Religion, Spirituality, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Health

Presented by:

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Background

• Increasing number of individuals who identify as spiritual but not religious (SBNR) in the US (Pew, 2015)

• Increase in the number of individuals who identify with traditionally spiritual disciplines (e.g., Yoga).

• Significant number of individuals who have left traditional religious communities due to discrimination experienced because of their “non-heterosexual” sexual orientation.

• Increasing number of Millennials desire to reconcile faith and sexuality but feel excluded from religious organizations (Christian Post)
Background

• Non-heterosexuals in particular who have been emotionally, mentally, and spiritually traumatized, marginalized, and stigmatized by some faith communities.

• Focusing on spirituality can be a superlative means with which to approach uniquely marginalized and “hidden” populations such as racial and sexual minorities.

• Focusing on spirituality can provide adequate, culturally competent, and culturally sensitive professional resources to assist persons struggling to bring into sync their sexuality and spirituality.
Religion, Religiosity, and Sexuality

- What are your religious views regarding sexuality?

- Where do these religious views come from?

- In what ways have these religious views changed or remained the same?

- Why or Why not?
Dictionary Definitions: “Spirituality”

- The quality or fact of being spiritual.
- Incorporeal or immaterial nature.
- Predominantly spiritual character as shown in thought, life, etc.; spiritual tendency or tone.
- Often, spiritualties, property or revenue of the church or of an ecclesiastic in his or her official capacity.

[Circa 1400]
Spirituality has long been dichotomized in our culture and society.

- Married with religion or religious matters
- Ethereal state of existence.

These are un-embodied definitions of spirituality.

Spirituality refers to anything relating to the Great Spiritual Director (God’s Holy Spirit)

*Spirituality refers to the embodied, ubiquitous, holy, authorized and inspirited entity that works in and through all of the universe-seen and unseen.*
Other Definitions: Spirituality

- African American Culture is a sociological construct that identifies the spirituality of a people as the soul (“placeless place”) of the people.

**Black Spirituality**

- Communal
- Participatory
- Embodied
- Socially
- Consciously
- Contemplative

- Relational
- Creative
- Mystical
- Holistic
- Integrative
- Ancestral*

Dictionary Definitions: “Religion”

Set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, esp. when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Specific fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a number of persons or sects: the Christian religion; the Buddhist religion.

Body of persons adhering to a particular set of beliefs and practices: a world council of religions.

Life or state of a monk, nun, etc.: to enter religion.

the practice of religious beliefs; ritual observance of faith.

[Circa 1200]
Dictionary Definitions: “Morality”

- Conformity to the rules of right conduct; moral or virtuous conduct.
- Moral quality or character.
- Virtue in sexual matters; chastity.
- Doctrine or system of morals.
Dictionary Definitions: “Sexuality”

Sexual character; possession of the structural and functional traits of sex.
Recognition of or emphasis upon sexual matters.
Involvement in sexual activity.
An organism's preparedness for engaging in sexual activity.
[Origin: 1790–1800]

Bisexual(ity) -1824 : possessing characters of both sexes:
HERMAPHRODITIC

Homosexual(ity) -1892 : of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward another of the same sex

Heterosexual(ity) -1892 : of, relating to, or characterized by a tendency to direct sexual desire toward the opposite sex
Spirituality and sexuality are intricately connected, infinitely complex, and both are gifts from God. Take a few minutes to answer the following questions; write down the first thing that comes to mind:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Spirituality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A good sexual experience sounds like:</td>
<td>A good spiritual experience sounds like:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good sexual experience smells like:</td>
<td>A good spiritual experience smells like:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good sexual experience tastes like:</td>
<td>A good spiritual experience tastes like:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good sexual experience feels like:</td>
<td>A good spiritual experience feels like:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A good sexual experience looks like:</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Understanding Sexual Identity Expression

• [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtYuUL3OdUY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtYuUL3OdUY)
Understanding Sexual Identity Expression

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Sexual_identity_symbols
Terms to Avoid

- Homosexual: See gay, lesbian
- Sexual preference: See sexual orientation.
- Transgendered/A transgender/Tranny: See transgender.
- Sex change: See gender affirmation surgery.
Factors that determine health

- Genes and Biology, 10%
- Physical Environment, 10%
- Clinical Care, 10%
- Health Behaviors, 30%
- Social and Economic Factors, 40%

Social Determinants of Health

External environments and conditions that contribute to health or lack of health.
Health Equity

Attainment of the highest level of health possible for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health disparities and health care disparities.
Health Inequity

**Health Inequity**—Differences in health status between more and less socially and economically advantaged groups, caused by *systematic* differences in social conditions and processes that effectively determine health. Health inequities are *avoidable*, *unjust*, and therefore *actionable*. 
Advancing Health Equity: Achieving Optimal Health for All

• Expand the understanding about what creates health
• Strengthen community capacity to create their own healthy future
• Promote a Health in All Policies approach with health equity as the goal
Expand the understanding about what creates health

**Worldview** – shaped by individual, cultural, and community values, beliefs, and assumptions

**Public Narratives**

**Frames**

**Messages**
Structural inequities

- Structures or systems of society — such as finance, housing, transportation, education, social opportunities, etc. — that are structured in such a way that they benefit one population unfairly (whether intended or not).
Background to Health equity and structural racism:
Background to
Health equity and structural racism:

Structural racism is the normalization of an array of dynamics — historical, cultural, institutional and interpersonal — that routinely advantage white people while producing cumulative and chronic adverse outcomes for people of color and American Indians.
Background to Health equity and structural racism:

- Social Construction of Race
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UZS8Wb4S5k (5:30)

- Equality vs equity video/Structural Effects of Race
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBQx8FmOT_0 (4:19)

- Race and Gerrymandering-How race is tied to neighborhood and privilege
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETR9qrVS17g (6:19)

- Slavery to Mass Incarceration
  - https://eji.org/videos/slavery-to-mass-incarceration (5:50)
Consider What Creates Health

Determinants of Health

- **Necessary conditions for health (WHO)**
  - Peace
  - Shelter
  - Education
  - Food
  - Income
  - Stable eco-system
  - Sustainable resources
  - Mobility
  - Social justice and equity

- Health Behaviors 30%
- Physical Environment 10%
- Clinical Care 10%
- Genes and Biology 10%
- Social and Economic Factors 40%


Spending Mismatch: Health Care and Other Key Determinants of Health

Source: NEHI, 2012
Promote a Health in All Policies approach with health equity as the goal

What is Structural Inequity?

- Systematic or Structural elements of society that benefit one population unfairly.
  - Finance
  - Housing
  - Transportation
  - Education
  - Social Opportunities
  - ETC...

From Minnesota Department of Health Office of Health Statistics, Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota, 2014
Who graduates on time?

4-Year Graduation by Race/Ethnicity
Bloomington 2009-2014

All Students
Asian/Pacific Islander
Black, not of Hispanic origin
Hispanic
Structural Inequity

Education → Employment → Financial Security → Access to Quality School System → Ability to pay high property tax → Education
Structural Inequity

- Lower Education
- Employment
- Financial Security
- Ability to pay high property tax
- Access to Quality School System
Structural Inequity

Unemployment

Financial Security

Ability to pay high property tax

Access to Quality School System

Lower Education
Structural Inequity

- Lower Education
- Access to Quality School System
- Unemployment
- Financial Insecurity
- Inability to pay high property tax
Structural Inequity

- Lack of Access to Quality School System
- Unemployment
- Financial Insecurity
- Inability to pay high property tax
- Lower Education
Structural Inequity

Lower Education → Unemployment → Financial Insecurity → Inability to pay high property tax → Lack of Access to Quality School System → Lower Education

Is this Systematic?
Bloomington Unemployment Rate by Education and Poverty Level

- Unemployment rate: 6.70%
- Less than high school graduate: 15.60%
- Below poverty level: 26.80%

American Community Survey: 2010-2014 (5-year estimates) Employment Status
Bloomington
Overweight by Race/Ethnicity

Overweight or Obese by race/ethnicity
8th, 9th and 11th grades 2013

- White: 18.2%
- African American: 25.8%
- Asian: 17.4%
- Hispanic or Latino: 36.5%

Minnesota Student Survey, 2013

Dark bars differ significantly from White (p<0.05)
Chronic Disease by Income Adults
Bloomington, Edina, Richfield and Eden Prairie

Hennepin County Adult SHAPE, 2010

Dark bars and light bars differ significantly from each other (p<0.05)
What needs to be done

• Achieving health equity and eliminating health disparities requires valuing everyone and making intentional, consistent efforts to address avoidable systematic inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices.
• Religiosity among Black MSM who used crack and cocaine was also associated with higher levels of risky behavior and may increase risk of HIV and STD infection (Klobin, et. al., 2006; Parsons, 2003; Reisner, et. al., 2009; Stall, et. al, 2003).

• Research found that unprotected anal intercourse, (UAI), and polysubstance use, were associated with higher religiosity scores, and lower levels of these risk behaviors were associated with higher spirituality scores (Watkins, et. al, 2015).
Dr. Kelly Brown Douglas captures from Christian ethicist, James Nelson, in her book, *Sexuality and the Black Church*, sexuality is more than who one has sex with.

“Sexuality is a sign, symbol, and the means of our call to communication and communion. This is the most apparent in regard to other human beings and other body-selves. The mystery of our sexuality is the mystery of our need to reach out to embrace others both physically and spiritually...[Sexuality] is who we are as body-selves who experience the emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual need for intimate communion-human and divine.”
Sexuality & the Spirit

“If God wants to relate to the whole person and be known by the whole person, then our sexuality must clearly be part of what we bring to authentic relationship with God. Many Christians cannot accept theoretically that sexuality is positive and is the most important part of nature—thus we can bring into God’s presence.”

Those that shared sexuality and engaged in sexual discussion experienced more authentic and healthy relationships with self and others.

Sexuality & the Spirit

• Sexual stories can affect relationships with God and others as sexual sensations and images occur considerably within one’s prayer life.

• Because one’s prayer life is at the center of spiritual direction, it is pertinent to incorporate one’s spirituality and sexuality into spiritual direction practice, as God can and does speak to us in our sexual selves.*

Sexuality & the Spirit

• Addressing spirituality provides the vehicle to address the whole person—mind, body (sexuality), soul, and emotional self in order to guide an individual towards a deeper and meaningful relationship with God or Higher Power.

• Addressing an individual’s sexuality can also have more positive results and perpetrate a richer and more effective spiritual direction relationship.

• Research has shown nearly ½ of those who discussed their sexuality perceived the discussion as negative; however, those individual’s who shared their sexuality by engaging in sexual discussion and shared their experiences developed stronger, more authentic and healthy relationships with themselves and others. *

Ibid, 22-23.
Conclusion

• Not advocating a sole focus on an individual’s sexual orientation or sexuality.

• Perhaps the lack of discussion of sexuality in health care settings has further exacerbated the over focus on sex and the genesis of negative views of sex and sexuality, namely the castigation and vilification of “non-heterosexual” persons.

• Incorporating a germane discussion on an individual’s sexuality will open up a more authentic, pervasive, and in many cases (especially among persons of color and Millennials) necessary discussion of how one experiences and perceives the Holy Spirit.
WHEN THE HEART and MIND WORK TOGETHER
References


• Medical AIDS Outreach
Questions & Comments