

Survive Stigma: A Review of Current Study of LGBTQ Christian

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ABSTRACT

The equal right of LGBTQ community has been a widely concerned issue. Nevertheless, research is scarce concerning LGBTQ individuals who believe in Christianity. In contemporary world, stigma of same-sex romantic relationship still exists. Structural discrimination towards LGBTQ group is particularly severe in Christianity community. The discrimination against LGBTQ group produced social stigma and internalised stigma, which pose a challenge to their mental and emotional health. The intersectionality of power produce long-term structural violence which has affect generations of LGBTQ individual historically, although the LGBTQ movements have persistently fight against stigma. It is still difficult for LGBTQ individuals to achieve the reconciliation between their sexuality and spirituality. Especially for ethnic minorities who also face racial discrimination and LGBTQ people who live in the countries of the Global south where social institution and political constellation are affected by colonisation legacy. This research used the methodology of literature review and archive research and find that current research suggests homosexual individuals face more difficulties in crocodile their religious faith and sexuality. Based on this, more inclusive ways of providing social work support are required and more research in LGBTQ Christians is necessary. Besides, this research also find out that the life of LGBTQ Christian are largely affected by the systematic political and economic process of their upbringing. Current research in social work have developed rich expertise in providing fair counselling service for LGBTQ Christian. Moreover, left wing Christian have revitalised the virtue of community and promote followers to discover the virtue of queer. However, conservative congregations still hold biased opinions on LGBTQ individuals and the social environment of many states in the U.S. make LGBTQ Christians difficult to come out in their original community.

Keywords: *Sexuality, Spirituality, LGBTQ rights, Christianity*

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no way to deny the significance of structure violence towards LGBTQ people in the USA as Bjork-James [1] argued, particularly in regions that majority believe in Christianity. The level of homosexual acceptance varies in various levels within Judaism

According to Abes's research in 2011 [2], Orthodox is the division that shows most intolerant attitude towards gay individuals. In contrast, churches of Reform and Reconstruction hold a general acceptance attitude towards LGBTQ individuals. While the psychological and emotional effects of stigma are widely accepted, one gap in the literature encompasses longitude research of LGBTQ individuals' experiences and attitudes. Although there is research that pays attention to their psychological and emotional well-being, it is rare to see literature that

records individual life history and presents them as people with autonomy that navigate their way among institutions. By reviewing current study, this essay calls for further empirical research that focus on how people who identify themselves as Christian as well as gay live their day-to-day struggles and how they survive the inner psychological conflicts caused by the incompatible characters of their believes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW & RESEARCH GAP

A growing body of research has documented the struggles that people who both identify themselves as LGBTQ and Christian, particularly people spent their childhood and teenagerhood in a highly religious environment. This intersection of identity is often

combined with cultural identity, and therefore produce further restriction on homosexual Christians. They usually show a delay in the age of first having sex and suggest a separation between their faith and their bodies. Brenda L. Beagan & Brenda Hattie conducted research of 35 people who have survived their dual-identity, and they found that as LGBTQ sexuality is considered as sinful conduct, people who are raised up in Christian families show a strong tendency of hiding their sexuality or try to make up a separation between their sexuality and spirituality. The question that many LGBT individuals ask is ‘how can I find God again?’ Research concerning identity and identity configuration has noticed the difficulties that many LGBTQ individuals face and the difficulties for social workers to provide sufficient help.

Evangelical Protestant Christian are one of many divisions that discriminate homosexuality. Research found that people from this group is easier to develop internalized homophobia, as Shilo and Savaya argued [3]. Stigma deeply affects one’s identity development. In the end stigma makes LGBTQ individuals develop negative attitude towards their body and make it difficult for them to develop romantic relationships. Such internalization of social stigma is unhealthy for one’s psychological wellbeing as Meyer studied [4].

Besides, it is common to see the combination between racial discrimination and structural violence towards sexuality minorities. For LGBTQ+ people from African heritage, it is more difficult for them to be accepted by American Catholics. The increase in passionate emotion of nationalism and patriotisms make conservative Christian congregations to combine the discrimination towards homosexuality with racial discrimination. With their calls of evicting sinfulness, the social circumstances for ethnic minorities who are identified as LGBTQ+ people to come out in many states in the U.S. Where Christian people take the major percentage of the entire population, as Bjork-James’s research suggests [5].

Moreover, for black LGBTQ+ people who were raised as Christian, they must learn how to regain self-worth when encountering the power of intersectionality. Kolysh [6] found that usually in Black community at the U.S.A, people believe in Christianity would associate LGBTQ+ with whiteness, and foreign. In the other hand, Christian community that hold more inclusive perspective toward LGBTQ+ group are mostly constituted by white people, and they are more generified. Therefore, throughout the process of growing up, Black teenagers who identify themselves in different gender from their biological gender or black teenagers who generate romantic relationship with same sex people have more possibility of feeling their body and mind were divided and eventually must choose a community when they come out. It is difficult for them to leave their community behind as well as move forward to blending into a new community. It is a challenging task that require

strategies to survive in a Christian community and to lead a coherent life eventually.

However, it is not always the case around the world. For example, Alava [7] studied the changes of Christianity in the west Africa. He pointed out that in recent years, the more liberal opinions towards the LGBTQ+ groups are expected in west Africa region. In Cabo Verde, although 90 percent of the population are Catholic, the law of homosexuality crime has been removed. Moreover, in Mozambique, anti-discrimination at workplace has been legalised since 2007, albeit one of third population in this country converted to Catholic church. There is a great trend of accepting and including LGBTQ individuals in West Africa.

As diverse groups hold different opinions towards LGBTQ group, this issue further divides Christian believers. According to Kurl [8], in current U.S. different congregations hold unique perspective towards sexuality problem. Different congregation’s different ways to interpret Bible serves the purpose of boundary making which distinguishes the insiders from the outsiders of the group. For example, congregations who hold more open-minded attitude towards LGBTQ groups would think they are completely different from more conservative congregations and assert that there is only one accurate way to interpret the Bible. This also result in the contradiction between the central church and the local churches. The central church of Protestant does not in official allow the acknowledgement of LGBTQ-identified folks and same-sex marriages. However, local congregation of protestant congregations might hold a different attitude and have relative autonomy when they decide what boundaries they wish to draw around sexuality, as Alder argued [9]. The division of church apparently become more and more visible in recent years in the U.S, the liberalisation of attitudes toward LGBTQ rights begins in the 1980s. Since 1980s, most Christian traditions become to more liberal, but the speed of change is much slower compared to other social groups as Bauach’s research suggests[10]. Nevertheless, there is no solid ground for any religious groups to claim homosexuality as crime in social environment nowadays. Particularly as Christianity is becoming an identity that young people tend to hide sometimes. According to Barnes (2021), there is an increasing trend among university that biology students consider Christianity is a concealable identity and they prefer to hide it on campus.

However difficult it might be, Mahaffy [11] found only half time LGBTQ+ group choose to give up one of their identities. When facing identity conflicts, half of LGBTQ+ individuals try to change their thoughts on how religion should be practiced or change how to interpret their religious belief, rather than choose to give up their Christian identity or sexual identity. How LGBTQ people deal with their identity conflicts depends on both internal and external factors. One significant internal factor is

age, while the external factors include social environment. Therefore, how the general social environment of religion practices considers people who have same sex attraction is of influence on people's decision when they come across identity confusions.

In addition, LGBTQ+ people who identify themselves as Christian also find ways to reconcile their sexuality with spirituality. Based on questionees gathered from southern LGBTQ Christians, Dupree (2018) found these group have been desperately seeking solutions to rebuild their relationship with churches and have been seeking possible ways to cooperate with them. Although LGBTQ group have suffered discrimination for centuries in the southern part of the U.S.A, several generations of LGBTQ groups have continued the work of their pioneer and seek ways to defend their rights in both sexuality and spirituality.

There is a movement of research that focuses on how social workers deal with the needs of their LGBTQ counselling clients. This movement in essence treat LGBTQ group that face difficulties their ways of negotiation between organizations. In comparison with other quantitative and qualitative approaches, few researchers used qualitative methods to deeply investigate the lived experiences of LGBTQ community. Nevertheless, Carolyn Cole and Helen Wilson Harris (2014) conducted qualitative research. They reviewed literature on people who are identified themselves as Christian and LGBTQ and then paid their attention to eighteen of them. They found that it was uneven to cast everyone's experience into a singular model as individuals' experiences are quite influenced by their economic, social, and educational background. By conducting semi-structured interviews, they found that there were many potential ways of achieving the balance between being gay and being Christian albeit the process of transformation was mostly filled with confusions and self-doubts. When seeking counselling service, most informants said they are particularly concerned with the social workers' ability in dealing with people with multiple identities especially social workers who provided counselling service for Christian minorities before. While most reported that they can handle their dual identity when seeking professional help, they all mentioned the great challenges that they face when considering coming out. The incongruence between their sexual orientation and religious beliefs significantly affects their choice of coming out or not. Many found the best way to deal with this problem is moving from one church to another until they eventually found one church that welcomes and acknowledges their existence. This way of life made them develop an intersection of identity, which require they to initiate different identities when they play their social roles in different communities. To avoid marginalization, many tried to avoid mentioning their homosexual relationships in front of their biological and faith-based families, especially

after coming out. This also involves the problem that they sometimes must accept rejection from their families and live with it for life. In the end Cole and Harris call for social workers to acquire a deeper understanding of the concept of cultural competency, as their research suggest it is same importance to provide affirmation to both Christian and LGBTQ group. Canda and Furman [12] found that it is still common for LGBTQ people to seek services from Christian social service organization, especially those who come from a religious background. This poses a significant challenge to social workers who believe in Christianity. They need to respect the sexuality dimension of their clients, just as fair as other life details of these LGBTQ individuals.

In one study with Hongkong sexuality minorities, Ho and Hu [13] found although different charity organizations might all provide service for LGBTQ Christians, it is obvious that different type of organizations hold different motivations. It is also clearly seen that cultural factors affect people's acceptance of LGBTQ individuals as well. In area that is influenced by Confucianism, LGBTQ individuals not only have to deal with their way of living with Christianity but also need to obey the moral tradition of filial. Homosexual behaviour is regarded as non-filial, not be able to contribute to the family, and a shame to ancestors. Apart from a sinful behaviour that is condemned by God, same sex sexual relationship is also interpreted as a disobey to parents and therefore create double psychological burden to LGBTQ young generation.

Another group of literature focuses on the attitudes that Christian church adopt towards LGBTQ group. To adapt to changes in society, Christian community begin to consider the traditional way that they treat LGBTQ groups. Traditionally, they commonly alienate and marginalize LGBT individuals. Researchers also pointed out that behind the discourse of protecting moral integration and the state's nationalism, Christian community cast same-sex marriage as sin and try to make changes in people who conduct homosexual behaviour. In recent years, there has been a trend that promotes the discourse of love rather than exclusion. Pastors consider the percentage of LGBTQ people becomes large and therefore if the church excludes every gay, it would be difficult for church to increase the influence among its followers. From Christian perspective, there are writings admit disagree with homosexuality does not solve the problems and challenges between the church and the public. Instead, they promote reconciliation and wish to promote the process of inclusion. For example, Otto [14] notices it is more constructive to promote the 'third way', which is a way lie between the fully agreement and the complete disagreement. The middle way delays the question of sin and promote a way of support LGBT people and pray together for answer. Others still wait for changes.

Carlstrom [15] conducted research of Swedish Christianity and found that although there are diverse types of discourses circulating within the group of evangelical churches in Sweden. He particularly paid attention to newspapers that published on this topic in Sweden. Adopting the model of Foucauldian discourse analysis, he divided the current trend of discourses into three groups, the Affirmative Contextual Discourse, the Middle Way Discourse and the Conservative Discourse. However, most of these articles were written by pastors in power in the church hierarchy. These writers are most male and went into university for theology degree, and therefore, conservative discourses are most common to be seen in Swedish newspapers. Although new agency usually presents an open-minded attitude and try to present different opinions, it still conditioned by the acceptance of majority population in Sweden.

Kathryn Jaekel [16] described the life of a group of Christians who pray the god will make gay away but at the same time they provide social support for young LGBTQ people who have difficulties with their family who believe in Christianity. This status suggests Christianity group become more open-minded towards sexuality minority group, but it does not suggest that the structural violence towards LGBTQ minority have completely changes. In fact, no matter how their attitude towards LGBTQ group shift, this group still associates LGBTQ with stigma and hope they can change their sexuality eventually. Such approach of 'praying away gay' drives towards the opposite direction of its initiative which aim to eradicate the stigma of LGBTQ Christians.

Recently, left-wing Christianity advocates promoted a new way to understand queerness as well as Christianity. Instead of seeking the reconciliation of two different things, pastor Elizabeth Edman [17] argues that Christianity should learn from the virtue of queerness and asset the authentic Christianity require the affirmation of LGBTQ +group. The biggest virtue that Episcopal Christianity should learn from queerness is to rebuild a sense of community, help each other and recognise the positive value of the self; Reinnervate the value of community for the most benefit of all.

3. CONCLUSION

This essay reviewed genres of current research on people who both identify themselves as Christians and LGBTQ individuals. Most of them suffered great psychological challenges in concede their sexuality and spirituality. Current research in theology and in social work do not provide enough historical records in how people of this group live their life and how can social organisations provide better support for LGBTQ Christians.

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