment to Christ will be there....gay straight, black or white...it doesn't matter.

Shae

Shae stated that she was still struggling daily with the process of reconciliation. Shae defined reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation as:

I guess just completely letting go of the thoughts that come up, those old, ugly thoughts of what I have been taught in the past. That I am a sinner.

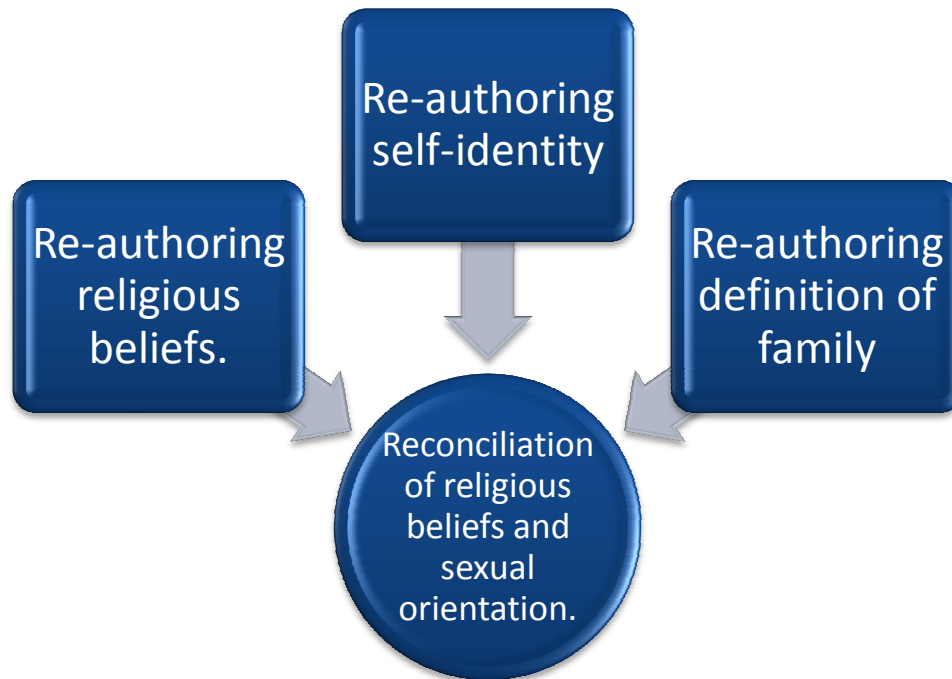
Ann.

Ann stated that reconciliation felt like a process to her, but that she was reconciled. Ann defined reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation:

It is when you can come to a place where you realize how insignificant your sexual orientation is.

Three Unifying Aspects of Re-authoring

The three areas of re-authoring that were common in the participants' stories were religious beliefs, past definitions of family, and past definitions of self-identity. I found that the process in each of these areas occurred simultaneously with each participant. As each participant examined one aspect of her life, she was examining the other aspects as well. The three unifying aspects of self-exploration were intertwined and complex. The process was complex, because the women identified as Pentecostal women by adhering to a dress code. Each of the women discussed the fact that much of her identity was embedded in her appearance. The following chart offers a visual representation of the complexity of this process. The central question of how three lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds reconcile their religious beliefs with their sexual orientation is depicted in a four-part illustration.



4.1 Visual representation of the three unifying aspects of re-authoring.

Re-authoring Religious Beliefs

Stories of past religious beliefs.

Pam. Pam is a 35-year-old female from Louisiana whose father is a minister of a non-denominational church with beliefs similar to those of Oneness Pentecostals. I interviewed Pam in a public library in a private room. When Pam walked in, she stated that she was a bit upset because she had just received an email from her father asking her if she was gay. I asked her if she felt comfortable being interviewed and she assured me that she was. As we began the interview, she described her religion of origin as:

I grew up in a very strict church. It was more like a Pentecostal church as well because it was very legalistic. It was very regimented. No going to the movies. Very Bible oriented

and what the Church thought the Bible said. It was more like law and legalism with a little bit of love and grace. But not really open grace. Like you are saved by grace, but I did not see that expressed as much as the legalism. The rules and regulation and the legalism.

Shae. Shae is a 35-year-old woman whose mother is a piano player for a Pentecostal church in Texas. Shae asked about anonymity, because her mother was concerned that her daughter's identity would be revealed. Shae wanted to protect her family. Shae described her religion of origin thusly:

I grew up in the UPC church in Texas. At first, as a child, it was really scary. I would hide under the pews, because of all the jumping around and praising God. As I got older, I got into it. I wore skirts all of the time, not cutting my hair, not wearing make-up. I was pretty scared. When I was 15 years old I lost my friend in a car accident and her death really scared me. One night I was at church and it got really quiet and someone started speaking in tongues really loudly and someone interpreted it. It got really quiet after that and my pastor asked me to come up to the front of the church and he told me that if I didn't get my life right with God, he saw me in a casket. From that night forward, I was maybe 15 or 16, I started to change my life around. I started going to church every service that was available. I started praying before school. I stopped wearing pants. I started wearing dresses. I stopped cutting my hair and wearing makeup. I quit playing sports that I loved. I was the drum major in the band and had a skirt made for my uniform.

Ann. Ann is a 65-year-old woman who grew up in a Pentecostal church in Oklahoma. I interviewed Ann in her home. Ann described her church of origin as described in the following quote:

We are more exuberant in our worship and more demanding in our dress code and what not. That is part of my story as well. At 16, I made a very strong commitment and decided what I was learning in school. I was just going to school. I didn't even do homework and still made excellent grades. All of that was easy for me. It was like I was going because that was what I had to do. It was like I didn't think I was learning for my vocation which was to preach. I thought for me to preach I need to study the Bible. I knew at 16 that I could quit school. I wanted to commit myself to the study of the word and that is what I did. My parents supported me. I cried because I loved school. I enjoyed going. I enjoyed the people. I enjoyed the activities. Pentecostal. It was fabulous. We lived in Oklahoma and our church was First Apostolic. They even had a college. Back that long ago...I am 65....that many years ago, they had the Bible College and the church had a high school as well as the younger grades. So I started school when I was 5. I started the first grade, because they did not have kindergarten. I learned to read when I was very young and by the age of 5, I could out read all of them. I went to a Pentecostal school. The building was in the assembly hall. My mother did a lot of missionary work. At that time, there were clothes shipped to Africa. That is the only country I remember sending clothes to. There may have been China or Japan. I remember packing barrels so they could be shipped to Africa, so people could have clothes. Clothes were so important to the Pentecostal people. Don't be naked. Put some clothes on. I was at the church for school, prayer meetings, missionary work and church.

Participants' stories of re-authoring religious beliefs. Although the stories of these three women are similar, they are at different places in their lives and journeys of reconciliation. Pam stated that she has reconciled but still struggles with guilt and shame. Shae states that she is in the middle of the process of reconciliation and struggles daily. Ann is an older woman, who has taken years to process everything. She stated that she began her reconciliation when she was 50 years old.

Although the stories of re-authoring religious beliefs were unique, I found common themes in the stories. Pam, Shae and Ann stated that they stopped attending church for several years, because of the shame, guilt and fear they felt when they attended church. They also discussed how it was difficult to question Biblical teachings. Lastly they all discussed how attending LGBTQIA affirming churches helped with re-evaluating their original religious beliefs. All three of them emphasized the importance of church in their families' lives. They described going to church 3 or 4 times a week. When the women backed away from church, they felt lost. The above themes overlap in the three stories. Because re-authoring religious beliefs was complex for each of the participants, I wanted to use their words to describe the process. The following visual illustration shows the common themes of re-authoring past religious beliefs for the participants. I chose this visual representation, because the arrow represents the fact that these themes were present in the three participants' stories and it is symbolic for overlapping themes.

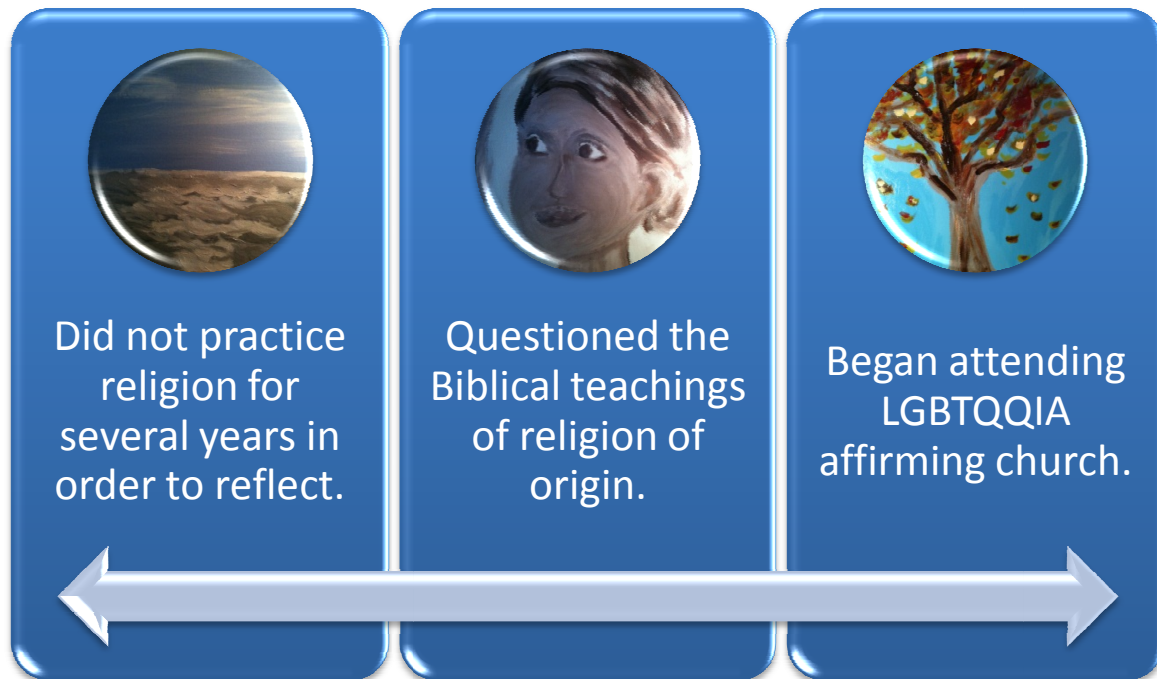


Figure 4.2 Visual Illustration of the Overlapping Themes of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.

Pam. In the beginning of Pam's journey, she realized she was attracted to women. After this discovery, she struggled with her religious beliefs. Because of the guilt, shame and fear she felt about having these feelings, she stopped going to church.

I started college and I moved out of my dad's house, but I tried to follow and stay in church, but it was just too hard to follow without the love and grace. And I wanted to live my life the way Christ wanted me to live my life. I eventually lost interest. I didn't go to church at all. I am going now but...I go to a gay affirming church...Praise and Worship Center. For a couple of years I just stayed away from church and religious dogma because I just couldn't take it anymore. Made you fill condemned and bad about yourself.

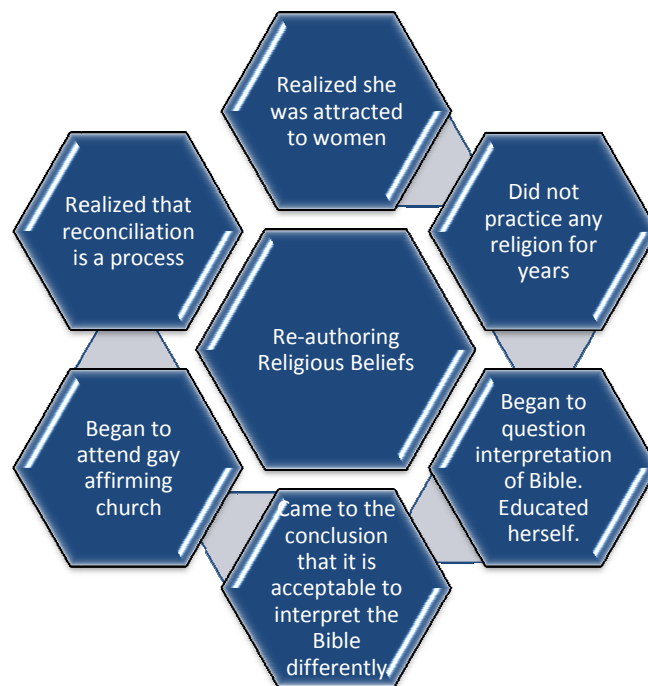
After backing away from religion, Pam began to question the belief system of her religion of origin. Pam struggled with questioning the Bible, but finally came to the conclusion that she could question her original beliefs and reconstruct her belief system.

I reconciled inside myself. I did a study on being gay and Christian and had a better understanding of the Bible scriptures that were used against gay people and what they actually meant. They didn't mean the same thing as what I was taught growing up. I had a new understanding and I also think that Jesus said 'Who so ever calleth.' And that means anyone. He didn't make an exception for this person or that person when he said, "Who so ever."

Pam began to attend a gay affirming church and began to realize that reconciliation was a process. Pam did this by studying the Bible and re-authoring by realizing that she could look at the Bible and interpret it with an open mind.

I look at the Bible differently and what I think Jesus was trying to say and teach differently. I think there are certain scriptures in the Bible that are law and others are grace. Even the scriptures that are being taught as law are being taught a certain way because of someone's own view of the Bible. But I don't think there was deep study when you really get into the heart of the Bible and really study it there were things that were said a certain way. They were not being taught the way...you know the original translations and ways of speaking. It gets a little intense and in-depth right there. I do look at the Bible differently and what and since we are talking about the gay aspect, I do see and view things differently than I did growing up.

Although the three areas of re-authoring were complex and intertwined for Pam, the following illustration helps the reader understand Pam's process of re-authoring religious beliefs. I chose this visual because it represents the circularity of re-authoring religious beliefs.



4.3 Visual Illustration of Pam's Process of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.

Shae. Shae stated that she slowly realized that she was attracted to women. This realization was anxiety producing for Shae.

Well, I didn't exactly know what it was, but I remember being attracted to a singer at a Pentecostal church. I was in the second grade. I had a crush on my third-grade teacher. Throughout the school years, I seemed to have had crushes on my female teachers. When I actually realized what it was, I began to pray at the altar, "Please, God, don't let me be gay. Please take this away from me. I was probably in my teens. I knew what the definition of being gay was as a teenager. I realized that is what I was feeling and I was afraid. I didn't want to be that way. I wanted to be normal.

Shae stated that she felt so much shame and guilt that she joined the army to get away from the small town where she was raised.

I joined the army. I knew that I was gay. I wanted to get out of the small town I was in. I was 19 then. I actually came out to my family at 21.

Shae stated that she backed away from her religion so she could cope with having sexual feelings for other woman. She discussed her backing away from religion and finding a gay-affirming church to attend.

I am still working on reconciliation of sexual orientation and religion. I have a hard time, because my whole life has been...it has just been pounded into my head, heart and soul that it is just wrong. You are sinner and are of the devil. You can be delivered. My mom still says that to me today. But I know that I prayed and I asked God to deliver me from this sin and that I didn't choose to be this way, but this is what I am. That prayer didn't get answered, but somehow he brought me here to church and I feel accepted. Every day is a struggle, but I get through it. I think that a lot of gay people feel that they have to choose one or the other. I can either be happy and not live for God or I can live this life where I am not who I am. So many years I have lived that separated life from God. I have

been fortunate and blessed enough to come here to this church where I am okay and it doesn't mean that I am a sinner. I am not living in sin because I am gay.

Unlike Pam, Shae describes her struggle as ongoing and very painful. After the interview was over, Shae inquired about programs that could change her orientation. She describes the process of her backing away:

Well I was pretty young. I was like 21 and I was in the Army. I had met this girl I was dating and she was agnostic or atheist. I am not sure which, but I just kind of looked at other people's viewpoints. I was being open- minded about the different ways that people believed. I just started questioning everything. I got away from it. I did my own thing away from God. Anything God, I wanted to be away from. For a while I felt a lot of guilt. Over time, I would compare myself to other people. I would say "I am not as bad as they are." It was mostly guilt.

She continued her story by stating that she wants to take a couple of classes offered at her church to help her interpret the Bible in a way that alleviates some of her guilt.

Some of the classes I have not been able to take yet. My partner and I have had some issues in our lives lately, so we have been busy. Some of the classes we have here at this church is reconciliation and the homosexual class. I want to go to both of those. I think that will help me. Knowledge is power and learning about it. To be honest with you I feel reconciled except when I think about people I knew growing up in church. It bothers me that they are so judgmental.

Shae's journey was also complex and intertwined. I chose to illustrate her process of re-authoring religious beliefs in the same way I illustrated Pam's. Although Pam and Shae were

similar, they were also unique. The following illustration helps the reader understand Shae's journey.



4.4 Visual Illustration of Shae's Process of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.

Ann. Ann described her realization that she was attracted to women as a gradual process. She stated that she denied her identification as a lesbian for years. For several years, she remained in a nonsexual relationship with a woman she loved. She continued to preach, sing and attend church.

Yeah. I was about 18. I met men and thought I was going to get married and none of it worked out. I remember there was this one young man I thought was the one. He was an evangelist. He had expressed his interest. I would go in early for church and would go down to the basement and pray before service. One day, I walked in early and there stood

Donny. And this is what I heard my pastor say, “If you don’t believe in women preachers, you better not be thinking about marrying one.” I ducked down and went out the side door. That relationship, what little there was of it, dissolved right there. That didn’t break my heart, but when the girl I was in love with, when she wanted to go separate ways, that broke my heart. I fell in love with her. As far as a relationship...what happened was...we became ministry partners. In that period of time, it did not matter how much love we had for each other, there could be no physical relationship, period. After the initial falling in love and experimenting, there was no physical relationship. I was content just to be a nun. We travelled around evangelizing. I had a female ministry partner at 16, but I was not attracted to this lady. I loved her but was not attracted to her. It really scared me when I fell in love with a woman. Many of my mentors were women. They were mostly missionaries.

When Ann was 30 years old, she began a physical relationship with a woman. After the relationship with this woman, Ann began to question her religious beliefs and her sexual orientation. Ann described the beginning of her relationship with a woman at thirty:

I may have been in my thirties. It was not like I pursued any relationship. I thought that was all twisted and I told myself not to even think about that. Just see if you can fall in love with a man.

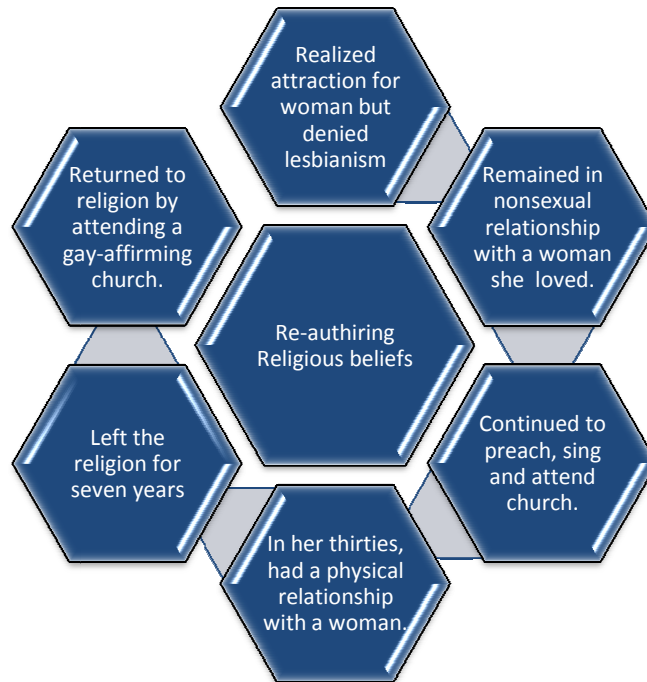
She continued her story by stating that she had to back away from the religion in order to deal with her sexual orientation. The strict apostolic church had a limited belief system that they were the church with “the truth.” Ann stated that she had to back away, so she could evaluate her beliefs.

That goes back to the seven years I didn't go to church. Common sense tells you if the Lord revealed the absurdity of it. If the church made you feel worse when you left than when you got there, common sense tells you to go somewhere else. I felt like I couldn't go anywhere else because that church had the truth. In that crazy psyche, that church was the only church.

Ann described her return to religion much like the other participants described their experiences. She stated that this return was very emotional for her.

The first year I went to Spirit Quest, when you see my face, I am crying. When you experience the presence of the Lord, you are never the same after that. That is what you expect when you go to church and when it does not happen it is hard. It was strange because it was a bunch of gay people praising the Lord. The presence of the Lord was there. For the most part I felt reconciled.

Ann's re-authoring religious beliefs was a long process. She realized she was attracted to women when she was 18 years old, but did not begin reconciliation of religious beliefs and her sexual orientation until she was 50 years old. Although she realized at a young age that she was attracted to women, she always hoped she could marry a man. Ann's re-authoring of religious beliefs was also complex. The following visual illustration maps this part of her journey.



4.5 Visual Illustration of Ann's Process of Re-authoring Religious Beliefs.

Re-authoring Definitions of Family

Participants' stories of past familial experiences. Because Oneness Pentecostal churches have a belief system where the man is the head of the household, women who discover they are lesbians have to redefine relationships and family. I chose quotes from each participant to illustrate what they were taught about family.

Pam. Pam described the teachings of her church about the roles of women and men as follows:

It seemed like when you can't wear any pants, you can't wear shorts and you have to follow all these rules, and submission to a man. Because the teaching was that the man was the head of the household and you are supposed to be in submission to a man. Especially in a marriage situation, the man is the head of the household. You abide by

what he wants even though you have your opinion that you express to him, you still have to follow. In the church, the women couldn't minister. A woman could teach a class or something but, as far as getting in the pulpit and preaching or doing anything like that. They were not allowed. Yeah, there was a bit of oppression toward woman.

Shae .Shae had a definite answer about what she was taught about relationships and family.

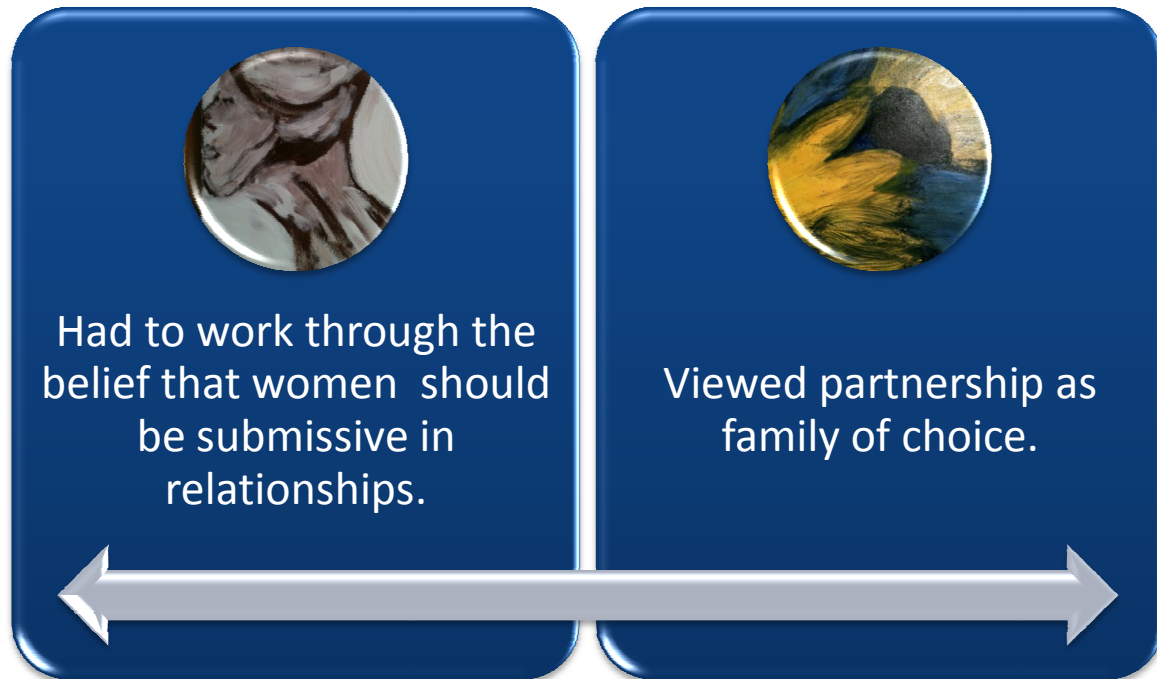
Absolutely. They preach that the man is the head of household and the women should not have a voice. Basically a woman is the slave around the house, just a servant to the man.

Ann. Although Ann described her parents as having an unusual relationship according to the belief system of the church, she still acknowledged the oppression of women in the church and the family.

Women were submissive to men, but my parents had an unusual relationship. My parents had an unusual relationship, I think. Mother did what she wanted to do and Daddy did what he wanted to do. My dad was so kind and loving. He was not a very demanding person. He made the living for the household.

Participants' stories of re-authoring definitions of family. A common theme that I discovered in the participants' stories about families and relationships was the fact that all three women saw themselves as somewhat submissive. Because this was taught in their families of origin as well as in the church, the women found it difficult to be assertive. Although the women saw themselves as equal in a relationship, the struggle with being submissive was present in all

three stories. I found that the participants were attempting to redefine roles in their families of choice and the following illustration shows the relationship between the two major themes in this area.



4.6 Visual Illustration of the Overlapping Themes of Redefining Family.

Because women who are members of Oneness Pentecostal churches have a regimented way of defining family and relationships, where the women are oppressed, women have to redefine and reconstruct what family means to them. Each of the women is unique in the way they redefined family. I have used visual illustrations to explain the processes the women went through in order to redefine what family meant to them.

Pam. Although Pam stated that she thinks relationships between women are equal, she had to redefine her submissive role.

That was a little bit of a transition because for a while, when you are young, that is the way you think because that is what you have been taught.

The second step in Pam's process of re-authoring family was the realization that she was attracted to women and getting romantically involved with a woman.

I had a best girlfriend and....we were best friends but it just seemed like there were more feelings there than just friends. One day she told me that she wanted to kiss me.

Pam stated that after this girlfriend informed her that she wanted to kiss her, Pam began to think about her attraction for women.

We didn't kiss at that moment even though she said she wanted to kiss me. I already knew that I found her attractive. She was already my best friend. I knew I was feeling that without saying it. So we went about our business or whatever. It kept being in my mind that I wanted to kiss her too. You know. She just started the ball rolling in my head by telling me that. It was already there, but by telling me that. Everything that I had suppressed was just right there.

Pam began to think of family differently. She began to re-author what her church had taught her about relationships. When discussing the difference in how she viewed her definition of family now as opposed to what she was taught, she stated that she viewed relationships between two women as equal. She stated that her church taught her that men were the heads of households.

Because the teaching was that the man was the head of the household and you are supposed to be in submission to a man. Especially in a marriage situation, the man is the

head of the household. You abide by what he wants even though you have your opinion that you express to him, you still have to follow. In the church, the women couldn't minister. A woman could teach a class or something but, as far as getting in the pulpit and preaching or doing anything like that. They were not allowed. Yeah, there was a bit of oppression toward woman.

Pam explains that she actually finds some gay relationships as stronger than that of heterosexuals. She also used her pastors as an example. Pam iterated that her involvement with a gay affirming church helped with her re-authoring her definition of family. The members of her church have become part of Pam's family of choice.

For example, my pastors. They have been together almost 20 years. As far as seeing a relationship out there and as far as seeing heterosexual and homosexual, it is probably the strongest relationship I have ever seen. They are committed to each other, respect each other and love each other. One might be strong in one area and the other weak. I just feel like having Christ as the center is like the glue. It helps your mind and eyes look at things a little differently.

Pam's attraction for women began her journey of redefining relationships. Because Pam was taught the man was the head of the household, Pam had to reconstruct her beliefs about relationships. I used the following visual representation of Pam's process, because it illustrates the circularity of the interrelated steps in her journey:



4.7 Visual Illustration of Pam's Process of Re-authoring the Definition of Family.

Shae. Shae stated that she just replaced the man with a woman in her relationship. Shae continued to feel submissive in a relationship.

I don't know that I necessarily reconstructed my definition of a relationship. I replaced the man's role with another woman. I do feel a lot more independent than the religion has taught me, but I guess I want to be less dominant than the woman I am with.

Although Shae has not redefined her role in a relationship, she has processed and reconstructed enough to consider her partner and her stepson as her family.

I just think that over time the fact that our lifestyle has just grown and has become more accepted. It is really not that difficult to view us as a normal family, especially living here in Austin. It is just accepted. It just is. You have a huge group of people in the same boat, in the same situation.

Shae stated that she is still in the process of reconciliation and redefining her role in the family. She added that being taught to be submissive has made it difficult to take a leadership role outside of the family. She stated that she is growing in this area.

.What is really hard for me to get away from is being in a leadership position. I have always kind of fallen into that place and it has made me get out of my comfort zone. The teaching I have had I just have to get over it. I just have to step up and be a leader and not be as submissive. I need to be more dominant in certain situations. It has taken a long time for me to get to the place I am now. I have just looked back on previous relationships and I had no voice, which is not healthy at all. I have gotten a lot better. I have a voice now.

Shae stated that she was still in the process of reconciliation and redefining roles within the family. I chose an illustration that depicts Shae's process of reconstructing the definition of family. This illustration shows the circularity of her complex journey.



4.8 Visual Illustration of Shae's Process of Re-authoring the Definition of Family.

Ann. Although Ann indicated that she was comfortable being submissive in a relationship, she felt the relationship between women was equal. She also stated that she did not see the importance of marriage. In the following quote, Ann describes her journey towards marriage.

My dad was so kind and loving. He was not a very demanding person. He made the living for the household. That is the reason we ended up in California. He could make a whole lot more money in California. I think I have fought the idea of marriage even to another woman. I thought it was crazy because it was just a piece of paper. The two shall be one.

Really? But I have found that to be the case with my partner. When people would ask where was my other half, I would tell them I am all here. I not find myself in situations that if I didn't have my partner, I would be adrift. I believe she feels the same about me. We complete each other. I don't think I put a male/female relationship into our relationship. I think it is a beautiful thing. I am glad I am not a gay man because they have the testosterone. You have two men in a relationship. Women, for me, are more soft, kind and gentle. There is understanding. My partner and I differ in some things. We converse about things. We tell each other how we feel. Our Canadian wedding we celebrated our first year last week.

Ann stated that her definition of family stems from the fact that her parents were independent. She stated that her father was kind and not very demanding. Ann's redefining was in relation to church. She stated that women were submissive to men in the church. The following illustration depicts the circularity of Ann's process:



4.9 Visual illustration of Ann's Process of Re-authoring the Definition of Family.

Re-authoring Self

Participants' stories of re-authoring self.

For all three women, finding their personal identities was an important part of the reconciliation process. I found three common themes in the stories of the participants concerning the development of self- identity. I chose the following illustration to depict this process. All three women found that they had to heal from the oppression of the Oneness Pentecostal Church. They also stated that they had to find their identities without the church, because of the strict rules of the church. Finally, they stated that they needed to accept their sexual orientation to evolve as a woman and lesbian. I chose the following illustration because of its upward movement that shows this process as an evolution.



4.10 Visual Representation of Overlapping Themes of Re-authoring Self- identity.

Because Oneness Pentecostal churches have a dress code for women, identity development outside the church is very complicated. The three participants in this study were taught that they should wear dresses, never cut their hair and never wear make-up. Each of them described the transition of outside appearances. Because the women in the Oneness Pentecostal churches were identifiable as Pentecostal by the way they dressed, the participants described changing their appearances as very important in the process of reconciliation re-authoring self. In this section, I include the stories of how the three participants navigated self-identity. Because the process of re-authoring self-identity was an integral part of reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation, I chose to discuss, in the participants' own words, their journeys of identity development.

Pam. The third area of re-authoring for Pam was her own identity. She discussed the fact that she felt oppressed by her religion she practiced as a child. She described the way she dressed as a child:

Yeah like dresses and skirts that go down at least to your knee. Nothing that showed cleavage. Very modest. Not showing too much skin.

She described the oppression of women as being part of her struggle because a woman has to be what men in the church want her to be.

That was a little bit of a transition because for a while, when you are young, that is the way you think because that is what you have been taught. Now I am independent. I work and do my own thing and dependent on a man. I mean I am not against people where that is the way they feel and the way they look at things. I don't know. I guess slowly my transformation. I guess I looked at it this way. A woman can do anything a man can do. A woman can be independent. She doesn't have to depend on a man. If a woman wants to depend on a man, that's her choice. That way of thinking is just ummm.

Pam evolved out of the church by backing away and discovering what she believed about religion, family and self. The gay-affirming church assisted her in self-discovery as well as religion and family.

Shae. Shae described her process of redefining her self-identity as complicated. She still struggles with issues of shame and guilt daily.

I felt really guilty for everything. I felt like I was sinning. I felt like an awful person. I have dealt a lot with guilt over the transition time. I felt guilty wearing pants and cutting my hair. I thought I looked better with make-up on.

She described the way she dealt with trying to figure out who she really was. The church belief system defined who she was until she stepped away from it.

What I did was run away. I joined the army. I took off and decided I needed to find myself. I already knew who I was. But I needed to do it without the rumors and people judging me.

Ann. Ann described her past religious experiences as oppressive as well as liberating. The expressive worship of the Oneness Pentecostal church she experienced was liberating, but the limits on her clothing and appearance were oppressive. Ann described her past religious experience as mostly positive.

Yes and at the same time, I felt liberated. Some of my fondest memories are waking up. I was laid out on the floor, sound asleep, underneath a pew and waking up and seeing the feet of the dancers, worshipping the Lord. It was a beautiful thing.

Ann discussed her identity as a lesbian. She discussed the fact that she did not think she was innately lesbian:

That is a funny part. The dress code was an important part. I have forgotten where I was. We talked about that I don't think I am innately attracted to women. Women were just who I fell in love with. I tried. I thought I will get married like many others. I tried to be attracted to men. It wasn't like I didn't like men. I had a great father. He was the kindest,

loving, gentle man. Like animals. I remember that animals just loved him. I envied his aura. I didn't have bad feelings towards men.

Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of my narrative inquiry into the lived experiences of three lesbians who grew up in the Oneness Pentecostal religion. I used the technique that I discussed in chapter three to re-story the individual stories. As stated and illustrated in the previous chapter, the findings in this narrative study were written in a pattern that told each story and overlapped the common themes while honoring the differences.

Because it was important that I stayed transparent in the re-telling of the individual stories, I began the process with a description of my experiences with Oneness Pentecostal churches. I then honored the individuality by asking each participant to define reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation. As the writing of the narrative continued, the three unifying aspects of re-authoring were identified. I then identified the common themes as well as the individual themes in each story. The common themes were joined in a pattern that crossed the other stories, followed by individual themes. The following illustration depicts the painting on which my methodology was based. It also depicts the participants' individual stories.



Figure 4.11 Visual Representation of the Journeys of the Three Participants

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the research findings are discussed. Findings are presented and discussed in relation to the existing literature. The purpose of the study, summary of procedures, discussion of findings, significance of findings, implications for counselors and other mental health professionals, implications for researchers, implications for counselor educators, and limitations of the study are included in this chapter. This chapter ends with a summary and a final note.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the journeys of reconciliation of religious beliefs with same-sex attractions among lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds. The lived experiences of three women and how they “re-authored” their stories to arrive at this reconciliation (White & Epston, 1990) were described. The overarching research question was: How do lesbians with Pentecostal backgrounds describe their journeys through the coming out process and the process of reconciling their religious beliefs and sexual orientation?

Summary of Procedures

Three participants were selected who met the following criteria: (a) the participant is a lesbian female who (b) grew up in a Oneness Pentecostal church and (c) has reconciled being a lesbian with her religious beliefs, and who is (d) willing to discuss her outing process. The participants were each interviewed for an hour and then were observed during their worship practices. After I transcribed the interviews, I sent each participant a copy of the transcript for her review. I then conducted a follow-up conversation with each participant to clarify any

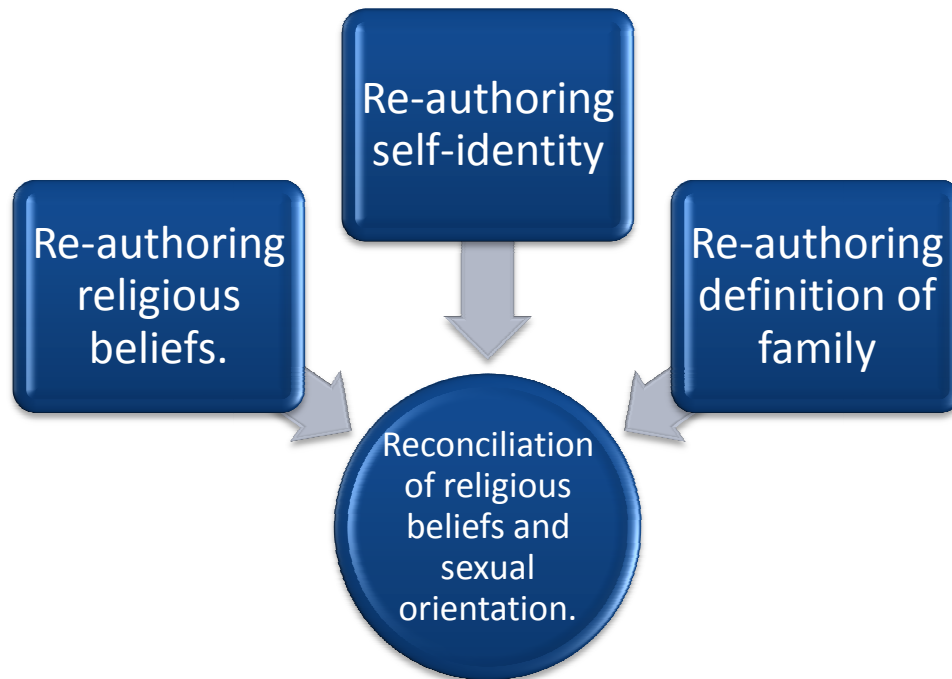
questions or gather any comments the participant wished to offer regarding the transcript. Each participant was asked at what age she realized she was a lesbian, at what age she told family and friends, the emphasis of religion within her family system, what the religion of origin thought about the LGBTQIA community, her religious experiences growing up and coming out as a lesbian, and how she reconciled her religious beliefs and her sexual orientation. The interview questions were submitted to participants prior to the scheduled interviews. The interviews began with an open-ended inquiry: “Tell me about the religion your family practiced as a child.” The participant was able to talk without interruption to give the researcher background information. A further question was asked: “How did you reconcile your religious beliefs with your sexual orientation and what does reconciliation mean to you?”

The preliminary step to data analysis was transcribing each interview verbatim. The transcription set the stage for the six-step analysis process. As the analysis began, visual representations were created to illustrate the cyclical process of reconciling religious beliefs with sexual orientation. The three participants’ stories suggested that reconciliation journeys are unique and complicated. Participants’ motivation to embark on a journey of reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation stemmed from their same-sex attractions. Further motivators to explore and reconstruct religious beliefs were feelings of shame and guilt. The participants arrived at a place where they could no longer deny their feelings. As I read the participants’ stories, I analyzed the stories by utilizing the narrative therapy concept of “re-authoring.”

Discussion of Findings

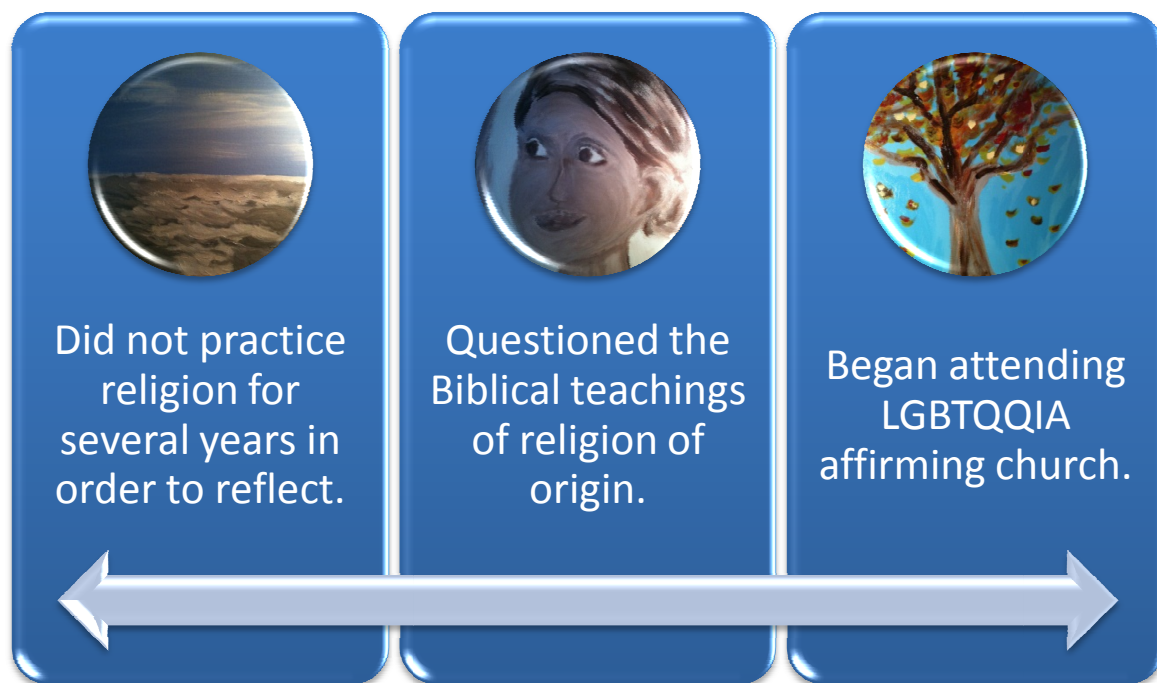
In my analysis, three unifying aspects of re-authoring were identified. The three unifying aspects of re-authoring in the participants’ stories were re-authoring religious beliefs, re-

authoring definitions of family, and re-authoring self. Although there were similarities and common themes that ran through the three aspects for the participants, each participant's journey was individual and unique. I identified common themes within each unifying aspect of the stories. The visual representation of these three aspects depicts the complexity of the process of re-authoring. I included figure 4.1 to illustrate the unifying themes.



Re-authoring Religious Beliefs

The first unifying aspect of re-authoring was religious beliefs. I analyzed each aspect in each participant's story. Common themes in re-authoring religious beliefs (see figure 4.2 below) were that the participants had stopped practicing religion for several years so that they could reflect on their beliefs, that they questioned the Biblical teachings of their religion of origin, and that they began attending a LGBTQQIA church.



Previous researchers have found similar themes. Sullivan-Blum (2004) conducted a small qualitative research project interviewing four drag queens who identified themselves as gay, on the subjects of religion and sexual orientation. Three participants, after soul searching and re-evaluating the way some religions view homosexuality, embraced spirituality and sexuality. Minwalla, et al. (2005) found similar coping mechanisms, such as distancing oneself from Allah and the Qur'an or questioning the way one interpreted it, with gay Muslim men in North America. Schooner (2006) and Miller (2007) also found themes of questioning religious beliefs and making sense of same-sex attractions by distancing oneself from religion. In a qualitative research study conducted with gay Jewish males in Toronto, Schooner (2006) explored how 30 participants negotiated their gay and Jewish identities. Twenty-four of the participants found ways to integrate the gay and Jewish identities, which included questioning theological views of homosexuality. Miller (2007) interviewed 10 Black gay men about their reconciliation of sexual

orientation and religious beliefs, and found that these men eventually rejected their churches' views on homosexuality.

Kirkman (2001) interviewed 30 Pakeha women in New Zealand. Some of Kirkman's participants reported having conflicts concerning sexual orientation and religion. These conflicts were associated with the inequality of women in a patriarchal religious system. All the women in Kirkman's study stated that they had to re-evaluate and change the way they interpreted Christianity to be able to reconcile religion and sexual orientation. Although Kirkman did not focus on the process of re-authoring, the women discussed the process of re-evaluating the way they perceived the constructs of their religions. In fact, all researchers discussed herein, including those who studied gay males only and those who studied lesbians, found that reconciliation was accomplished by renegotiating the beliefs of religions of origin.

Anderton (2010) conducted a phenomenological study of women who grew up in a fundamentalist religion. Her participants were ten Mormon women who grew up in Utah or Idaho and were born into the LDS (Latter Day Saints) religion. She explored how women described their experiences with growing up in the Mormon Church while experiencing same-sex attractions and how these women reconciled their religious beliefs and sexual attraction for other females. Four of the 10 women identified themselves as lesbian, three as gay, and one as bisexual. All three women who participated in my study left their Oneness Pentecostal churches to be able to process their same-sex attractions. Anderton (2010) also inquired into her participants' present involvement with the LDS church and found that two of the women had remained members of the LDS church, four had formally resigned, and four were inactive. In my study, I found themes similar to those found by Anderton, such as self-acceptance, struggles with

religion, and others finding out about their sexual orientation, although the focus was different in the two studies.

Anderton (2010) found that eight of the 10 women knew at a young age that they were different from other girls. Seven of the ten women did not understand what this difference was. Two of the participants in my study expressed similar reactions. Shae stated, *“Well, I didn’t exactly know what it was, but I remember being attracted to a singer at a Pentecostal church. I was in the second grade. I had a crush on my third-grade teacher.”* Ann stated, *“We talked about that I don’t think I am innately attracted to women. Women were just who I fell in love with.”* For some time, Ann denied being attracted to women and struggled with her same-sex attractions, as did the women in Anderton’s study. Although a number of researchers (Garcia, 2008; Love, 2005; Miller, 2007; Minwalla, et al., 2005; Rodriguez and Ouelette, 2000; Schooner, 2006; Sullivan-Blum, 2004) have concluded that some people are able to transcend religious beliefs, the participants in my study stated that they still hold some of the same belief systems that their religions of origin taught them. Thus, transcending religious beliefs was not an element of their stories. Each participant did discuss backing away from her religion of origin to re-evaluate her belief system, but none of the three participants indicated that she had transcended religious beliefs. All three participants stated that they wanted to get away from religion altogether in order to reflect. For example, Pam stated, *“For a couple of years I just stayed away from church and religious dogma because I just couldn’t take it anymore. Made you feel condemned and bad about yourself.”*

Participants in my study found that attending a LGBTQQIA affirming churches was helpful in reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation. The three participants stated

that attending a church that affirms them is very important in their lives. Ann described her return to a LGBTQQIA affirming church:

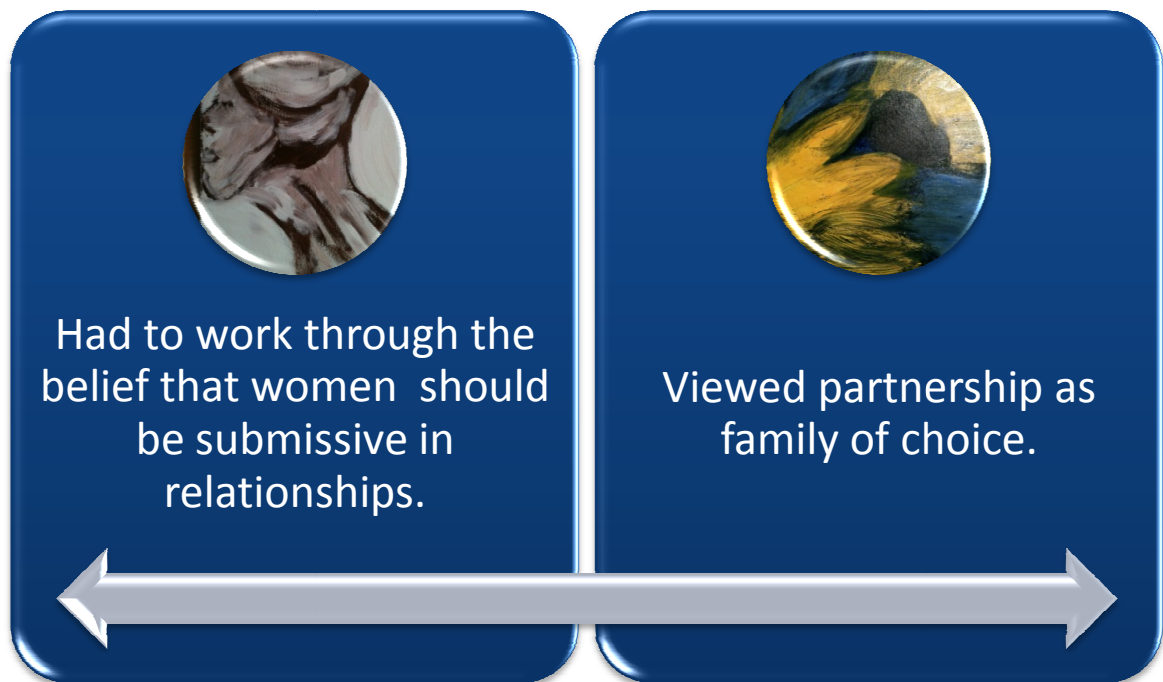
The first year I went to Spirit Quest, when you see my face, I am crying. When you experience the presence of the Lord, you are never the same after that. That is what you expect when you go to church and when it does not happen it is hard. It was strange because it was a bunch of gay people praising the Lord. The presence of the Lord was there. For the most part I felt reconciled.

Previous researchers have found that LGBTQQIA individuals may find comfort in LGBTQQIA affirming churches or organizations and that these affiliations assist them to reconcile religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Schooner (2006) discovered that 24 of 30 participants found participating in gay Jewish organizations to be helpful in integrating their gay and Jewish identities. Some participants in Garcia's (2008) study reported that finding a church that accepted LGBTQQIA people was a means to reconcile their religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) interviewed 22 gay males and 18 lesbians who were members of the Metropolitan Community Church in New York (a gay positive church) to explore the participants' integration of religious beliefs and sexual orientation. The researchers found that the participants who had more involvement in the Metropolitan Community Church reported being totally integrated.

Re-authoring the Definition of Family

The second unifying aspect of re-authoring was redefining family. Through the analysis of the participants' stories, I identified these common themes that occurred in re-authoring their definitions of family (see figure 4.6 below): the participants had to work through the belief that women were to be submissive in a relationship and they came to view their partnerships with

other women as their families. Anderton (2010) reported that the women in her study had to re-evaluate their beliefs about family, because family was a complex part of their journeys.



Re-authoring Self

The third unifying aspect of re-authoring was redefining self. Through the analysis of the participants' stories, I identified three common themes within the redefining of self (figure 4.10 displayed below): healing from the past oppression of women within their families and churches, finding an identity without the church, and accepting their sexual orientation. Anderton (2010) also found that self- acceptance was a very significant aspect of her participants' journeys.



Although depicting the three unifying aspects of re-authoring in a visual illustration helped portray the complexity of reconciling religious beliefs with sexual orientation, it did not portray the personal journeys and the meanings each participant gave her personal journey. I chose to retell the stories in a format that displayed the common themes as well as the individualized themes. The visual representation of the three unifying aspects of re-authoring helped me organize the retelling of the stories under each of these aspects. I portrayed the common themes followed by the individual themes. I created visuals for each unifying aspect for each of the participants and created a pattern while retelling the individual stories. The pattern depicted common themes followed by individual experiences or definitions. This pattern was repeated throughout the retelling of the stories.

Other Related Themes

Previous literature indicated that some LGBTQQIA individuals are not able to reconcile their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation (Boellstorff, 2005; Garcia, 2008; Sullivan & Blum, 2004). Rather, these individuals used other coping mechanisms. Some chose to continue participating in their religion of origin while not disclosing their sexual orientation, and others decided to try to change their sexual orientation.

The three participants in my study continued to practice their religions of origin and did not disclose their sexual orientation at the beginning of their journeys. All three participants stated that they practiced their religion of origin and kept their sexual orientation a secret until the guilt and shame became overwhelming. They stated that they had to reject religion altogether for several years to be able to realize their own belief systems. During their time of backing away from religion, they discovered that they had beliefs that were different than those of their religion of origin.

Although some literature (e.g., Boellstorff, 2005) indicates that some people want to change their sexual orientation, two of the three participants in my study did not mention changing their sexual orientation. One participant asked about literature about changing one's orientation, because she wanted to do research in this area. Shae prayed to be delivered from her sexual orientation.

But I know that I prayed and I asked God to deliver me from this sin and that I didn't choose to be this way, but this is what I am. That prayer didn't get answered, but somehow he brought me here to church and I feel accepted. Every day is a struggle, but I get through it. I think that a lot of gay people feel that they have to choose one or the

other. I can either be happy and not live for God or I can live this life where I am not who I am. So many years I have lived that separated life from God. I have been fortunate and blessed enough to come here to this church where I am okay and it doesn't mean that I am a sinner. I am not living in sin because I am gay

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature revealed a paucity of research conducted with lesbian participants on reconciling religious beliefs. Most studies have included male participants exclusively (Boellstorff, 2005; Doyal et al., 2008; Garcia, et al., 2008; Harris, Cook, Kashubeck-West, 2008; Henrickson, 2009; Kirkman, 2001; Love, et al., 2005; Miller, 2007; Minwalla, et al., 2005; Schnoor, 2006; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Smith & Horne, 2007; Sullivan-Blum, 2004). In the last ten years, only one study (Anderton, 2010) has been conducted with lesbian participants exclusively on the topic of reconciling religion and sexual orientation. One other study (Kirkman, 2001) conducted solely with lesbians was reported almost a decade earlier. The present study contributes to filling this gap in the research literature.

Little research has been conducted on the utilization of re-authoring to reconcile religious beliefs and sexual orientation. Although other studies have suggested that re-authoring was a process that facilitated reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation, the process of re-authoring has not been discussed in detail. Anderton (2010) asserted that reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation was missing from the literature and that detailed stories were needed to fill the gap in the literature. The findings of the present study suggest that re-authoring may be an avenue to reconciliation that is worthy of further exploration.

As was noted earlier, although previous researchers have discussed the obstacles involved in coming out and overcoming these obstacles in the context of religion, they have not specifically addressed the process of re-authoring. This process involves questioning of one's constructs about sexual orientation inculcated by religion and society and restructuring those constructs to include different ways of expressing one's sexual identity.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings from this study offer a basis for future research for counselors and other mental health professionals, researchers, and counselor educators. Although previous researchers have explored reconciliation of religious beliefs and sexual orientation, no studies have specifically researched the process of re-authoring. This study examined the patterns of re-authoring to reconcile religious beliefs and sexual orientation.

Implications for Counselors and Other Mental Health Professionals

Some counselors and other mental health professionals use narratives in their practices (White 2007). According to White (2007), re-authoring is an effective intervention used in narrative therapy. Because this study described the innate ability of the participants to re-author their own stories, counselors who use the process of re-authoring may be able to apply the stories of participants and how they re-authored their reconciliation journeys to the use of narratives in their work. Because the participants in my study had long, complex stories of reconciling religious beliefs and sexual orientation, counselors who encounter clients with issues with reconciliation may be able to use the stories as a way of helping their clients. They could share the stories of reconciliation with their clients to help normalize their feelings. The participants in my study indicated that they felt alone in their journeys. For instance, Shae stated, "*I thought I*

was the only one in the world that left the Pentecostal religion until I met you.”Shae stated that she felt comforted by the knowledge that someone else had gone through a similar journey.

In this study, the context of the participants’ stories was evaluated. My findings may raise the awareness of counselors of the need to explore the context in which a client may come out of the closet. Participants’ stories underscored the importance of exploring the ramifications of a client’s decisions to come out to family, friends, co-workers and ministers. For instance, Pam, whose father was a minister, lost her mother and sister in a car accident. Therefore, coming out to her father was going to be an emotional hurdle, because she was afraid of losing him. She described her religious context:

I grew up in a very strict church. It was more like a Pentecostal church as well because it was very legalistic. It was very regimented. No going to the movies. Very Bible oriented and what the Church thought the Bible said. It was more like law and legalism with a little bit of love and grace. But not really open grace. Like you are saved by grace, but I did not see that expressed as much as the legalism. The rules and regulation and the legalism.

Pam’s strict religious background coupled with the fact that she had lost her mother and sister in a car accident increased Pam’s fear of losing her father. Pam’s story illustrates the importance of exploring context when working with clients during the coming out process.

Implications for Researchers

Because only limited research has been conducted with the LGBTQQIA community using the concept of re-authoring, further study in this area is needed. Although a number of studies conducted concerning reconciling religious beliefs and sexual orientation indicated that re-authoring was a process of reconciliation, the stories were not analyzed using re-authoring as

the focus. Future researchers might explore the use of re-authoring as a therapeutic tool with the LGBTQQIA community. Another area for further research might be to examine how LGBTQQIA identity models work within the context of religion. The issue of identity development within the context of religion was evident in my study; all three of my participants stated they needed to step away from religion to be able to figure out who they were.

Implications for Counselor Educators

Because counselor educators are responsible for educating counseling students about different theories, approaches, and interventions, findings from this study might increase counselor educators' understanding the uses of narratives in different therapeutic approaches. The findings may also add to counselor educators' understanding of the complexity of counseling LGBTQQIA clients who are coming out in the context of religion, and of the importance of context in examining clients' issues.

Limitations

Possible limitations to this study include the relationship forged between the main researcher and the participants, the main researcher's interpretations of the interviews, the participants' interpretations of their own experiences, and the interpretation of the peer reviewer.

A limitation of narrative research is the small number of participants. Narratives often have a single participant. I chose to have three to increase credibility of the findings.

Another possible limitation is researcher bias. I grew up in the United Pentecostal Church and have an insider's view of the context of this religious system. Although this insider's view helped me understand the context and may have facilitated the participants' willingness to share, my history with the United Pentecostal Church and coming out as a sexual minority may have created a bias in the interpretation of the data and the direction of the interviews. To reduce bias,

I attempted to remain transparent and to ensure that throughout the discussion of the personal stories, the participant was in control of the interpretation of life events. I employed additional strategies to minimize any effects of my bias by debriefing with a peer and a personal therapist.

Chapter Summary

This study explored the lives of three lesbians who grew up in a profoundly strict, fundamentalist church and journeyed to a place of reconciliation of their religious beliefs with their sexual orientation. Findings supported the assertion of McCarn and Fassinger (1996) that lesbian identity development is complex and is embedded in the lesbian's social group. The process of identifying as a lesbian is two-fold for woman due to their statuses in family and community. Many women see their identities in relation to others. In their families, women may see their roles as mothers, sisters, and wives as very important. In their communities, such as church and social groups, their identification as a heterosexual, married woman may also be important. Many women who discover that they are lesbian worry about the effects their new identities will have on the people who are important to them. Issues that must be addressed include the relationships the women have with others and the expression of their sexuality. In addition to the social and familial statuses, religion further complicates identity development. In this study, the participants discussed the complexity of their journeys. They discussed religion, family, and identity development in great detail. These stories underscore the need for further research on lesbian identity development and religious identity development. The use of re-authoring might be considered in exploring the identity development of members of the LGBTQQIA community.

Final Note

In the beginning of my journey of reconciliation of religious beliefs with sexual orientation, I was very frightened by the process and had very little guidance. Like the participants in the present study, I felt I needed to re-author several aspects of my life. I found peace in writing poetry and later in painting.

When I began this study, it had been many years since the beginning of my journey and I felt distanced from the process. As I collected the stories and observed the participants, the feelings I had experienced during my own journey resurfaced. I enjoyed the stories of my participants and admired their strength. I gained strength from their stories, and I appreciate the gift this process has given me professionally and personally. My final thoughts are expressed as a painting I created about the empowerment of women and a poem I wrote while I was in the process of reconciling my religious beliefs and sexual orientation. The painting and closing poem will also honor the journeys of my participants.



The Pouring

*The paint was poured
and rolled towards us,
but we were handed
a paint brush so that we
could dip down into the colors
of our pasts.
We stroke over the canvas of our*

*future with curvature,
because we have learned that
there are no straight lines of discovery.
We know that those splashes of black and white
can form us, mold us, paint us
until we take the brush and embrace what did
the molding, sculpting, forming
and
make it our own,
make it our strength,
make it our art, the curves of our bodies,
the essence of what makes us women.
And when we look down to see what we have painted,
we realize everything we have taught ourselves about survival
was poured in our pasts
and rolls towards us each day
and even though we once felt we had no choice,
we now embrace the power of the gift of the brush and
paint and paint until we make beauty out of the shapes
of our bodies, the strengths of our minds and the spirits of our souls.*

Karen Parker

References

- Anderton, C. (2010, May). Reconciling Disparate Identities: A Qualitative Study with Women in the LDS Church Experiencing Same-sex Attractions. Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA: ProQuest LLC.
- American Counseling Association. (2005). *Association for lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling*. Retrieved March 8, 2011, from ALGBTIC: <http://www.algbtic.org/competencies.html>
- Bigner, J. J. (2006). *Interventions With Families of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People: From the Inside Out*. New York: Hayworth Press.
- Boellstorff, T. (2005). Between religion and desire: Being Muslim and gay in Indonesia. *American Anthropologist*, 107, 575-585.
- Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 219-235.
- Cearley, S. (1999). *The Center for Child and Family Studies*. Retrieved July 1, 2003, from www.sc.edd/cosw/center/femin.html.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F.M. (2000). *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Dahl, A. L., & Galliher, R. V. (2009). LGBQQ Young Adult Experiences of Religious and Sexual Identity Integration. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 92-112.
- Degges-White, S., Rice, B., & Myers, J. E. (2000). Revisiting Cass's theory of sexual identity formation: A study of lesbian development. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling*, 22, 318-333.
- Diamond, L. M., & Savin-Williams, R. C. (2000). Explaining diversity in the development of same-sex sexuality among young women. *Journal of Social Issues*, 56, 297-313.
- Doyal, L., Paparini, S., & Anderson, J. (2008). 'Elvis died and I was born': Black African men negotiating same-sex desire in London. *Sexualities*, 11, 171-192.
- Edwards, J. (2005). Telling Stories: Accounts of Identifying As Lesbians. *Gay and Lesbian issues and Psychology Review*, 3-10.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The Ethnographic I*. Oxford: Alta Mira Press.
- Enns, C. Z. (1997). *Feminist Theories and Feminist Psychotherapies*. Binghamton, NY: The Hayworth Press.
- Garcia, D. I., Gray-Stanley, J., & Ramirez-Valles, J. (2008). The priest doesn't know that I'm gay: The religious and spiritual journeys of Latino gay men. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 55, 411-436.
- Haldeman, D. (1996). Spirituality and religion in the lives of lesbians and gay men. In R. P. Cabaj & T. S. Stein (Eds.), *Textbook of homosexuality and mental health* (pp. 881-896). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.
- Hanway, D. G. (2006). *A Theology of Gay and Lesbian Inclusion*. New York: Hayworth Press.
- Harris, J. I., Cook, S. W., & Kashubeck-West, S. (2008). Religious attitudes, internalized homophobia, and identity in gay and lesbian adults. *Journal*

- of *Gay and Lesbian Mental Health*, 12, 205-225.
- Henrickson, M. (2007). Lavender faith: Religion, spirituality and identity in lesbian, gay and bisexual New Zealanders. *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work*, 26, 63-80.
- Herlihy, B. C. (2001). Feminist therapy. In G. Corey, *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (pp. 342-381). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Herlihy, B., & McCollum, V. (2003). Feminist theories. In D. G. Capuzzi, *Counseling and psychotherapy* (pp. 332-350). Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Merrill Prentice Hall.
- Kahn, M. J. (1991). Factors affecting the coming out process for lesbians. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 21, 47-70.
- Karslake, D. (Director). (2007). *For the Bible Tells Me So* [Motion Picture].
- Kirkman, A. M. (2001). Ties that bind: Recognizing the spiritual. *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 5, 211-227.
- Love, P.G., Bock, M., Jannarone, A., & Richardson, P. (2005). Identity interaction: Exploring the spiritual experiences of lesbian and gay college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46, 192-309.
- Maniaci, T., & Rzeznik, F. (Directors). (1993). *One nation under god* [Motion Picture].
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd. Ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miller, R. L., Jr. (2007). Legacy denied: African American gay men, AIDS, and the Black Church. *Social Work*, 52, 51-61.
- Minwalla, O., Rosser, B. R. S., Feldman, J., & Varga, C. (2005). Identity experience among progressive gay Muslims in North America: A qualitative study within Al-Fatiha. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, 7, 113-128.
- Murray, T. (Director). (2005). *Fish Can't Fly* [Motion Picture].
- McCarn, S. R., & Fassinger, R. E. (1996). Revisioning sexual minority identity formation: A new model of lesbian identity and its implications for counseling and research. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 24(3), 508-534.
- Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance. (2010, October 30). *The Southern Baptists about Homosexuality*. Retrieved March 7, 2011, from ReligiousTolerance.org: <http://www.religioustolerance.org>
- Plummer, K. (2000) *Documents of Life 2: An Invitation to a Critical Humanism*. London, Sage.
- Reid, K. (2008). Dancing Our Own Steps: A Queer Families' Project. *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 61-68.
- Rees-Turyn, A., Doyle, C., Holland, A., & Root, S. (2008). Sexism and Sexual Prejudice (Homophobia): The Impact of the Gender Belief System and Inversion Theory on Sexual Orientation Research and Attitudes toward Sexual Minorities. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling Vol. 2 (1)*, 2-25.
- Richardson, L. (2000) 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry' in Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. (Eds) *The Handbook of Qualitative Research 2nd Edn* Thousand Oaks, Sage, pp. 923 – 948.
- Rodriguez, E.M., & Ouellette, S. C. (2000). Gay and lesbian Christians: Homosexual and religious identity integration in the members and participants of a gay-positive church. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, 333-347.
- Rosario, M., Yali, A. M., Hunter, J., & Gwadz, M. (2006). Religion and Health Among Gay,

- Lesbian and Bisexual Youth: An Empirical Investigation and Theoretical Explanation . In A. M. Omoto, & H. S. Kurtzman, *Sexual Orientation and Mental Health: Examining Identity and Development in Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual People* (pp. 117-140). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ross, R. (1998). Retrieved March 23, 2012, from Rick Ross Institute: <http://www.rickross.com/warningsigns.html>
- Rutter, P. A., Estrada, D., Ferguson, L. K., & Diggs, G. A. (2008). Sexual Orientation and Counselor Competency: The Impact of Training on Enhancing Awareness, Knowledge and Skills. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 2 (2) , 109- 125.
- Schnoor, R. F. (2006). Being gay and Jewish: Negotiating intersecting identities. *Sociology of Religion*, 67(1), 43-60.
- Schuck, K. D., & Liddle, B. J. (2001). Religious conflicts experienced by lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 5, 63-82.
- Sherkat, D. E. (2002). Sexuality and religious commitment in the United States: An empirical examination. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41, 313-323.
- Simon, F. B., Stierlin, H., & Wynne, L. C *Vocabulary and Sourcebook*. New York: Family Process Press.
- Smith, B. S., & Horne, S. (2007). Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered. (1985). *The Language of Family Therapy: A Systemic (Journal of Homosexuality*, 52, 235-248.
- Sullivan-Blum, C. R. (2004). Balancing acts: Drag queens, gender and faith. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 46, 195-209.
- GLBT) experiences with Earth-spirited faith.
- Thody, A. (2006). *Writing and presenting research*. London: Sage Publications. 150
- Triandis, H. C. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- van Manen, M. (1997). From meaning to method. *Qualitative Health Research*, 7(3), 345-369.
- United Pentecostal Church Position Papers. (2006). United Pentecostal Church International . Retrieved December 31, 2010, from upci.org: <http://www.upci.org>
- Wacker, G. (2000, November). *The 20th Century*. Retrieved March 6, 2011, from National Humanities Center: <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org>
- White, M. (2007). *Maps of Narrative Practice*. New York: WW Norton Company.
- White, M., & Epston, D. (1990). *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.
- White, M. 1997: *Narratives of Therapists' Lives*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

***University Committee for the Protection
of Human Subjects in Research
University of New Orleans***

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Barbara Herlihy

Co-Investigator: Karen Parker

Date: July 10, 2012

Protocol Title: "The Use of re-authoring to Reconcile Fundamental Religious Beliefs with Sexual Orientation: A Narrative Study"

IRB#: 03Jul12

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7)). Please correct Dr. O'Hanlon's number to 504-280-3990 in your informed consent.

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

Appendix B
Consent Form

Appendix B

Consent to Participate

Research Project: *The Use of Re-authoring to Reconcile Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs and Sexual Orientation: A Narrative Study*

Please carefully read the following information prior to signing this form.

1. Karen Parker, MA (225-235-1693; kdparke1@uno.edu) a doctoral student in the Counselor Education program, under the direct supervision of Dr. Barbara Herlihy (504-280-6662 or bherlihy@uno.edu), a faculty member at the University of New Orleans, is requesting your participation in a research study entitled, *The Use of Re-authoring to Reconcile Fundamentalist Religious Beliefs and Sexual Orientation: A Narrative Study*. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of lesbians who grew up in an apostolic (Pentecostal) home and how they reconciled their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation. Your participation will involve being interviewed face-to-face for approximately 60 minutes at which time you will be asked open-ended questions. A second interview will be required for clarification purposes. You will be audio-taped during the interview process. Once the study is complete, the tapes will be discarded. Your real name will not be revealed in the study. Anything you say can be used in the study.
2. One risk associated with this study is that you will be asked to share personal information regarding your experiences. You do not have to answer any question that you do not wish to answer. Due to the length of the interview (approximately 60 minutes), you may become tired or fatigued. Should that happen, you may take a break or choose to discontinue this interview. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, a licensed counselor will be available to provide services at no cost to you if needed.
3. The benefits of participating in this study for you personally are minimal; however, you will be contributing to the scholarly research about the experiences of lesbians who grew up in an apostolic(Pentecostal) religion and reconciled their religious beliefs with their sexual orientation.
4. You do not have to participate and are free to stop the interview at any time without consequence. Additionally, you are free to withdraw from this study at any point.
5. The results of this study will be used for dissertation purposes, conference/presentation and publication/ journal articles; however, your name and identity will not be revealed. You will be assigned a pseudonym and it will be used in any reporting of your comments. The researcher will only know your name and any transcriptions of this interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

6. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you will not be compensated. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You may withdraw from participation in this research study at any time.
7. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon, Institutional Review Board, at the University of New Orleans at 504-280-3990 .

By signing the Consent to Participate form, you acknowledge having read this document and understand the conditions of participation in the research study.

Participant:

Researcher:

Karen Parker, MA

Appendix C

Participant Interview Protocol

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Age (yrs.): _____
Age you came out as LGBT _____
Religious Affiliation _____

Educational Level:

Did not complete high school: _____
High School Diploma or GED: _____
College Graduate: _____
Graduate Degree: _____

Marital status:

Never married or partnered/single _____
Partnered/Married _____
Divorced/separated _____
Widowed _____

Education:

Employed/currently working _____
Employed/currently on disability _____
Unemployed/unable to work _____

1. Tell me about the religion your family practiced as a child.
Prompting questions:
 - a. What age did you realize you were a LGBTQQIA person?
 - b. At what age did you tell family and friends?
 - c. What emphasis did your family put on religion?
 - d. What did your religion of origin think about LGBTQQIA people?
 - e. Describe your religious experiences growing up and coming out as LGBTQQIA.
A further question will ask,
2. How did you reconcile your religious beliefs and your sexual orientation?

Appendix D

Participant Thank You Email

Dear *Participant Name*,

I would like to thank you again for participating in my study. It was a pleasure speaking to you and as requested, I will email the findings of the study once concluded.

Sincerely,

Karen Parker, MA, LPC-S, LMFT
Doctoral Student
University of New Orleans
225-235-1693

Vita

Karen Parker was born in Cotton Valley, Louisiana. In 1989, she graduated from Louisiana Tech with her bachelor's degree in English Education, In 1992. She earned a master's degree in Marriage and Family Therapy at the University of Louisiana at Monroe. In 2008, Karen entered the graduate program at the University of New Orleans to earn her PhD in counselor education. Karen is a Licensed Professional Counselor as well as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.