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# The Role of Religious and Faith Communities in Addressing the Needs of LGBT Elders

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## Abstract

Religious and faith communities occupy unique and specific roles and functions in society. Although information is presented on specific views about LGBT persons of certain religious affiliations, it is not the intent of this chapter to present a philosophical discussion of the concepts of religion and spirituality, nor to promote the views of any particular faith or denomination. The purpose of this chapter is to present information on the impact, role, and perceptions of faith communities in the lives of LGBT elders. Specifically, information is presented on the attitudes and perceptions of the “church” toward LGBT persons, the value placed on religion and spirituality by LGBT persons, and the ways in which religious leaders can provide care and support to LGBT elders. A discussion of implications of the role of religious leaders in policy development that affect LGBT persons is also presented.

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## Keywords

Religion · Spirituality · Faith communities · Religious leaders · Politics

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## Overview

Religion, spirituality, and faith are often discussed in unison and as interchangeable concepts, when, in essence, they are different and have individualized meaning for each person. The information presented in this chapter is intended to explore the

role of religion, spirituality, and faith in the lives of LGBT elders. In addition, attention is given to attitudes and perceptions of faith communities toward LGBT persons. Although it is beyond the scope and intent of this chapter to present information about all faith communities and religious denominations, reference is made to specific beliefs and practices of various denominations to illustrate a point. The reader is encouraged to consider the information in this chapter not as endorsement or as criticism of a specific religion or religious beliefs, values, or practices.

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## Learning Objectives

By the end of the chapter, the reader should be able to:

1. Understand how LGBT persons might define and connect to religion, spirituality, and faith communities.
2. Understand similarities and differences of various religious denominations' beliefs and attitudes about sexual orientation and gender identity.
3. Understand the cultural implications of religious beliefs about sexual orientation and gender identity or expression.
4. Identify how religion and politics are intertwined in regard to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.

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## Introduction

Religious and faith communities occupy important, unique, and specific roles and functions in society. Although spirituality is different than religion/religiosity, it is often subsumed under religion and frequently used interchangeably. Rose (2012) suggests that in modern life, the two terms have an “uneasy relationship,” and for many people, the two terms have become conflated, with spirituality as the default term used when referring to religion or religious practices. For some, the two terms are unrelated—religion often represents a dogmatic set of demands for behavior and beliefs seemingly incompatible with a diverse modern world. Others view *spirituality* as a cafeteria approach indicative of narcissism and lack of commitment (Rose). In a study of the meanings and manifestations of religion and spirituality among LGBT adults, Halkitis et al. (2009) found that LGBT persons defined spirituality largely in relational terms (e.g., in terms of one's relationship with God and with self) and religion largely in terms of communal worship and in terms of its negative

influences in their lives and communities. In this chapter, religion and spirituality are recognized and discussed separately, but supportive of each other. Religiosity is defined as a set of beliefs about the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially of a superhuman agency, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs ([www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion](http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/religion)). Spirituality is that which lies at the center of each person's being (e.g., God), an essential dimension, which brings meaning to life. Others may find relationships with other people as providing central or core meaning in their lives (MacKinlay 2006).

It is not the intent of this chapter to present a philosophical discussion of the various concepts of religion and spirituality. Moreover, this chapter does not promote the views of any particular faith or denomination. However, information is presented related to specific views about LGBT persons in relation to certain religious affiliations, acknowledging the existence of conservative and liberal theologies and beliefs about sexual minorities and fixed propositions and theological plurality. The term faith community is used to refer to both religion and spirituality and is considered as more inclusive of the two. Religion is salient in the lives of many people across different cultures and consists of various denominations and religious practices that are observed and practiced in different ways. Religious coping has been shown to reduce levels of depression and anxiety in connection with stressful situations and events, and social support within religious communities has been demonstrated as a vital factor in better health outcomes in older adults (Banerjee et al. 2014; Musick et al. 2004). Spirituality has been shown to protect older adults from negative attitudes and declines in physical health (Lowry and Conco 2002).

Many LGBT elders came of age during a time when homosexuality was seen as a psychiatric disorder, the goal of which was to “cure” them. In religious practices, the cure was one of conversion therapy (i.e., ex-gay ministry) or

exorcism. The stressors of aging faced by many LGBT elders are compounded by the trauma inflicted by religion and society around their sexual orientation and gender identities (Mahru 2014).

The purpose of this chapter is to present information on the impact, role, and perceptions of religion, spirituality, and faith communities in the lives of LGBT elders. First, information is presented on the historical and contemporary functions of religion, spirituality, and faith communities. The attitudes and perceptions of the church toward LGBT persons and behaviors are examined. Next, the value placed on religion and spirituality by LGBT persons and how they express or practice those values and their experiences are discussed. In addition, the chapter includes ways in which religious leaders can provide care of and support to LGBT elders. Finally, political implications of the role of religions and religious leaders are discussed. Wherever possible, information is included from a cross-cultural perspective. Throughout this chapter, the term homosexual/homosexuality is used in the context of biblical reference, a term that is antiquated in contemporary times.

### **The Functions of Religions, Spirituality, and Faith Communities**

Until the fifth century, the only persons who were punished for same-sex behavior were “passive men”. Subsequently, Emperor Justinian interpreted same-sex intimacy as “against nature,” and, therefore, a religious misdemeanor punishable by God that resulted in double punishment from God and law. In essence, the law became the weapon of the church (Dreyer 2008a, p. 749). Mainstream religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have been described as being at best negative and at worst destructive toward LGBT persons (Lynch 1996). Religion has been used to legitimize the ostracism of LGBT persons. Sacred religious texts have been referenced consistently as authoritative means of verifying that LGBT patterns of attraction and intimacy are

sinful, to make claims that inevitably LGBT persons will receive divine punishment and damnation, and to monitor and control the behaviors and identities of LGBT persons (Halkitis et al. 2009).

This section examines the general function of religions, acknowledging that the purposes of religion are extensive and grounded in philosophical constructs, cultural contexts, and sociological assumptions. Beliefs about the function of religion have evolved over time. For example, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels asserted that the function of religion was to disguise the realities of the underlying economic system and reduce or cover up the suffering of the laboring masses. The structural–functional approach to religion has its roots in Emile Durkheim’s work on religion, *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1917). Durkheim believed that religion is the celebration of, and to a certain extent, self-worship of human society. According to Durkheim, religion provides three major functions in society: (a) social cohesion to help maintain social solidarity through shared rituals and beliefs, (b) social control to enforce religious-based morals and norms to help maintain conformity and control in society, and (c) meaning and purpose to answer existential questions (Carls 2012). Critics of the structural–functional approach to religion argue that it overlooks religion’s dysfunctions (e.g., to incite violence, war, terrorism, hate crimes).

Lenkeit and Lenkeit (1997) expanded on the work of Durkheim and classified the value of religions to society into eight categories (see Table 27.1). The disciplinary function of religion is in many ways disproportionately applied to LGBT persons. As a disciplinary function, religion provides a paradigm for moral behavior and the promise of both natural and supernatural punishments for perceived breaches of conduct. Further efforts to explain the functions of religions are offered by Goldberg’s (2010) list of functions: (a) transmission—to impart to each generation a sense of identity through shared customs, rituals, stories, and historical continuity; (b) translation—to help individuals interpret life

**Table 27.1** Function of religion to society

<i>Cohesive</i> —helps to organize society, promote a unified group identity, and delineate between insiders and outsiders
<i>Explanatory</i> —helps to explain things that would otherwise remain inexplicable, both unexplained material phenomenon and deeper questions
<i>Education</i> —a role in instruction, especially moral instruction, and helps to pass down cultural values that might otherwise be lost
<i>Euphoric</i> —religious rituals provide feelings of awe, excitement, relief, enlightenment, and so forth. These experiences are often transformative, leading to changes in personality or motivation, and tend to cement cultural and moral values in the minds of participants, while motivating further action
<i>Revitalize</i> —rituals reinforce and reinvigorate the structures and values of society, and its subsets, such as family bonds. Most public holidays are good examples of this function in action
<i>Ecological</i> —mediates the contact between human groups and their environment, by adding critical moral value to decisions that are otherwise decided through self-interest
<i>Disciplinary</i> —provides a paradigm for moral behavior and promises both natural and supernatural punishments for perceived breaches of conduct
<i>Supportive</i> —being agents of redistribution, taking in contributions of money and resources, and redistributing on the basis of need. Also, providing individual support such as counseling, spiritual guidance, and material assistance in times of trouble

Adapted from Lenkeit and Lenkeit (1997)

events, acquire a sense of meaning and purpose, and understand their relationship to a larger whole, socially and cosmically; (c) transaction—to create and sustain health communities and provide guidelines for moral behavior and ethnical relationships; (d) transformation—to foster maturation and ongoing growth, helping people to become more fulfilled and more complete; and (e) transcendence—to satisfy the longing to expand the perceived boundaries of the self, become more aware of the sacred aspect of life, and experience union with the ultimate ground of being. These viewpoints on the functions of religion may or may not be representative of past or current functions or representative of different cultural aspects. Religiosity and scriptural liberalism (the degree to which one interprets the scriptural literally), associated with traditionalism, also influence faith communities' views of LGBT persons and behaviors.

Turner and Stayton (2014) contend that religious leaders face a wide variety of sexual needs and concerns, sexual expressions, and sexuality issues within their faith communities. Sexuality issues range from reproductive technologies to sexual abuse to sexual orientation and gender identity and expression. “Not only are faith

communities filled with people experiencing difficult and complex situations involving sexuality, they are turning to their clergy and religious leaders for guidance and help in the belief that these same leaders are trained in, and capable of, dealing with this vast range of concerns” (p. 485). Given the sexual issues and the growing conflicts, awareness, and acknowledgement around them and across the spectrum of religious denominations, religious leaders remain ill prepared to deal with them (Turner and Stayton). When people in their congregations bring questions, concerns, or dilemmas, many religious leaders realize that they have inadequate information, understanding, or training to be good counselors or to address the interwoven spiritual nature of congregants' concerns. Turner and Stayton contend that “religious leaders are in a unique position to transform, inform, and influence society's understanding of sexuality and religion—through the pulpit, pastoral care of individuals and families, and involvement in local communities, the media, and policies” (p. 485). Unfortunately, sexuality and sex education are not a part of seminary education and religious training. See the case of Alex, an example of an older gay man coming to his

religious leader for guidance on a situation around his sexuality.

often the first point of contact for concerns of their faith community members.

### The Case of Alex

Alex is a 71-year-old gay man. He has just returned to his hometown after an absence of 50 years. After the death of his partner, Alex decided to move back home to be close to his family, especially since acquiring some health issues. During attendance at church, one of the church members approached Alex and invited him to dinner, indicating that she wanted him to meet her mother who is recently widowed. The woman, oblivious to the possibility that Alex is gay, is trying to fix him up with her mother. Alex has declined several invitations. He likes being back home and participating in the church in which he grew up, however, is not comfortable with telling any of the church members that he is gay. He decided to go back “in the closet” and is experiencing some stress because he cannot be open about his sexual orientation. Alex decided to talk with his minister.

#### Questions

1. What are some possible reactions from the minister for which should Alex be prepared?
2. What type of knowledge and skill should the minister have to assist Alex?
3. How would you counsel Alex?

In understanding the functions of religion, spirituality, and faith communities in the lives of LGBT persons, one can argue that in each, there is diversity and inclusion, not division and exclusion. Sexuality and spirituality are integral parts of everyday life in multiple faith traditions around the world in which both sexual wholeness and spiritual wholeness are intricately connected (Turner and Stayton 2014). Religious leaders are

### Religious Attitudes and Perceptions Toward LGBT Populations—Cultural and Denominational Differences

Faith communities are broadly categorized as Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Humanism, and Judaism. Within each, subcategories exist concerning the way in which congregations interpret and practice their doctrines. Faith communities may range from traditional/conservative to contemporary/progressive. According to Gold (2010), the views of differing denominations range from punishment by Fundamentalist Christianity to full acceptance by Quakers or Unitarian Universalists, with other churches encompassing both ends of the spectrum by advocating love for the sinner (the person), but hate of the sin (gay behavior). A strong relationship exists between the messages religious leaders promote regarding LGBT acceptance and support and the attitudes held by their congregations (Dutwin 2012). In fact, Hoffman et al. (2006) suggest that “developing a religious identity allows a person to develop a sense of identity and worth in relation to God and his or her place in the universe”, thus, “religion may affect a person’s LGB identity development” (p. 11). The geographic location of faith communities also influences religious beliefs. For example, in the “Bible Belt” (i.e., states in the West South Central, East South Central, and South Atlantic), much of which adheres to Christian fundamentalist dogma about homosexuality (e.g., homosexuals are bad, diseased, sinful), Christianity permeates other social institutions such as schools, homes, and entertainment venues (Barton 2010). For faith positions of various faith communities, the reader is referred to the Human Rights Campaign (<http://www.hrc.org/resources/entry/faith-positions>). Barton asserts that the majority of research on

homosexuality has explored heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals with a focus on the relationship between prejudice, right-wing, authoritarianism, and dimensions of religiosity. Much of religion has been used to create and cultivate hostility against LGBT persons.

Stances of faiths on LGBT issues in Islam are difficult to summarize because of its enormous geographic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. To a large extent, attitudes depend on how individual Muslims and Islamic sects interpret the Holy Quran and other theological sources. Nevertheless, a majority of Muslims express very negative attitudes toward LGBT persons. However, only a few passages in the Quran and several hadiths (sayings attributed to the prophet Muhammad) refer to sex between two males. Specifically, the story of Lut (or Lot as he is known in Jewish and Christian Bibles) is mentioned, but the Quran does not call for a specific punishment for this behavior. While most Islamic institutions have not explicitly addressed transgender issues, they do make reference to cross-dressing, those transgressing traditional gender roles, and sex-reassignment surgery (Human Rights Campaign, n.d.).

The beliefs about and responses to LGBT issues in Judaism vary across Orthodox and Reform Judaism. The Torah clearly states that the act of homosexuality is prohibited. The Torah refers to homosexuality as *Toaviva*-abomination (i.e., abhorrent to God) (Amsel, n.d.). The Talmud says that in the act of homosexuality, the person is “straying” from one of the primary goals in life—to procreate and populate the earth. It is in the straying that homosexuality is prohibited. That is, it is not the “unholiness” of the homosexual relationship, but rather, the violation of one’s purpose on earth (Amsel). For Jews, the law of the Torah is the all-encompassing and governs every single part of living, general, societal, and personal (Shaffer, n.d.). Conversely, Reform Judaism has a long history of working for the full inclusion of LGBT persons in Jewish life (Appell, n.d.). According to Appell, Reform Jews “are guided by the very basic belief that all human beings are created *b’tselem Elohim* (in the Divine image)” (p. 1). The Reform Movement

believes that, “regardless of context, discrimination against any person arising from apathy, insensitivity, ignorance, fear, or hatred is inconsistent” with the fundamental belief of *b’tselem Elohim*, “for the stamp of the Divine is present in each and every one of us” (Rabbi David Saperstein cited in Appell).

Homosexuality is discussed seven times in the Christian Bible: Genesis 19, Judges 19, Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20, Romans 1, Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1 (Dwyer 2007). These passages serve as the foundation for most of the abuse projected on LGBT persons in some churches (Atchison 2013). In response to these biblical references, adherents claim that God condemns homosexuality or homosexuals. In response, Dwyer wrote the book, *Those 7 References: A Study of 7 References to Homosexuality in the Bible*. Dwyer’s rationale was to allow LGBT persons who have been abused by the “misuse” of scripture to have a voice about a different interpretation of God’s voice to be heard in these passages in ways that had been silenced for many for a long period of time. In her reflections about the seven references, Atchison (2010) asserts that often the Bible is used (and misused) in two extreme interpretations to oppress and harm members of sexual minority groups. The Bible is used either blindly as “The Word” and the use of certain texts as a self-flagellation (referring to self and others of their community as “sin”), or with complete dismissal of the whole book and Christianity itself, allowing Christian fundamentalists to unanimously dictate what is righteous and what is good.

Atchison (2013) suggests that for people who teach and preach about the seven references, it is necessary to understand that, the Bible, although relevant for today, was written in a particular historical context, making it often difficult to apply something written for a particular ancient audience to a contemporary lived experience. This view is consistent with that of Dreyer (2006a) who espouses that theologians and exegetes cannot ignore the changes that have occurred in social life from biblical times, through the ages, to our modern and postmodern

worlds. A postmodern view is that sexuality is not a homogeneous entity, rather the result of an infinite variety of ever changing factors. LGBT persons feel that they are “being” a sexual minority and God made them this way.

Different religions and denominations have varying attitudes toward sexual orientation and sexual identity; experience may vary greatly depending on the nature of the religious community. The experiences of LGBT persons in faith communities are as diverse as the type of practices and ceremonies in which they engage. “Religion has been a source of both solace and suffering for many LGBT Americans” (Human Rights Campaign 2014). For some LGBT persons, neither their sexual orientation, their religion, nor the intersection of the two is a problem, while others struggle with the attitudes of those around them, religious leaders, or their own internalized attitudes toward sexual orientation or sexual identity (Pace 2013). Many LGBT persons have been raised in an organized religion but have been forced to leave those communities because of condemnation. However, in recent years, there has been a shift in a growing number of organized religious groups in the United States to issue statements officially welcoming LGBT persons as members. As an example, some religious organizations have taken supportive stands on issues that affect LGBT persons (e.g., freedom from discrimination, right to marry, ordination of openly gay clergy) (Human Rights Campaign 2014).

Religion-based bigotry, “the attitudes of prejudice hostility or discrimination toward gay people that are falsely justified by religious teachings or belief,” causes enormous harm to LGBT persons (Faith in America 2010). Negative social attitudes about sexual orientation and gender identity can cause harmful consequences in the lives of LGBT persons, creating the “fear of going to hell” depression, low self-esteem, feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, and internalized homo/bi/transphobia (Barton 2010; Mahru 2014). In a study of LGBT persons in Ireland, Reygan and Moane (2014) found that while participants lived in an increasingly pluralistic Irish society, the negative dividend of religious homophobia created intrapsychic

tension for participants and led some to abandon religion altogether. The authors also found that a changing Irish society is characterized by increased diversity, openness, and respect for minority rights including LGBT rights. Some denominations welcome the inclusion of all persons, including those who are LGBT (e.g., Episcopal, United Methodist, Unitarian Universalist), at the same time that others overtly condemn them (e.g., Christian fundamentalist, Baptist). The current policy (as of 2012) of the United Methodist Church states, “We implore families and churches not to reject or condemn lesbian or gay members and friends. We commit ourselves to be in ministry for and with all persons”. Although the United Methodist Church bans discrimination at the congregational level and recognizes the “scared worth” of all persons, church doctrine also states that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teachings and bans financial support of all LGBT-based groups. More progressive factions among clergy and laity have defied church doctrines in an effort to reclaim the Bible’s call for social justice as it applies to marriage and ordination (Human Rights Campaign 2014).

In Canada, The United Church has developed policies about sexual orientation and transgender and gender identity, affirming all human being regardless of sexual orientation. The timeline of policy decisions on sexual orientation of The United Church of Canada includes the following: (a) in 1984, affirmed acceptance of all human beings as made in the image of God, regardless of sexual orientation, acknowledged that the church has condoned the rejection of lesbians and gays, and called the church to repent; (b) in 1988, declared that “all persons, regardless of sexual orientation, who profess faith in Jesus Christ and obedience to him, are welcome to be or become full members of the church;” (c) in 1992, began creating resources for same-sex covenants; and (d) in 2003, called on the Government of Canada to recognize same-sex marriage in marriage legislation (<http://affirmunited.ause.ca>). More recently, The United Church of Canada passed policies on gender identity and the participation and ministry of transgender

people, instructing staff to develop resources to encourage the participation and ministry of transgender persons in the life of the church and to prepare individuals and churches to receive such participation and ministry.

Another international perspective of challenging prejudice toward LGB persons is recommendations from Scotland and England. In Scotland, the proportion of people who have religious faith and those who do not is significant, including LGB persons (Donnelley 2008). Attitudes of Scottish people of faith toward LGBT persons vary greatly, with 21 % believing that same-sex couples should not be allowed to marry (15 % for people who have no religion or seldom attend religious meetings and 43 % for people who attend religious meeting at least once a week), and 32 % of those who attend religious meetings at least once a week agreed same-sex couples should be allowed to marry (Scottish Government Social Research 2007). Across Britain, 71 % of people with a religious belief state that they would be comfortable if their local religious representative was gay (Guasp and Dick 2012). These attitudes of many people of faith do not necessarily correspond to the positions taken by faith leaders, nor is the majority view of people within a faith widely reported as representative of that faith (Donnelley).

Within the Christian tradition, LGBT persons can experience the rejection of the Church community and even further oppression when they negotiate their gendered identities in relation to their church community's construction of sexuality (Sharma 2008). Although LGBT persons may be welcomed in the faith community and regarded as devoted Christians, church officials are still allowed to exclude LGBT persons who are honest about their gay lifestyle. Taylor (1989) refers to this as the "ethics of inarticulacy." Although sexuality as a social construct is forever changing, the challenge for institutional religion is that these institutions cannot easily accept these changes (Dreyer 2008a, b). The impact of negative messages from the Christian faith community about LGBT persons in regard to who they are, how they may or may not love, and what their value is in the eyes of God is

summarized by Martin (1996) as resulting in a denial of self-identity (see Discussion Box 27.1).

### Discussion Box 27.1

Any interpretation of scripture that hurts people, oppresses people, or destroys people cannot be the right interpretation, no matter how traditional, historical, or exegetically respectable. There can be no debate about how the fact that the church's stand on homosexuality has caused oppression, loneliness, self-hatred, violence, sickness, and suicide for millions of people. If the church wishes to continue with its traditional interpretation, it must demonstrate, not just claim, that it is more loving to condemn homosexuality than to affirm homosexuals ... Is it really better for lesbians and gay teenagers to despise themselves and endlessly pray that their very personalities be reconstructed so that they may experience romance like their straight friends? It is really more loving for the church to continue its worship of "heterosexual fulfillment" ... while consigning thousands of its members to a life of either celibacy or endless psychological manipulations that masquerade as "healing"?

#### Questions

1. What are the main points being made by Martin?
2. What is the difference between condemning homosexuality and affirming heterosexuality?
3. Both LGBT persons and heterosexuals express sexuality. In what ways do LGBT persons experience a tension between their faith and reality as sexual beings as compared to heterosexuals.

Martin (1996).

In a Pew (2013) survey of LGBT Americans' ( $n = 1197$ ) attitudes, experiences, and values in changing times, the overwhelming majority

(92 %) said that society has become more accepting of them in the past decade. The participants attribute this change to various factors ranging from people knowing and interacting with someone who is LGBT to advocacy on behalf of high-profile public figures to LGBT adults raising families. However, LGBT persons report that many religions are not accepting of them. They describe the Muslim religion (84 %), the Mormon Church (83 %), the Catholic Church (79 %), and evangelical churches (73 %) as unfriendly. Fewer than half of LGBT participants indicated that the Jewish religion and mainline Protestant churches were unfriendly, and one-in-ten described them as friendly, with the remainder indicating that they were neutral.

Overwhelmingly, research on religion and sexual minorities has focused on lesbians and gays. There is limited to no attention given either to bisexuality or transgenderism and religion and/or spirituality. Donnelley (2008) states that while many of the religious issues identified for LGBT persons apply to transgender persons, the pattern of attitudes toward transgender persons is significantly different than toward LGB persons. For instance, issues for transgender persons of faith can be different: there are fewer trans-persons than LGB persons, and the law covers trans and LGB persons differently. All of these factors suggest that differences in approach may be needed for trans and LGB issues (Donnelley).

### **Research on LGBT Elders' Religious and Spiritual Beliefs and Practices and Experiences**

Both the religious beliefs and the way in which individuals worship is a matter of choice, personal preference, and familial teaching. For many LGBT persons, participation in organized religion may be detrimental to their mental health because of negative messages about their sexual orientation and gender identity that are communicated through religious teachings, institutionally imposed sanctions against openly LGBT members, and the prohibition against gay religious leaders (Lease et al. 2005). The conflict

between one's sexual orientation or gender identity and one's religious identity may lead to dissonance because full acceptance of one aspect of the self implies full rejection of another (Gold 2010). Ways that religiosity may shape sexual identity and ways in which LGBT persons' engage in worship practices are altered by their experience within hostile or affirming religious communities. Some LGBT persons elect to eschew organized religion entirely, while others self-define as atheists. Yet others may reject public religious life but may express their religious and spiritual commitment by engaging in private acts of devotion, meditation, and prayer. LGBT persons who remain committed to participating in organized religious life may choose to ignore or minimize the relevance of anti-gay doctrines and sentiments within their faith community (Halkitis et al. 2009).

A study by Halkitis et al. (2009) included 498 participants ranging in age from 18 to 75. Of these participants, only 24.5 % ( $n = 122$ ) reported that they held a membership in a religious institution such as a church, synagogue, or mosque, and those who indicated membership tended to be older than non-members. The majority of participants were raised in religious households. Although it is unclear whether the findings that older LGBT persons tended to hold membership in organized religion is a reflection of a developmental effect, they may suggest that as LGBT persons age, they will have a need for organized communities in which they can express their religious and spiritual beliefs. Moreover, these individuals will have a particular need for welcoming and affirming religious communities, ones that can help them negotiate the challenges associated with aging (Halkitis et al.).

As people get older, their support networks often shrink. Rose (2012) found that spiritual and religious experiences were an important source of support and strength for many LGBT elders. Conversely, it was also a source of pain, due to religiously linked experiences of stigma, usually in childhood or young adulthood. For all of the participants in Rose's study, sexual orientation or gender identity set them apart in some way from the heterosexual mainstream of their generation

and required them to define themselves spiritually. Those participants had a variety of individual experiences, but most were in the mainstream of American traditions (e.g., church, synagogue, other religious institutions). According to Rose, the individuals grew up during a time when the majority of American society held religious and social conservative views about homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender non-conformity. Moreover, “to acknowledge one’s identity, was, for the majority of study participants, to find oneself in a world where religious leaders, social arbiters and, often, one’s own family, would almost universally condemn you” (p. 12).

For many of the LGBT elders in Rose’s (2012) study, the spiritual community provided a place to perform service to others. The majority of participants indicated substantial involvement with their spiritual or religious community. LGBT elders played various roles and performed important functions in their faith community including the role of deacons, celebrants, taking care of the place of worship or fellow congregants, and mentor of younger members. In addition, LGBT elders provided spiritual and personal support and advice to others struggling with issues of identity or with personal crises. These LGBT elders highly valued their spiritual community and regarded it as a place for them to fulfill the tasks of adulthood that they might not have had the opportunity to do if they were disconnected from it. All of the LGBT elders in the study stated that in one way or another, having a religious or spiritual practice, community, or perspective helped them cope with life stressors, coming out, health issues, and changes in life circumstances.

Similarly, Espinoza (2014) found that 40 % of LGBT elders say that their support networks have become smaller over time, as compared to 27 % of non-LGBT older people. Among LGBT elders who consider the church or faith community as part of their support networks, 26 % are African American, 8 % are White, and 8 % are Hispanic/Latino. (See Chaps. 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 for discussion of the role of religion in the lives of ethnic populations). Research shows that

involvement in religious and spiritual practice corresponds to better health-related outcomes regardless of age (Beery et al. 2002; Brennan 2004; Newlin et al. 2008), and may provide social support and a sense of well-being, which promotes better overall mood (Mitchell and Weatherly 2000).

A Gallup Poll on LGBT populations and religious affiliation in the USA found that LGBT persons are significantly less likely than non-LGBT persons to be highly religious and significantly more likely to be classified as non-religious. Religiosity among national adults found that 24 % of LGBT identify as highly religious, 29 % as moderately so, and 47 % as not religious compare with non-LGBT at 41, 29, and 30 %, respectively. A comparison by gender reveals that male gay, bisexual, and transgender persons compared with non-gay, bisexual, and transgender were classified 25 % versus 36 % as highly religious, 26 % versus 28 % as moderately, and 49 % versus 35 % as not religious (Newport 2014). Some LGBT persons find that no specific religion’s teachings are fully in accordance with their personal identity and worldview, but take comfort from the idea of a spiritual presence in the world. Others find that spirituality fits more easily into their identities than religion, although many do also maintain a strong belief in the teachings of particular faiths (Pace 2013). A national survey of American congregations from 2000 to 2010 (conducted in 2000, 2005, 2008, and 2010) identified substantial changes including a net overall result of fewer persons in the pews and decreasing spiritual vitality (Roozen 2011) (see Table 27.2).

Similarly, a Pew study (Taylor 2013) found that LGBT adults are less religious than the general public. Approximately 48 % reported no religious affiliation compared to 20 % of the public at large. Of those LGBT adults with religious affiliation, one-third said there is conflict between their religious beliefs and their sexual orientation or gender identity, and 29 % said they have been made to feel unwelcome in a place of worship.

The results from each of the studies discussed above reveal that while societal views about

**Table 27.2** American congregations 2000–2010

Continued increase in innovative, adaptive worship
Rapid adoption of electronic technologies
Increase in racial/ethnic congregations, many for immigrant groups
Increase in the breadth of both member-oriented and mission-oriented programs
Increase in connection across faith traditions
Change in the historical pattern of religious involvement in support of the electoral process
Significant decrease in financial health
Continuing high levels of conflict
Aging membership
Fewer persons in the pews
Decreasing spiritual vitality

Adapted from Roozen (2011)

LGBT persons have shifted relatively dramatic over the past decade, highly religious people remain more likely than others to believe that sexual behavior and identity of LGB persons should not be accepted by society. This view serves to marginalize, stigmatize, and perpetuate stereotypical views and attitudes at a time that many LGBT persons of all ages are coming out and speaking out.

In response to the two extremes of how the Bible is used and misused that were discussed earlier in this chapter, Atchison views these two extremes as black and white (absolute and opposite) and as inhabiting a gray area in between. See Discussion Box 27.2 for Atchison's interpretation of existing in a gray area.

### Discussion Box 27.2

Gabrie'l J. Atchison is a feminist, an African American, and a member of the LGBT community. She has a doctorate in Women's Studies and a master's of religion with a concentration in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies. Dr. Atchison has created "healing spaces" for women, including Angel's Refuge whose vision is to create peaceful spaces for those who are experiencing grief and loss or have

experienced trauma (<http://angelsrefuge.wordpress.com/about/>).

Inhabiting a Gray Area:

"I believe that God loves me as I am"... "He made me the way that I am"... "He also made me the way that I am for a purpose" ... "In my uniqueness, I am here to serve a specific Devine purpose" ... "I trust God" ... "My challenges are about self-acceptance, deepening my faith and learning to love His people" ... "My challenge is not about trying to repress, hide or deny part of myself" ... "I know that God loves me, and nothing I read will change my mind."

Questions

1. What is Gabriele'l's view of her relationship with God and faith?
2. What are Gabriele'l's challenges?
3. If you were to have a conversation with Gabriele'l, how would you respond to her inhabiting a gray area?

Adapted from <http://angelsrefuge.wordpress.com/2010/06/08/homosexuality-and-the-bible-part-1-of-7/>

Hoffman et al. (2006) align LGB faith development with the stages of LGB identity development in an attempt to explain LGB religious experience. The authors indicate that with many models, conflict along with resolution is at the core of transition from one stage to the next. For LGB persons, a conflict may exist between growing acceptance of their own sexual identity and religious beliefs and attempts to relieve this conflict often leads initial attempts to deconstruct religious beliefs deemed unquestionable.

Wood and Conley (2014) reviewed the need for counselors and researchers to address the effects of LGBT person's loss of religious and spiritual (R/S) identity and to examine the concepts of R/S abuse and R/S struggle. R/S abuse refers to physical, sexual, or psychological abuse perpetrated by those in power within R/S

communities (Gubi and Jacobs 2009). S/R struggles are “efforts to conserve or transform a spirituality that has been threatened or harmed” (Pargament et al. 2005, p. 247). Wood and Conley concluded that as LGBT persons experience R/S abuse, they might experience R/S struggle, which may then lead to loss of R/S identity. See Research Box 27.1.

**Research Box 27.1:** Religious/Spiritual Identities

Wood and Conley (2014). Loss of religious or spiritual identities among the LGBT population. *Counseling and Values*, 59, 95–111

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is to underscore the need for counselors and researchers to address the effects of LGBT persons’ loss of R/S identity and to examine the concepts of R/S abuse and R/S struggle.

**Method:** This is a conceptual article. The authors include institutional and denominational components of religion in the definition of R/S abuse. To understand the impact of R/S abuse on LGBT persons, the authors explore S/R abuse using Ward’s (2011) types of R/S abuse, integrate microaggressions as defined by Sue et al. (2007), and expand microaggressions to include sexual microaggressions (Shelton and Delgado-Romero 2011). A case study of an individual who suffers from loss of R/S identity is presented to explore the implications for counselors and researchers.

**Results:** The concepts that are discussed in this article, although important, do not have empirical bases. Counselors should use these concepts with caution because individual differences exist in experiences of R/S abuse, R/S struggle, and loss of R/S identity. Further qualitative research (e.g., grounded theory) and quantitative (e.g., predictors of loss) research are necessary to assess the validity of the negative effects of

loss of R/S identity as well as generalizability to different individuals.

**Conclusion:** As LGBT persons experience R/S abuse, they may experience R/S struggle, which may then lead to loss of R/S identity. Because of the non-finite nature of loss of R/S identity, LGBT persons can experience negative mental health effects. Multiple facets of LGBT persons’ identities can be affected and require attention, thus counselors can help them experience loss in the most functional way possible.

**Questions**

1. What type of qualitative research study would you design?
2. What variables would you use in a quantitative research design?
3. What type of LGBT characteristics would you consider in designing either a qualitative or quantitative study?

**Religious Leaders’ Pastoral Care Provided to LGBT Elders**

Dreyer (2008b) suggests that the ambiguity in pastoral care with gay people in many institutional Christian communities exacerbates the “unhealed wound” of gay persons. The unhealed wound refers to the ambiguity in ecclesial approaches to pastoral care with LGBT persons. That is, the ministries of churches that reach out to educate or counsel LGBT persons sound positive; however, LGBT persons to whom they want to reach out are labeled as deviant and stigmatized. Even in many faith communities that have moved toward greater tolerance toward LGBT persons, this more tolerant approach is conditional—gays should confess that same-sex behavior is sinful and should either be “healed” and “become heterosexual” or remain celibate for the duration of their lives (Dreyer 2008b).

If indeed “one of the main tasks of the church is to help heal people’s wounds, this should include those wounds caused by outdated social codes that express prejudice against sexual orientation and behaviors that differ from heteronormative conventions” (Dreyer 2008b, p. 1237).

Many LGBT elders have encountered negative experiences and have been hurt deeply by religion. Thus, they may have strong initial suspicions of religious leader and their motives. In interactions with LGBT elders, it is the responsibility of religious leaders to convey a non-judgmental presence during visits or in counseling and to affirm them as they are and assure them that they are safe (Mahru 2014). Pastoral engagement with sexual minorities is affected by religious leaders’ disposition, which is related to their religious views. Thus, self-reflection on and awareness of religious leaders’ own personal disposition, theological views, and values will prepare them for engaging openly and respectfully with those whose belief system may differ from theirs (Dreyer 2008b). According to Dreyer (2005, 2006b), the mental, physical, and spiritual well-being of all people of faith is the concern of pastoral caregivers. Thus, Dreyer (2008b) advocates for practical theologians to expose all harmful attitudes toward others, including LGBT persons. Whereas therapists and counselors have an ethical obligation to refrain from imposing their views on clients and to be non-judgmental about clients’ belief systems, many religious leaders may find it difficult to do so. The issue of maintaining a value-free approach may be even more difficult for religious leaders from “a tradition where religious propositions are presented as undeniable truths, and especially when dealing with sexual minorities where social and religious morality and values are significant issues” (Dreyer 2008b, p. 1244).

Anonymous pastoral care (APC) is one option for assistance in concerns pertaining to sexuality (Van Drie et al. 2014). APC eliminates the risk of rejection or judgment by their religious leaders. APC is especially positioned to counsel LGBT persons because of socially contested sexual issues such as lesbianism, gayness, bisexuality, and transgenderism. Van Drie et al. (2014) assert

that the World Wide Web offers ease and anonymity with which persons can obtain advice and reassurance. Although LGBT adults are heavy users of social media (80 %) as compared to the general public (58 %), older LGBT persons are less like to do so (Taylor 2013).

***The Need for LGBT-Affirmative Congregations.*** Generally, LGB persons have three options when dealing with religious and spiritual issues: (a) reparative or conversion therapy—attempts to help the person change their sexual orientation, (b) the use of therapy to help the person live a celibate life, and (c) abandonment of their religious beliefs and work through the issues related to the anticipated loss of meaning and support in their lives (Hoffman et al. 2006). Despite being proven as ineffective and outdated, conversion therapy is highly regarded among religious leaders as a way to change a person’s sexual orientation. Hoffman et al. offer another option an affirming or welcoming model for those who do not believe that their sexual orientation is sinful or wrong and wish to maintain their religious beliefs. LGBT-affirmative congregations and spiritual communities may be more in line with the biblical teachings of both justice and love. In this vein, Dreyer (2008b) suggests several LGBT-affirmative considerations for religious leaders. First, religious leaders who adopt such a theology and philosophy will be more advantageous when engaging LGBT persons, and an open view of the scripture will be conducive to finding a way that the Bible does not damage, reject, or condemn individuals. Second, openness to the voices of the marginalized is conducive to a pastoral and therapeutic responsibility to listen to and understand the experience of the other from the inside. Finally, the willingness of religious leaders to struggle with the Bible and with other voices rather than adhere to a set of prescribed answers is helpful when dealing with the complex personal, social, and religious sectors of LGBT persons.

In 2006, the Social Issues and Resources Panel of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland put forward General Assembly Resolution (GAR) guidelines (<http://www.presbyterianireland.org/getmedia/c89505dc-f8a9-4640-ad20->

[ab20-ab9f6bed106/Pastoral-Guideline](#)), which advocated for “the need for the church to be the church,” meaning that “the church has a crucial responsibility to create an environment of love, understanding, acceptance, patience, forgiveness, openness, and grace.” In addition, the GAR guidelines stipulated that the role of pastoral care is not to force gay and lesbian persons into counseling, let alone suggest demonic activity. The guidelines asserted the danger of suggesting that sexual minorities are sick and need to be healed, and clarifying that all people, in various ways, are in need of the healing graces.

In a survey of members of the congregation of Dignity, Lutherans Concerned, and Integrity churches, institutions that seek to affirm LGB sexual orientation among their congregants, Lease et al. (2005) found less internalized homonegativity and higher spiritual scores among members. The authors concluded that overt behaviors and attitudes that convey acceptance are important in offsetting the negative messages from mainstream religious denominations. Moreover, Gold (2010) believes that in light of the current situation, “empathy for the spiritual plight of LGB persons must serve as the basis for grieving what may have to be sacrificed and for

rejoicing in what must be discovered in order to integrate and live out one’s spiritual and sexual orientation” (p. 210).

Strategies for making gay and lesbian persons and their families feel welcome in one’s faith community were adapted by Fortunate Families and Concerned Catholics for lesbian and Gay Inclusion (2014, [www.kcprovince.org/kcprovince/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Pastors-resource.pdf](http://www.kcprovince.org/kcprovince/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Pastors-resource.pdf)). These strategies ranged from ensuring general hospitality for all to homily development inclusive of references to LGBT persons to being patient/sensitive to the possibility that LGBT persons may be present. Contemporary theological reactions to sexual minorities offer a more inclusive approach for LGBT persons while challenging religious leaders to reexamine their judgmental stance (see Table 27.3).

## Political Implications

Over the years, much of the opposition to equality for LGBT persons in America has come from organized religion, especially from conservative religious leaders and faith-based groups.

**Table 27.3** Contemporary theological reactions on sexual minorities

*John McNeill*

Through the lenses of scriptural interpretation and psychological insight, McNeill argues that, in justice, the Church needs to abandon its traditional opposition to committed, sexually active lesbian or gay relationships. He proposes, “The same moral norms should be applied in judging the sexual behavior of a true homosexual as we ordinarily apply to heterosexual activity.” Additionally, he argues “there is the possibility of morally good homosexual relationships and that love which unites the partners in such a relationship, rather than alienating them from God, can be judged as uniting them more closely”

*Sister Margaret Farley*

She observes that the church’s teaching on sexuality is based in an act-centered morality (i.e., what is judged good or bad is an activity). She proposes that the church adopt a relationship-centered morality (i.e., what is judged good or bad is the quality of the relationship between people). Principles such as free consent of the partners, equality between partners, a sense of commitment, and permanency, she argues, provide a better basis for evaluating the good in a partnership that the Church’s current teaching with its heavy biological emphasis

*Bishop Geogrey Robinson*

He asks two critical questions: (1) Why are sexual sins considered offenses against God and not against people? (2) Why does the Church’s sexual morality have such little Biblical, and specifically New testament, support? He proposes that the Church could develop a new sexual ethic from the Gospels by looking at the principles that Jesus taught about how people should treat one another

[www.kcprovince.org/Kcprovince/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Pastors-Resource.pdf](http://www.kcprovince.org/Kcprovince/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Pastors-Resource.pdf)

Beyond preaching and teaching that sexual minorities represent a violation of God's will, many religious leaders and groups have worked in the political arena to oppose legislation and policies that provide human rights and equality for LGBT persons (Thistlethwaite and Cook 2011). Thistlethwaite and Cook argue that while it is important to support the First Amendment rights of faith communities to voice their beliefs, it is equally important "to oppose their effects to impose their theology on a pluralistic democracy and deny justice and equality to millions of LGBT Americans" (p. 1). The quest is to expand and reframe the debate that will allow for moral equality to be as important as legal and social equality.

One area of considerable debate surrounds the separation of church and state. In the United States, on one side of the political debate (the Religious Right) are organizations that identify themselves as family focused and for traditional values, and believe that their religious views should be that of all Americans. On the other side (the Left) are organizations that support separation of church and state and oppose the imposition of religious views about homosexuality and gay marriage as espoused by the Religious Right. Although religious groups have the right to hire whomever they want and to restrict to whom they will offer services, many view that they should not have a right to accept government funding to operate programs and then refuse to offer services to certain classes of people such as LGBT persons. For faith-based organizations to do so is tantamount to government-sponsored discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Prominent religious leaders of the Christian Right openly influence public policy that restricts and denies LGBT rights (White 2006). In July of 2014, over 100 religious clergy, theologians, and faith leaders sent a letter to President Obama urging him not to include religious exemptions in an executive order prohibiting federal contractors

from using hiring policies that discriminate against LGBT persons. Those religious leaders stressed that it is unjust for any person or corporation to use their religious beliefs to trample the rights and beliefs of others and stipulated that such actions run contrary to the "Golden Rule" articulated in every world religion.

Grzymala-Busse (2012) argues that religion has had clear and significant impacts in several domains of politics. These include voting and political behavior; as institutional players, lobbyists, and coalition partners; in the origins of institutions and the long-term outcomes through specific ideas and norms regarding appropriate institutional solutions; on attitudes toward and policies of social welfare; and through the influence of regime type and durability by legitimizing and lending support to secular regimes, or conversely, withdrawing that support and opposing particular secular incumbents and governing structures. These domains demonstrate that "organized religion and the secular state are in constant interaction, if not conflict" (Grzymala-Busse, p. 433). Religious loyalties continue to structure political thought and action because, as suggested by Grzymala-Busse, once religion is introduced into politics, it becomes very difficult to disinvite it. In 1991, Demerath described the presence and impact of religion in politics and policy development and this perception is as relevant today. According to Demerath, "Not only do its absolutist criteria clash with the politics of compromise, but religion tends to be emotionally 'hot and accompanied by its own experts who are frequently difficult to control ... very few state officials relish publicly opposing religious considerations once they have been activated" (p. 30). The comingling of religion and politics regarding policies on LGBT persons has proven to be a battle between individual freedom and personal choice and imposition of mandated doctrines and narrow interpretations of the Bible for everyone (Americans United for Separation of Church and State, n.d.).

## Summary

Religion and spirituality are related but distinct entities. A person can be spiritual without being religious. Many LGBT persons identify as spiritual, defining it as their connection to the world and their place in it. LGBT elders are involved with religion and spirituality in different ways and at various levels. There seems to be reciprocity between the way in which religion influences sexual identity and the way in which LGBT persons engage in worship practices.

Some religions have used scripture and religious writings to justify the marginalization and oppression of LGBT persons. Conservative religious leaders continue to pronounce sexual minorities and sinners and immoral persons and to oppose LGBT rights across social, economic, employment, and religious spectrums. They hold this stance even in light of more accepting attitudes of the general public toward LGBT persons. Opponents of anti-LGBT views of some religious leaders and faith communities is that these leaders and communities are holding to scripture of the Old Testament and not to gospel, which is more applicable to modern times. Moreover, opponents believe that religious documents were written at a time when those who penned the scripture could not envision the world of modern times.

In summary, many faith communities have taken increasingly favorable and supportive stances on the issues that affect LGBT persons. In addition, many faith communities exhibit clearly supportive and welcoming environments for LGBT persons. It is difficult to say if and when the anti-LGBT sentiment of many religious leaders and faith communities will be resolved. However, it is feasible to suggest that the religious leaders take the stance espoused by Dreyer (2008b): making the church whole by “bringing together in on created humanity the people that the church has so often separated and polarized ... heterosexuals form sexual minorities, glorifying the one pole and demonizing or demeaning the other” (p. 1251).

## Learning Exercises

### Self-check Questions

1. What is the difference between religion and spirituality?
2. What was the response of faith communities to LGBT elders during the era in which they grew up?
3. How prepared are religious leaders to address concerns of LGBT members in their congregations?
4. What are the characteristics of Christian Fundamentalist dogma?
5. How many times is homosexuality discussed in the Christian Bible?

### Field-based Experiential Assignments

1. Develop a presentation in which you defend the rights of LGBT persons to be equally recognized and supported in faith communities.
2. Interview religious leaders on their knowledge of LGBT issues and how qualified they believe they are to provide pastoral care to LGBT elders.
3. Select a denomination and volunteer to review and modify/update their policies on LGBT members in the church and/or develop a resource directory of available service.

### Multiple-choice Questions

1. Which historical figure determined that same-sex intimacy was against nature and a crime?
  - (a) Moses
  - (b) Jesus
  - (c) King Solomon
  - (d) Emperor Justinian
2. Which of the following books of the Bible does not mention homosexuality?

- (a) Mark  
(b) Romans  
(c) Genesis  
(d) Leviticus
3. Which of the following is a postmodern view of sexuality?
- (a) Homogeneous  
(b) Bi-modal  
(c) Heterogeneous  
(d) Moralistic
4. Which of the following context was sexual diversity not considered by writers of the Bible?
- (a) Behavioral  
(b) Ceremonial  
(c) Cultural  
(d) Marriage
5. Negative religious attitudes about sexual minorities can lead to which of the following in LGBT persons?
- (a) Depression  
(b) Low self-esteem  
(c) Feelings of worthlessness  
(d) All of the above  
(e) None of the above
6. In Rose's study, how do LGBT elders rate their faith community?
- (a) Tolerant and guarded  
(b) Source of strength and supportive  
(c) Intolerant and dismissive  
(d) Supportive and judgmental
7. Which of the following is true of LGBT persons' religious identity?
- (a) Less religious than non-LGBT persons  
(b) More likely to identify as non-religious  
(c) Equally religious as non-LGBT persons  
(d) Both a and b  
(e) None of the above
8. Which of the following is an ethical requirement for therapist, but religious leaders may find more difficult when working with LGBT persons?
- (a) Non-judgmental and not impose beliefs  
(b) Impose beliefs and suggest conversion treatment  
(c) Non-judgmental and promote the views of the faith community  
(d) Assist LGBT persons to understand how their behavior is sinful
9. Which of the following should be given consideration when looking at religious issues for LGBT persons?
- (a) Issues are consistently the same for LGBT persons  
(b) Transgender issues may be different and require different approaches  
(c) Gay men are discriminated against more in faith communities  
(d) Lesbians are readily accepted in faith communities
10. Which of the following do LGBT elders report about their social support network?
- (a) Gets larger as they age  
(b) Remains unchanged  
(c) Includes more younger people looking mentors  
(d) Gets smaller as they age

**Key**

- 1-d  
2-a  
3-c  
4-c  
5-d  
6-b  
7-d  
8-a  
9-b  
10-d

## Resources

- A Wider Path: Spiritual Experiences of LGBT Seniors (film): <http://youtu.be/ESQzndjLre0>
- Gay Buddhist Sangha: [www.gaybuddhistsangha.org](http://www.gaybuddhistsangha.org)
- Gay Christian Network: [www.gaychristian.net](http://www.gaychristian.net)
- Gay Church: [www.gaychurch.org/](http://www.gaychurch.org/)
- Imaan (Muslim): [www.imaan.org.ku](http://www.imaan.org.ku)
- Jewish Gay and Lesbian Group: [www.jglg.org.uk](http://www.jglg.org.uk)
- LGBT Ministries Books & Videos for Education and Discussion: [www.lgbtq/discussion/index.shtml](http://www.lgbtq/discussion/index.shtml)
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- Outreach & Public Witness for LGBTQ Rights: [www.lgbt/witness/index.shtml](http://www.lgbt/witness/index.shtml)
- Sarbat (Sikhs): [www.sarbat.net](http://www.sarbat.net)
- Stringfellow, Roland Rev. (2011). *Amber Hollibaugh—The Role of Congregations in Supporting LGBT Seniors* (film): [vimeo.com/27884144](https://vimeo.com/27884144)
- Unitarian Universalist LGBT History and Facts: [www.lgbtq/history/index.shtml](http://www.lgbtq/history/index.shtml)
- Welcoming and Inclusive Congregations: [www.lgbtq/welcoming/index.shtml](http://www.lgbtq/welcoming/index.shtml)

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