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INTRAPERSONAL CONFLICT BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND HOMOSEXUALITY: THE PERSONAL EFFECTS FACED BY GAY MEN AND LESBIANS

(Konflik intrapersonal di antara kepercayaan Kristian dan homoseksualiti: Kesa personal yang dihadapi oleh lelaki gay dan lesbian)

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ABSTRACT

Potential conflict between Christianity and homosexuality is not considered as a totally new phenomenon. Nonetheless, since scarce is known regarding the matter this might assumed the level of intolerance is still high within most traditional western religion including Christianity. A qualitative study of 10 male and 10 female Christian homosexuals was conducted via in-depth semi-structured interviews. This paper seeks to explore the potential conflict between Christianity and homosexuality faced by the respondents. The result found that the majority, eighty percent (80%), were affected by the conflict, suggesting that both Christianity and homosexuality were important components of their lives. The most common personal effects of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality indentified included depression (68.8%), self-blame/guilt (37.5%), anxiety (31.3%), suicidal ideation (25%) and alienation (25%). Implications and recommendations at three levels are provided to assist those dealing with homosexual people who are affected by the conflict.

Keywords: intrapersonal conflict, homosexuality, gay men, lesbians, Christianity

ABSTRAK

Potensi konflik antara kepercayaan Kristian dan homoseksualiti bukanlah dianggap sebagai satu fenomena yang baru. Oleh kerana sedikit sahaja yang diketahui tentang fenomena ini, boleh dianggap bahawa ramai yang mempunyai tahap tidak toleransi yang tinggi di dalam kebanyakan kepercayaan agama tradisi barat termasuk agama Kristian. Satu kajian kualitatif melalui temubual semi-struktur secara mendalam yang melibatkan 10 orang lelaki dan 10 orang perempuan homoseksual beragama Kristian telah dijalankan. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meneroka potensi konflik antara kepercayaan Kristian dan homoseksualiti yang dihadapi oleh para responden. Keputusan kajian mendapati bahawa majoriti (80%) yang mempunyai kesan konflik, menyarankan bahawa kedua-dua komponen iaitu kepercayaan Kristian dan homoseksualiti adalah penting dalam kehidupan mereka. Kesan personal yang paling umum akibat konflik antara kepercayaan Kristian dan homoseksualiti yang telah dikenalpasti termasuk kemurungan (68,8%), menyalahkan diri-sendiri/rasa bersalah (37,5%), kebimbangan (31,3%), keinginan membunuh diri (25%) dan pengasingan (25%). Implikasi dan saranan pada tiga tahap untuk membantu mereka yang terlibat dengan golongan homoseksual yang terkesan oleh konflik turut diberikan.

Kata kunci: konflik intrapersonal, homosexuality, lelaki gay, lesbian, kepercayaan Kristian

INTRODUCTION

The struggle that homosexual people have to undergo can be overwhelming due to the general position of Christianity with respect to homosexuality. This is due to the stand of most mainstream Christian denominations which still regard homosexuality as sinful (Richards & Bergin, 2000). It may also be related to the fact that many homosexual people have felt that they had to completely renounce their Christian identity when they identified as a homosexual. While renouncing religious faith may offer a solution to conflicts for some homosexuals, there are some people for whom both their sexuality and their religious faith are important facets of their lives. Rodriguez (2010) states, "...the issue of conflict is not just about the clash that can occur between gay and religious identities, but also about the anxiety that arises in a gay or lesbian person experiencing such conflict" (p. 9). The conflict between Christianity and homosexuality often begins in adolescence, the time when most religious traditions try to nurture (and control) emerging sexuality within the context of religious beliefs (Buchanan et al. 2001). Regrettably for homosexual young people, support and nurturance may not be available, thus, making them feel distressed and, therefore, perhaps less able to embrace their sexuality (Barret & Barzan 1996; Barret & Logan 2002).

In an effort to understand gay men and lesbians more fully their religious and spiritual lives cannot be denied. A better understanding of the potential conflict needs to be obtained in order to provide support to gay men and lesbians who have experienced, or are currently experiencing, conflict in daily life between their Christianity and their homosexuality. Although experiences are unique to individuals and their surroundings, understanding the means by which others have confronted such conflicts would be beneficial in guiding those who are dealing with the burden of such conflict. Most individuals are raised with some form of religious and spiritual upbringing. For example, based to the 2001 Australian Population Census, 72.8% of the population identified themselves as having some kind of religious affiliation (Australia Bureau of Statistics 2006). As a result, for those who uphold their religious identity dearly sometimes it is more realistic to consider changing their sexual orientation than abandoning their religion. 'Conversion Therapy' is the strategy used in effort to change sexual orientation (Haldeman 2004). However, the success of such therapy is still debatable (Herek 2003; Worthington 2004). One may also commit to celibacy or sexual abstinence as means of rejecting homosexual identity. This is because as long as the individual is not engaging in any homosexual behaviour, some Christian denominations would not label them as homosexuals (Thumma 1991). Nonetheless, often those who have had bad experience with the church or felt rejected by God may detach themselves from their religious identity. The two means by which Christians typically detach themselves from their religious identity are by becoming atheist or by becoming involved in a non-Christian religion that does not uphold negative views about homosexual and homosexuality (Ellison 1993). If none of the alternatives are able to produce an acceptable outcome (to the individual), resulting in extreme circumstances of high pressures and stress, a GLBTI individual may contemplate or even attempt suicide. There has been evidence linking suicide and homosexual people reporting depression (Kourany 1987; Kulkin et al. 2000; Skeg et al. 2003).

Psychologists and other mental health professionals often still have limited knowledge and expertise on the subject of homosexual people (Garnets et al., 1991; Philip 2000), especially concerning the conflict between sexual and religious orientation (Haldeman, 1996 2004). Moreover, there is a likelihood that this group of professionals still experience and portray feelings and attitudes that are heterosexist and sometimes homophobic (Bieschke et al. 2000; Garnets et al. 1991). In discussing the spiritual experiences of gay men and lesbians, Barret and Barzan (1996) argued for greater concern for these individuals from counsellors and all who are attached to the helping professions. They encouraged practitioners to try to help gay men and lesbians to be “open to [the idea that] potentials for spiritual lives that exist for all can lead to a stronger personal foundation in sexual orientation and a kind of spirituality that will inspire and inform them through life’s challenges” (p. 10).

The purpose of this article is to explore the most common personal effect that respondent’s experienced while dealing with the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. At the same time, this paper focuses on the implications and recommendations to professionals dealing with homosexual people affected by the conflict are provided.

METHOD

This research study comprised of 20 homosexual respondents consisting of 10 male and 10 female respondents living in the Brisbane City area and surrounding suburbs. At the time of interview the respondents’ ages ranged from 20 to 51 years (mean age 36.5 years old). The majority of respondents had a high level of education with 18 respondents having completed tertiary degrees (8 males and 10 females). Of the remaining 2 respondents, both male, one possessed a secondary education background while the other possessed a primary education background. Twelve respondents identified as having partners (5 males and 7 females), while the other 8 (5 males and 3 females) remained single. Of those with partners, 7 (1 male and 6 females) were living together with their partner. At the time of interview, five respondents came from divorced families. All respondents had sibling except one.

Respondents were recruited on a voluntary basis. Announcement of the study was made through flyers, a local gay radio network and direct contact with organizations that cater for gays and lesbians socially or religiously. All respondents participated in two in-depth interviews. At the start of the first interview session respondents were briefed about the purpose of the study. Respondents were informed of their rights to confidentiality, anonymity and to withdraw from the research at any point prior to or during the study. If respondents decided to withdraw after commencing interviews, any information that had already been collected would be destroyed. Respondents were also given the chance to ask questions to clarify any ambiguity regarding the study. Upon agreement to participate, a written informed consent was obtained from each respondent.

The interview session lasted approximately one hour for each respondent with a one-week interval between the two sessions. The interview structure was chosen due to the sensitivity of the issues being discussed. At the same time, the researcher believed that in order to get sufficient depth in respondents’ descriptions of their experiences, engagement in more than a

single one hour session with respondents were required (Polkinghorne, 2005; Seidman, 1991). The first interview focused on the respondents' backgrounds and their perception of their sexual identity. Simultaneously, it also acted as means of building up a strong rapport with the respondents in preparing them for the more intense discussions in the second interview. The second interview focused on the respondents' religious/spiritual development while at the same time exploring the conflict they faced between the interweaving issues of Christianity and homosexuality. Here respondents' ability to be resilient in times of adversity was also being sougheed out. The interviews were audio recorded using a digital recorder. The small size of the recorder reduced the level of distraction and the recorded audio files were transferred directly to computer for data analysis.

The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Boyatzis (1998). Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting themes within findings. Thematic analysis is essentially a method independent of theory and epistemology and can be applied across various theoretical and epistemological approaches. As thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and discourse analysis, it offers more accessibility for novice researchers (Braun & Clarke 2006). For the purpose of this research paper the analysis used was inductive using the six phases step by step guide provided by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) familiarizing yourself with your data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes and (6) producing the report. This means that by using open-ended interview questions, themes were allowed to emerge without pre-supposing in advance what the important themes would be. In this way, patterns were identified and investigated, assisting the inquirer to understand and make meaning of the data (Patton, 2002). This analysis concentrated on exploring the respondents' self perceptions about being gay and examining their sexual identity development and possible contributing factors towards the overall development process.

RESULTS

The research study found four respondents (20%) of which all female did not experience any conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. Two main reasons that accounted for respondents not experiencing conflict were either because they had already abandoned Christianity before they came out as a lesbian or they had continued identifying as Christian but were not practicing and, therefore, not in contact with particular faith communities.

Distinct from the 20 percent that were unaffected by the conflict, most of the respondents (80%) faced conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. This findings relating to the experiences that the respondents shared regarding the conflict that they have faced or are still facing are divided into two: (1) intrapersonal conflict and (2) interpersonal conflict.

a) Intrapersonal conflict

Intrapersonal conflict occurred within the individual. Although each of the respondents who experienced conflict have their own unique journey, most of them identified the same underlying reasons for the intrapersonal conflicts they experienced, that is, they believed that Christianity condemns homosexuality and considers it to be sinful. Bobby started off involuntarily as a male

prostitute. When he stopped working as a male prostitute he actively made the choice of living a gay lifestyle. His conflict began when he realized that Christianity condemns homosexuality. This realization promoted conflict within him and was also the starting point in a long journey towards attempting change in his life:

“It was hard in a way. I knew I couldn't change God. God doesn't change. He's the same. So I knew I had to change but I just didn't know how. That was the wrestle. I would pray to change. I had people pray for me to change. I prayed to heart. And then I would get disillusioned and I would become weary from the battle. And I would go back out in frustration thinking that I can't do it, it's impossible. Then I would be up in the lifestyle, living the same lifestyle and then in time the pull towards God again began”.

b) Interpersonal Conflict

Interpersonal conflict occurred when the conflict it involved significant others around them (e.g., family, friends or church community). For some respondents their conflict between Christianity and homosexuality escalated when it became interpersonal. After a powerful encounter with God Wynona began a journey of active membership in the church, “I guess God knows how he can touch your heart and get hold of you when he wants to”. For the next 6 years she devoted herself to doing God's work. Like others who have had experience of being active in a church, Wynona tried to suppress her homosexuality by prayer and participating in “deliverance ministry”. However, when Wynona later wanted to build a relationship with a woman the conflict was amplified because her intention was against the teachings of the Christian church that she belonged to at the time:

“I think that is when the conflict really started to manifest because in those 6 years I wasn't in a relationship in Perth, you see... I wasn't really confronted with it. I was so involved with church and being busy with that, that I didn't get involved in relationship”.

Besides the few cases mentioned above, it is also wise to acknowledge that some of the experiences also interweaved with the issue of respondents' process of coming out to own-self and others. For example, Jules only came out to himself as a gay man in his adulthood because perhaps subconsciously he wanted to deny his homosexuality. By admitting to be gay he would automatically be seen as opposing the strict Christian upbringing imposed by his very religious mother:

“... I tried very hard not to come to terms with my sexuality but to deal with my sexuality. I didn't want to be gay. I tried everything possible not to be gay because to be gay was to be a bad thing [according to his religious believes]”.

This interweaving issue, whether occurring directly or indirectly, would add to the complexity of the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. Overall the conflict experienced by these respondents came in various forms and differed from one respondent to the other. If the conflict was extreme, sometimes respondents had to choose between abandoning their Christian beliefs or their homosexuality.

c) Personal Effects

All respondents, who indicated that they have experienced or are still experiencing conflict, shared their experiences of personal effect of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. The five most common personal effects of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality found in this research were depression (68.8%), self-blame/guilt (37.5%), anxiety (31.3%), suicidal ideation (25%) and alienation (25%) (Figure1). It is important to note that when terms such as ‘depression’ and ‘anxiety’ are used; they represent the words chosen by respondents themselves to describe their experiences. They are not used in the sense of psychological definitions and diagnosis. Further elaboration of the respondents’ personal experiences is presented below.

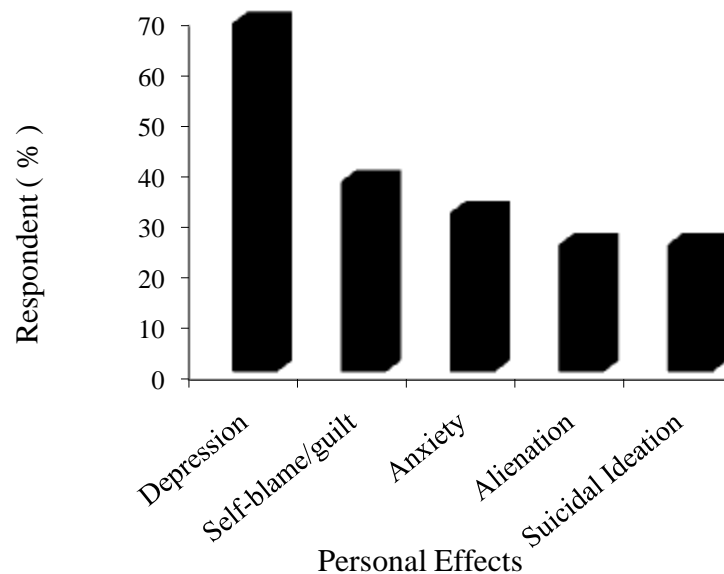


Figure 1: Most commonly reported personal effects of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality as stated by respondents (n=16)

Depression was the most often reported personal effect that was faced by respondents. Eleven of sixteen respondents (68.8%) specifically mentioned it. Some of the respondents mentioned the word or concept only a few times but there were also those who repeated it many times during the interviews. Growing up with firm religious beliefs, Charles found it difficult to handle his coming out experience. In his mind and from the perspective of his religion to have a same-sex attraction was considered sinful and an abomination. To add to Charles’ already difficult situation, his parents’ conservative view on everything including homosexuality made coming to terms with his homosexual identity even more difficult. In hindsight he stated that he was in constant depression at this time, especially when he had to keep the feelings to himself:

“That’s something I experienced basically from the age of fourteen... I would say from the age of fourteen up until the age of nineteen I suffered from severe depression and I didn’t even realize it. Do you know what I mean? I just

thought that this was normal. I thought it was normal to have this sinking feeling in my gut 24 hours a day but it was so much stuff going through my mind eerrmm... yeah”.

Self-blame/guilt was the second most frequent personal effect that respondents reported. Basically self-blame/guilt happened because respondents felt disappointed in their inability to pursue their goal, which was to put aside their same-sex attraction in an effort to seek gratification in God or Christianity. After becoming a born again Christian, Sandra was aware that Christianity viewed homosexuality in a negative light. Therefore, she felt she had to deny her homosexuality, although she had come out as a lesbian before becoming a born again Christian. She tried various ways to suppress her same-sex feelings and attractions. When her efforts were unsuccessful she felt ashamed of herself and blamed herself for her futile actions:

“That leads me down the whole path of shame and disappointment and you know... what’s so bad or what’s so wrong with me that even though I’m praying hard and I’m believing in the Lord and I’m believing in what everyone’s is saying... I’m maintaining a relationship with Christ. What’s so wrong with me that it’s not changing? Why am I so bad or so filthy or so horrible that nothing is happening? And so you really began to point the finger at yourself”

Anxiety was the third most frequent personal effect experienced by respondents. Casey started to feel anxious after she had to redefine her understanding of Catholicism and to move away from the organized structure of the religion. As soon as she distanced herself from organized religion the feeling of anxiousness started to invade her thoughts:

“The anxiety and the depression sort of came after I had moved away from the organized religion. It sort of hit home that my sexuality was not accepted everywhere; not everyone would accept it. After moving out of the church and realizing that, that’s when I sort of became anxious. If I’m not accepted there where I have sort of been part of my whole life, what about everyone else... family, friends...I think from that I sort of think about the ‘what if?’”

Some respondents found themselves alienated because of their identification as homosexual. Once Roger came out to himself as a gay man he wanted to experience a same-sex union, however, the desire conflicted with his Christian beliefs as a member of a Protestant Church. Therefore, he always felt down and at the same time withdrew from socializing with others by alienating himself in his room:

“It was coming from the conflict that I always wanted to go and experience this same-sex union and yet I couldn’t express that in the Protestant Church and said, “Hey! Guess what, I’m sort of having this feeling and this experience,” because the guidelines of that church don’t accept that”.

Suicidal ideation could be regarded as the most extreme of the five personal effects presented. As the findings suggested, usually a person would have suicidal ideation when they feel that all hope is gone. Jules described having suicidal ideation when he was deeply in conflict trying to control his homosexual encounters with anonymous men for sexual pleasure at a time when he was an active member of a church. Therefore, every time after he engaged in a sexual act he would “lock himself up and emotionally and psychologically self-inflict torture” for his misconduct:

“Oh... I’m, never gonna change. I’m trying so hard to change but I never can change. I might as well give up. OK, I think I better kill myself because this is never gonna change.” And so it went from that one incident to being... wanting to suicide”.

Most commonly the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality experienced by the respondents resulted in personal effects including depression, self-blame/guilt, anxiety, alienation and suicidal ideation. These personal effects had affected over three-quarter of the respondents. Commonly these effects were interrelated rather than existing alone.

DISCUSSION

In general, the findings of the present research study found two possible outcomes based on the intersection between Christianity and homosexuality: (1) no occurrence of potential conflict between Christianity and homosexuality and (2) occurrence of potential conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. Four respondents, all females, did not experience conflict between Christianity and homosexuality for two reasons: (1) Christianity had already been abandoned before coming out as a lesbian or (2) respondents were identifying as Christian although not practicing. Conversely, the majority of respondents did experience conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. The figure in the present research study (80%) was much higher than the findings of Schuck and Liddle (2001) who reported 66.7% of their respondents were affected by the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. The higher percentage acquired from the present research study of homosexuals affected by the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality might also be due of Christianity is still regarded as the leading religion in Australia. Regardless of rapid physical development and lifestyle, it may be assumed that the people affected were raised within a mainstream denomination or with some form of Christian tradition. Interestingly, although the level of tolerance among Australian as a whole and among Brisbane residents in particular has reportedly increased within the last few decades the results of the present research study showed otherwise. This high figure may suggest that more homosexual people experience conflict between Christianity and homosexuality than initially anticipated and warrants further investigation.

Generally the conflict happened as soon as the respondents wanted to assimilate both Christianity and homosexuality because they are considered not compatible (McMinn 2005) and that most mainstream Christian denominations still view homosexuality as immoral and opposed to Scripture (Richards & Bergin 2000). The conflict arises if the person comes from a cohesive fairly religious background (Newman & Muzzonigro 1993). Parents’ religiosity is an important factor in assisting the transmission of religiosity, along with the quality of the family relationship

and traditional family structure (Myers 1996). He also argued that parent's religiosity would constantly influence their children's religiosity regardless of age and life course effects. In the present research study, those who remain somewhere in between the continuum of either rejecting Christianity or homosexuality are the ones who wanted to maintain their religiosity. For these respondents, they generally came from families with either parent having a moderate to very religious background. Suggestively, these respondents intention to maintain their Christianity might be from a direct or indirect influence of their parents' religiosity.

A few respondents came from a cohesive fairly religious family background. Thus, their experience of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality was tougher in comparison with others who came from a slightly more lenient Christian background (Newman & Muzzonigro 1993). For the few respondents such as Jules, Wynona and Maria who have religious parents the process of coming out to them as a homosexual was very difficult. There was a lot of anger and resentment from the parents at the time of them coming out. Due to this hostility these respondents had to limit contact or even temporarily sever their relationship with their parents. Basically, for these respondents their parents' religiosity was seen to be influencing their lives well into their adulthood.

The majority of respondents (80%) wanted to maintain both their Christianity and homosexuality. This figure reflects the findings of Mahaffy (1996) on lesbians who found 81.91% of the respondents insisted on maintaining their identification as Christians. Moreover, since both studies had samples comprised of educated respondents it may be assumed that regardless of education level occurrence of conflict is possible; however, the strategies used to cope might differ from those who have low education background. These findings also suggest that both Christianity and homosexuality were important components of the respondents' lives. Therefore, most respondents believed that it was worth the challenge of struggling through the conflict to harmonize both Christianity and homosexuality.

The present research study also found depression (as described by the respondents themselves) to be the most common individual effect of the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. Beside depression, other individual effects described by respondents included self-blame/guilt, anxiety, alienation and suicidal ideation. The experience of conflict was difficult and challenging thus might also leave emotional scars even though it had long happened.

In intense conditions, "when all hope is removed" as narrated by Clark, it could trigger the likelihood of attempting suicide by homosexual people. In the present research study, 25% of respondents experienced signs of suicidal ideation also experienced depression. The link between suicide and depression supports previous studies (e.g., Kourany, 1987; Kulkin et al., 2000; Skegg et al., 2003). Interestingly, only male respondents in the present research study reported suicidal ideation. This finding reflects those of D'Augelli et al. (2001) and Remafedi et al. (1998) who found suicidality to be more prominent in gay men as compared to lesbians.

Although at the time of interviews all of the respondents appeared to have passed the most excruciating stage of the conflict (even though some might have not fully resolved the conflict), some of them have spent more time with the struggle (based on the initial starting point of the conflict, which is typically at the time of coming out to self or others) compared to others. Coming out is considered more as the beginning point of the religious-based conflict rather than

the end awaiting respondents finding a set of religious or spiritual beliefs that matches with their sexual identity (Shuck & Liddle 2001). Some respondents who were in their 40s and early 50s at the time of interviews came out at an early age (10-19 years old) as gay men or lesbians. This means that compared to the younger respondents who were still in their 20s these older respondents might have had a longer experience struggling with the conflict due to the fact that the surrounding environment was much more homophobic than in the last one to two decades (Loftus 2001; Yang 1997).

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY FOR PRACTICE

This article has some implications and recommendations for practice. These implications and recommendations are discussed at three different levels. For counsellors and mental health professionals – who are still considered to have limited knowledge and expertise concerning homosexual people (Garnet et al. 1991; Philip 2000) especially around the area of conflicting issue between Christianity and homosexuality (Haldeman 1996, 2004) – this research study would hopefully be of great benefit. Undeniably also there is likelihood that some members of these groups of professionals still portray feelings and attitudes which are heterosexist and sometime homophobic (Bieschke et al. 2000; Garnet et al. 1992). Therefore it is hoped that this research study will provide insights for those wishing to understand this issue better. Recommendation: A large number of respondents were found affected by the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality, therefore counsellors and mental health professionals need to be more aware of the possibility of incorporating Christianity into the discussion by their GLBTI clients. For counsellors and mental health professional who may be incompetent or uncomfortable to include religion in consultation may need to consider referral for these GLBTI clients.

For church leaders, this research study is expected to convey the arduous struggle for those Christian homosexual people who have to go through conflict between their Christianity and homosexuality. It would be an advantage if church leaders were able to provide a tolerant and safe ambiance within their congregation for those homosexual people who wish to continue having Christianity as a significant part of their lives – which in the case of this research study the majority of respondents attempted to accommodate both their Christianity and homosexuality together. By providing such environment, respondents might feel less alienated within the denomination that they were brought up in. This research study also intends to support opportunities within the church for Christian homosexual people to continue worshipping within their congregation while simultaneously finding means to strengthen their sense of religiosity and spirituality. Recommendation: Church leaders and clergymen need to maintain a nonjudgmental stance when dealing with whatever conflict members in their congregation have to share which may include conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. Church leaders and clergymen also need to be better equipped with the current knowledge on homosexual and homosexuality along with having the skills to handle issues pertaining to homosexual people including conflict between Christianity and homosexuality.

For parents, this research study demonstrates that the support of parents is crucial if they have a loved one who identifies as homosexual. It also reveals that parents who provide a supportive environment and are ready to modify their attitude and beliefs could in fact buffer

their gay or lesbian child from facing the worst forms of conflict between Christianity and homosexuality. This need not mean parents have to change their deeply held beliefs in the importance of Scripture or in particular ways of interpreting it, but rather it suggests changes to their attitudes and behaviour toward their adult children. A recent finding by Veenvliet (2008) on attitudes and judgments toward gay men and lesbians revealed,

... linking higher religious group teaching of “love the sinner, hate the sin” with higher intrinsic religious orientation reveals a more tolerant attitude toward gays and lesbians and a less tolerant attitude toward same-gender sexual behavior. (p.62)

Thus this finding might assist some Christian parents who have strong religious beliefs to find closure in their own struggle between their Christian beliefs and accepting a gay or lesbian child. Recommendation: Parents need to open and understanding of the conflict that their child is experiencing between Christianity and homosexuality while constantly expressing unconditional love.

CONCLUSION

The majority of the respondents faced conflict between Christianity and homosexuality although a few respondents managed to bypass the conflict. Suggestively, there have to be some reasons why Christianity and homosexuality are equally very important and, thus, to live with one without the other would diminish life. The five most common personal effects of the conflict between Christianity and homosexuality identified included depression self-blame/guilt, anxiety, alienation and suicidal ideation. Implications and recommendations at three levels were provided in hope to give more knowledge and insight pertaining to the conflicting issue.

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