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Effects of Age on Spiritual Well-Being and Homonegativity:

Religious Identity and Practices among LGB Persons in Portugal

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Abstract

The present study explored the effects of age on spiritual well-being and internalized homonegativity among Portuguese Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) persons. A set of questionnaires were filled out by 471 LGB participants: the *Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale*; the *Spiritual Well-Being Scale*; and the *Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness and Spirituality*. While most participants had been raised Catholic, only 17% currently belonged to a religious denomination. Participants higher in religious well-being were more likely to have concerns in concealing their sexual identity. Existential well-being was related to higher identity affirmation. Older participants reported better spiritual well-being and lower homonegativity.

1. Introduction

Religion and spirituality play an important role in the lives of many people. According to a Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2005), 79% of Europeans have some sort of religious and spiritual beliefs; a decline in church attendance and membership has been witnessed, and there has been a diversification of religious denominations in Europe, namely due to migration (Islam; Hinduism). The same survey indicated that, in Portugal, 93% of citizens have some kind of religious or spiritual beliefs, either in a God (81%) or in some sort of spirit or life source (12%); while only 6% of Portuguese individuals reported that they have no belief in any sort of spirit, God or life source. Of all religious denominations, Catholicism is clearly the one that represents the largest religious group (84.5%), consistent with Portuguese history.

Psychological research tends to demonstrate a positive relationship between religiosity, spirituality and physical and mental health (Koenig, 2004; Mueller, Plevak & Rummans, 2001). This includes, for example, increased psychological well-being (Levin, Markides & Ray, 1996), lower suicide rates (Corrêa, Moreira-Almeida, Menezes *et al.*, 2010), reduction in depressive symptomatology (Ellison, 1995), and stronger social support systems and coping strategies when dealing with stress and illness, including terminal illness (Averson, 2006; Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Corey, 2006; Corrêa, *et al.*, 2010; Curlin, Lawrence, Odell *et al.*, 2007; Hill, Pargament, Hood *et al.* 2000; Koenig, 2004, 2009; Mueller *et al.*, 2001; Nelson, 2009). Although this may be true for most of the population, it may not be the case for specific groups. Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) individuals and their relationships and families tend to be stigmatized and oppressed by most Western religions (Haldeman, 1996). Simultaneously, common discourse perpetuates the perception that LGB

persons are not as religious as their heterosexual peers, and that LGB sexual orientations and a religious identity are incompatible. Therefore, the positive relationship between spirituality and religion, and mental health and psychological well-being may be less clear among LGB persons (Lease, Horne & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

1.1 Definitions of Religiosity and Spirituality

The terms religion and spirituality can be confused with each other. For some people these terms have the same meaning or are overlapping concepts, while for others they are vastly different (Anandarajah, 2008; Hill *et al.*, 2000; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Hodge, Bonifas & Chou, 2010; Nelson, 2009). Therefore, simplistic distinctions should be avoided and definitions that focus on only one aspect of religion or spirituality may be inadequate (Nelson, 2009). The word “religion” comes from Latin *religio* which literally means “to tie or bind” (Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006). Throughout literature, religion has been conceptualized as an institutionalized and organized system of beliefs, practices and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to a divine and higher power (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Corrêa, *et al.*, 2010; Koenig, Georg, Titus & Meador, 2004; Hodge *et al.*, 2010; Mueller *et al.*, 2001; Nelson, 2009; Swinton 2003). In general, definitions of religion emphasize the worship and rituals towards a God, gods or higher power, and their relationship with community activities that bind or tie people together (Koenig *et al.*, 2004; Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006; Smith, 2007). On the other hand, “spirituality” comes from Latin *spiritus*, meaning “to breathe” (Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006). Spirituality has been related to the pursuit for understanding life’s ultimate questions and the meaning and purpose of life (Chally & Carlson, 2004; Koenig *et al.*, 2004). It can be described as more individual than religiosity, since it may or may not lead to participation in a community, and quite sometimes people define their own rules and values to accomplish (Koenig, 2009).

This distinction between religion and spirituality also makes sense when we talk about LGB people (Jeffries, Dodge & Sandfort, 2008; Halkitis, Mattis, Schadath *et al.*, 2009). Halkitis and colleagues (2009) collected definitions of religion and spirituality in a large sample of LGB and transgender participants. In their definitions of religion, participants focused on structured, communal forms of worship, beliefs in and relationship with God, as well as on prescribed, rule-based patterns of devotional practice. On the other hand, respondents equated spirituality with a quest to define a moral frame and to live in accordance to it, as well as a quest to achieve insight and wisdom (Halkitis *et al.*, 2009).

1.2 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identities

LGB people face the challenge of developing a positive identity against a background of social stigma and discrimination. Different models of LGB identity development have been proposed (eg, Cass, 1979, 1984; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), usually conceptualized in stages or phases. Earlier stages of LGB identity development may be related to more negative feelings, such as guilt, and later stages to greater psychological well-being and to the integration of sexual identity with other facets of identity (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). It should be noted that stage identity models are viewed as problematic by some theorists. It has been pointed out that they pose a risk of becoming prescriptive and not descriptive of a psychological (and social) phenomenon (Rust, 2003). Queer theory in particular (Jagose, 1996) does not align with identity categories and assigns these models to an essentialist perspective. In fact, LGB identity can differ across contexts and developmental phases (Diamont, 2005), and some people may perceive the labels used to describe sexual orientation as not descriptive of their experiences (Russel, Clarke & Clary, 2009). In response to these criticisms, LGB identity is now conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon and research aimed to assess it has been centered in a set of different variables, such as

internalized homonegativity, sexual orientation concealment, acceptance, or perception of anti-LGB bias among heterosexuals (Mohr & Kendra, 2011).

1.3 Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People, Religion and Spirituality

Contrary to common belief, research shows that LGB persons are not devoid of religiosity and spirituality (Tan, 2005; García, Gray-Stanley & Ramirez-Valles, 2007; Ridge, Williams, Anderson & Elford, 2007; Jeffries, Dodge & Sandfort, 2008; Cutts & Parks, 2009; Halkitis *et al.*, 2009). Nonetheless, there are specific stressors that LGB persons face in their religious communities (Jeffries *et al.*, 2008) that can, at times, potentially undermine their well-being (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Gage Davidson, 2000; Ridge *et al.*, 2007). What can be specific for LGB persons is the experience of a conflict between their sexual minority identity and their religious or spiritual identity (García *et al.*, 2007). Conflicts over a specific faith and sexual orientation have been associated with increased shame, depression, suicidal ideation, and difficulty accepting an LGB sexual orientation (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

These conflicts may be felt more severely in younger people: adolescence is described by some LGB persons as a difficult and conflictive period, in part due to the rejection from their churches (García *et al.*, 2008). At the same time, older LGB people tend to be members of religious denominations more frequently (Halkitis *et al.*, 2009) and are more likely to have a faith in a spiritual force (Henrickson, 2007). Resolving the struggle between one's personal religious beliefs and his/her LGB identity usually does not happen at a glance: it's a process that may involve different phases, sometimes for a lifetime (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000), and with different possible outcomes (García *et al.*, 2008). This process is affected by personal and contextual factors (Levy & Reeves, 2011). For example, the ability to derive religious attitudes critically and independently, in particular in the use of the self (instead of others) as a religious authority, may be associated with less negative feelings about being LGB (Harris,

Cook & Kashubeck-West, 2007). At the same time, family support or its degree of involvement with religion can also be crucial (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; Henrickson, 2007).

Despite the possible conflict between one's religion and sexual minority identity, some LGB individuals remain religious and continue participating in services regularly, but are not openly LGB with their religious peers (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000; García *et al.*, 2008). Jeffries and colleagues (2008) found that some LGB persons are welcome in their religious communities, but are expected not to make their sexual orientation explicit, in a sort of "don't ask, don't tell" implicit policy. If for some LGB persons this compartmentalization of identity components is routinized and unproblematic, for others this situation represents the maintenance of a conflict and has psychological costs (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000). An alternative pathway is to abandon the religion of origin and join other religions or denominations that are perceived as more LGB friendly (García *et al.*, 2008). Positive or affirming faith group experiences are related to psychological health through a lesser endorsement of internalized homonegativity and higher spirituality (Lease, Horne & Noffsinger-Frazier, 2005).

Several LGB persons are able to take what they need from religion, leaving behind what is perceived as threatening to identity and well-being (Ridge *et al.*, 2008). This can result in a decreased involvement with religion (Henrickson, 2007), or in an increased engagement in more private religious practices (Cutts & Parks, 2009). Ultimately, a possible outcome of the conflict between sexual minority identity and religious identity is the abandonment of any form of organized religion (García *et al.*, 2008). For some of these persons, spirituality can emerge as a central and meaningful narrative (Ridge *et al.*, 2008). As pointed out by Halkitis and colleagues (2009), «the term "spirituality" may serve as a line of demarcation between formal, institutionalized beliefs and practices that reinforce bias (i.e., religion), and more subjectively meaningful beliefs and practices that affirm LGBT

individuals' sense of worth and connectedness to others» (p. 260). Tan (2005) found that existential well-being (or sense of life purpose and satisfaction) is negatively related to depression among LGB individuals, and is a significant predictor of higher self-esteem, lower internalized homonegativity and feeling less alienated. Spirituality may be used by LGB people to cope with sexuality discomfort, life adversity and even with the condemnation from some religions (Jeffries *et al.*, 2008).

1.4 Present Study

Historically, the literature that addresses the struggles of LGB persons of faith to reconcile their faith with their minority sexual orientation tends to come from an Anglo-Saxon perspective (Henrickson, 2007). The present study was designed to approach the relationship between LGB identity and religion/spirituality in Portugal, a South-Western European country with strong Catholic routes. The specific research questions were the following: (1) Which are the main religious/spiritual practices and beliefs among LGB Portuguese people? (2) How do these practices and beliefs relate to sexual minority identity? (3) What are the levels of religious/spiritual well-being among LGB Portuguese people, and how do these levels relate to religious practices and beliefs, and to sexual minority identity? (4) What is the effect of age on religious/spiritual well-being and sexual minority identity?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The sample for this study included 471 adults. Overall, 48.4% (n=227) of the respondents were female and 51.6% (n=242) were male. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 years to 76 years, with the mean age of 30.86 years (SD=11.19). Age was distributed as follows: 42.4% of respondents were aged from 18 to 25 years old (n=199); 25.6% were aged between 26 and 35 years old (n=120); the participants with 36 to 45 years old

represented 20.7% (n=97) of the sample; and finally 11.3% were aged between 46 to 76 years old (n=53). The majority of the participants were of Portuguese origin (n= 455; 97.0%) and the remaining 3.0% represented migrants and ethnic minorities. More than two-thirds of the sample reported being single (70.6%), followed by 14.2% of respondents reporting living in civil union. Remaining participants were nearly equally distributed between three groups - being married (since same-sex civil marriage was legally approved in 2010), divorced/separated, or dating. When asked about their educational attainment, almost 50% of the respondents reported having at least 12th grade, and more than 45% reported having a college education (a bachelor 34.2%; a master's degree 10% or a PhD 4%). Almost 60% of the respondents were employed (either full- or part-time) and 43.7% were studying. When asked about their sexual orientation, almost half of the participants identified themselves as Gay, 32.1% as Lesbian and 19.5% as Bisexual. Finally and according to the Kinsey Scale (Kinsey, Pomeroy & Martin, 1948), more than 50% of the participants reported being exclusively homosexual, while almost 31% defined themselves as predominantly homosexual. To be precise "Predominantly homosexual, only incidentally heterosexual" represented 26.5% and "Predominantly homosexual, but more than incidentally heterosexual" composed only 4.2% of the reports. A summary of demographic information is provided in Table 1.

 Insert Table 1

2.2 Instrument

2.2.1 Demographic form: The first part of the survey consisted of a demographic form, where participants were asked to provide their personal information, including age, gender, sexual behavior and orientation, nationality, relationship status, education,

employment. The information collected allowed participants to remain anonymous and maintain confidential and voluntary participation, in accordance with the Code of Ethics of the Association of Portuguese Psychologists (OPP, 2011) and American Psychological Association standards (APA, 2002).

2.2.2 Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS): The LGBIS (Mohr & Kendra, 2011) is a revision and extension of the Lesbian and Gay Identity Scale LGIS, developed by Mohr and Fassinger in 2000. The LGBIS is a 27-item questionnaire, where participants are asked to indicate their experience as an LGB person using a 6-point rating scale, from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree). This scale was designed to assess 8 dimensions of LGB identity that have been discussed in the clinical and theoretical literature: acceptance concerns, concealment motivation, identity uncertainty, internalized homonegativity, difficulty with the identity development process, identity superiority, identity affirmation, and identity centrality (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). Two studies (test-retest) developed by Mohr and Kendra (2011) have indicated a moderate to high degree of stability of the LGBIS subscale scores over a 6-week period, with a correlation coefficients ranging from .70 to .92. Chronbach's alpha scores also indicated a moderate to high levels of internal consistency (reliability from .72 to .94, for different subscales), supporting its psychometric qualities. In the present study, these qualities were confirmed (Cronbach alpha from 0.78 to 0.85, with the exception of Identity Superiority at 0.61).

2.2.3 Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS): This measure was developed by Paloutzian and Ellison in 1982, and it is one of the pioneer and most used instruments in the field of spirituality and religion, aiming to assess spiritual well-being (Ellison, 1983; Hill & Pargament, 2003; Marques, Sarriera & Dell'Aglio, 2009). The SWBS is a 20-item instrument organized into two subscales: (i) religious well-being (RWB), which involves a *vertical relation* or well-being in connection to God (e.g. "*I have a significant personal relationship*

with God"); and (ii) existential well-being (EWB) or a *horizontal relation* with respect to non-theistic qualities, such as sense of life purpose and satisfaction (e.g. "*I believe there is a true purpose for my life*") (McCarthy, 2008; Nelson, 2009). Each subscale consists of 10 statements that the individual rates on a 6-point scale ranging also from 1 (strongly agree) to 6 (strongly disagree).

Regarding its psychometric properties, previous studies reported high internal consistency (coefficient alpha = .78 to .94), construct validity and two-factor structure of the scale with the coefficient alpha between .82 – .94 for RWB and .78 - .86 for EWB (Iman, Abdul Karim, Jusoh & Mamad, 2009; Marques, et al, 2009; McCarthy, 2008). It was also found that the SWBS is highly correlated with other variables, such as loneliness, self-confidence, intrinsic religious orientation, and sense of purpose in life, supporting its construct validity (McCarthy, 2008). In our study, we also found high internal consistency for both sub-scales (0.94 for RWB and 0.87 for EWB).

2.2.4 Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness and Spirituality for use in health research (*MMRS*): This instrument is a report-survey developed in 1999, by a Fetzer Institute and National Institute on Aging [FI/NIA] working group. Since its first publication, it has become one of the most comprehensive scales, aiming to measure specific domains focusing on a particular aspect of religiousness/spirituality, along with reviews of underlying theory and supporting research (FI/NIA, 1999; Rippentropa, Altmaierb, Chena, Founda & Keffala, 2005). The long version of this report consists of 12 domains and 128 questions; and the brief measure is comprised of short forms from 11 of the 12 domains and a total of 38 items. For the present study 8 items were used: 4 items of Brief Religious History Form, 2 regarding private and public religious practices, and the 2 items of Overall Self-Ranking: "*To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person?*" and "*To what extent do you*

consider yourself a spiritual person?" This instrument has demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties in a general population.

2.3 Procedure

The work team and co-authors of this study prepared the translation and adaptation of the English version of the instruments into Portuguese using the forward translation method and taking into account the expertise areas of each member. The final version of the Portuguese questionnaires was achieved by reaching a consensus about each translated item through group discussion. A backward translation was then asked to an English-speaking independent person (American citizen, resident in Portugal), and minor adjustments were made to the final form of the items.

The questionnaire administration occurred in two distinct phases: online and paper-and-pencil data collection. In the 1st phase (online), the questionnaire was made available to the individuals interested in participating through dissemination in the major national LGBT associations and followed a snow-ball sampling strategy. The announcement described the study and directed the participants to the informed-consent webpage and online questionnaire. The online version was available from June to August, 2011. A total of 396 online participants were involved in this data collection phase. The 2nd phase (paper-and-pencil administration) occurred on June 25th, 2011, during the Lisbon Pride Events week, with a total of 81 participants. In both phases of data collection, participants were informed that the participation was anonymous and voluntary; no identification information was collected on the questionnaire and finally the participants were not paid any monetary reward for their participation in this study (APA, 2002; OPP, 2011).

3. Results

Participants reported mostly that they did not currently identify with any religious denomination (n = 385; 82.8%). Those who did identify religiously were mainly Catholic (65%), but also indicated other religions such as Buddhism and other Christian Churches, among others (e.g. Kabbalah; Wiccan). Independent of religious identifications, only 9.4% of participants (n=39) stated that they attended public religious practices more than “none at all” or “rarely”. Private religious practices, such as prayer or meditation, were more frequently reported (n=99; 22.5%). Regarding religious history, almost 80% (n=362) of the respondents reported that they had been raised in a religious tradition, among which nearly 70% (n=317) indicated Catholicism as the main religion. For those who had experienced a religious change, currently they considered themselves to be mostly agnostic or atheist (25%); or to be spiritual, but not religious (3.6%); to have or live a personal belief (2.5%); or reported “no religion” (2.3%). When inquired “*To what extent do you consider yourself a: religious or spiritual person?*”, fifty three percent (n=250) of the participants claimed not to be religious “at all”, while only 15.5% (n=73) indicated not being spiritual “at all”. The summary of the religious history of participants is available in Table 2.

 Insert Table 2

Findings on spiritual well-being revealed that the existential well-being scores were somewhat higher than those of religious well-being (see Table 3). Overall, on a range 1-6, participants reported a positive evaluation of their existential well-being (M = 4.33), and a lower evaluation of their religious well-being (M = 2.85). With regards to sexual minority identity, participants reported higher levels of Identity Affirmation (M = 4.64) and Identity Centrality (M = 4.00). Moderate levels of Acceptance Concerns (M = 3.06) and Concealment

Motivation ($M = 3.47$) were also found, whereas the values for Identity Uncertainty ($M = 1.70$), Identity Superiority ($M = 1.60$) and Internalized Homonegativity ($M = 1.73$) were the lowest of the subscales.

 Insert Table 3

In table 3, the association between spiritual well-being and sexual minority identity can also be explored. Participants with higher religious well-being (that is, stronger connection to God) reported significantly higher concealment motivation ($r = .19, p < .01$). On the other hand, those who indicated having higher scores on existential well-being (i.e., stronger sense of purpose) reported significantly higher levels of identity affirmation ($r = .29, p < .01$). These participants also showed significantly less acceptance concerns ($r = -.34, p < .01$), less identity uncertainty ($r = -.22, p < .01$), less difficulties in their LGB identity process ($r = -.32, p < .01$), and less internalized homonegativity ($r = -.31, p < .01$).

Results on religious identification (including public and private religious practices) also showed significant relations with sexual minority identity. We found a statistically significant association between someone identifying him/herself as a religious person and the participation both in public religious activities ($r = .62, p < .01$) and private religious practices ($r = .60, p < .01$). Simultaneously, these religious participants also were significantly more motivated to conceal their LGB identity ($r = .22, p < .01$) and reported significantly higher levels of internalized homonegativity ($r = .12, p < .01$). These associations were not found with the degree to which someone identified as a spiritual person (identity concealment motivation, $r = .05, ns$; internalized homonegativity, $r = .04, ns$).

In fact, using a MANOVA to analyze the mean differences between those participants who reported currently identifying with a religious denomination and those who did not,

significant results were found (see Table 4; $F(1,427)=2.00, p<.05$). Religious participants were found to report significantly higher values of motivation to conceal their LGB identity [$F(1,427) = 6.59, p<.01$] and to reveal significantly higher scores on internalized homonegativity [$F(1,427) = 5.46, p<.05$].

 Insert Table 4

Age was also explored as a possible important factor in this realm. To this end, age was dichotomized into a categorical variable (younger participants in a group of 18 to 39 years old; older participants in a group aged 40 to 76). MANOVA's were conducted to compare both groups in spiritual well-being and results are presented in Table 5 [$F(1,371)=4.16, p<.05$]. As shown, statistically significant differences were found between the age groups in terms of religious well-being [$F(1,371) = 6.85, p<.01$] and marginal differences for existential well-being [$F(1,371) = 3.26, p=.07$]. Older LGB persons reported higher levels of well-being in both subscales. Furthermore, significant differences were found with regards to sexual minority identity variables [$F(1,430) = 5.49, p<.01$]. Namely, acceptance concerns were higher among younger participants [$F(1,430) = 28.99, p<.01$]. Similarly, findings on identity uncertainty were greater for younger participants [$F(1,430) = 6.45, p<.01$]; and internalized homonegativity was higher for younger participants than for older LGB persons [$F(1,430) = 5.54, p<.05$]. Conversely, while it only marginally reached statistical significance, the centrality of LGB identity appeared to be somewhat higher for older participants [$F(1,430) = 3.82, p=.06$].

 Insert Table 5

Finally, two multiple regression analyses were performed, as showed on Table 6.

Insert Table 6

The results showed that both models were statistically significant in the explanation of religious well-being [$F(12,346) = 10.41, p < .01$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.25$] and of existential well-being [$F(12,395) = 11.24, p < .01$; Adjusted $R^2 = 0.24$]. In terms of religious well-being, age (older participants), current religious affiliation/identification and sexual identity concealment motivations seemed to be significant predictors. On the other hand, existential well-being was found to be significantly predicted by lower acceptance concerns, lower internalized homonegativity, less difficulties in the process, and more LGB identity affirmation. Age was not a significant predictor. Nonetheless, being raised religious and current religious affiliation/identification also contributed significantly to existential well-being in a positive way.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to, first of all, characterize the religious and spiritual experiences of Portuguese LGB persons, as well as their public and private practices. Given the fact that Portugal is a country with a strong Catholic history and that most research on LGB persons of faith have been done in Anglo-Saxon contexts, it was our interest to describe the way participants reconcile their sexual and religious identities in this setting. Secondly, our study also aimed to analyse the effects of age on spiritual well-being and the development of the identity as a LGB person. We were particularly interested in exploring their relation with internalized homonegativity.

Unsurprisingly, our findings revealed that nearly 80% of the participants reported that they had been raised in a religious tradition (mostly Catholic). This percentage is consistent with data from the Eurobarometer survey (European Commission, 2005) for the

general Portuguese population. However, only less than one fifth currently identified with a religious denomination. It remains undetermined from our data if this reveals that there was an actual distancing from religion and why, namely, what was the role of the conflict between LGB persons' sexual identity and religious upbringing. In fact, literature has shown that one of the possible outcomes of the conflicts that LGB persons of faith experience is the abandonment of their Churches and religious traditions (García *et al.*, 2008; Henrickson, 2007), oftentimes accompanied by an increase of religious private practices (Cutts & Parks, 2009). This may be the case for some of our participants since results also showed that only 9% attended some or a few religious services, while 22.5% admitted being involved in private religious practices.

Despite this scenario, our study found that LGB persons in Portugal report having positive levels of spiritual well-being. In particular, existential well-being seemed to be more positively rated than religious well-being. These findings are consistent to the ones found by other authors in different contexts, such as Ridge *et al* (2008) and Halkitis *et al* (2009), and highlight that spirituality plays an important role in the lives of many LGB people.

Contrary to existential/spiritual well-being, in the Portuguese context we found that religious well-being was associated with an increased motivation to conceal one's LGB identity. In fact, people who identified as religious reported higher levels of both concealment motivation and internalized homonegativity. These results support the idea that a number of specific challenges and threats to their identity may be experienced by LGB persons of faith (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000). This may be especially the case in Portugal and its traditional religious context.

Nevertheless, as people grow older, it seems that these conflicts experienced by religious and/or spiritual LGB persons work toward resolution. Our data showed that older

participants were the ones that indicated, simultaneously, higher levels of spiritual well-being (religious and existential), and lower levels of concealment concerns, identity uncertainties and internalized homonegativity. These results find support in other studies which have shown that younger people may struggle more with the rejection from their churches (Garcia *et al.*, 2008) and that older LGB persons are more likely to have a faith in a spiritual force (Halkitis *et al.*, 2009; Henrickson, 2007). However, these findings also do speak to the resilient nature of older LGB persons in Portugal, in that only recently have LGB issues been openly and constructively discussed in society. For that reason, one could expect that internalized negative views of homosexuality would be lower among LGB young adults, wherein older adults would have lived for a longer period of time in a context with more pervasive openly-negative views of non-heterosexual identities and behaviors. Hence, our hypothesis is that, rather than a cohort effect, these findings that support higher scores on spiritual well-being and sexual identity centrality among older adults are related to a developmental process effect.

Finally, despite the correlational nature of the study design, the results of the multiple regressions analyses seem to point to a directionally in terms the impacts of sexual identity and age on spiritual well-being. Indeed, religious well-being was significantly predicted by older age and by identification with a religious denomination, as well as by the concerns with the concealment of one's own sexual identity. Conversely, existential well-being was significantly predicted by lower levels of acceptance concerns and internalized homonegativity, less difficulties in the process of sexual identification, and more identity affirmation. Age, in this case, was not a significant contributor *per se*, indicating that existential well-being might be more intrinsically dependent on the sexual identity process. Nevertheless, past and present religious affiliation also contributed to spiritual well-being. This is congruent with the documented positive relationship between spirituality and better

psychological health among LGB persons, such as decreased depression and internalized homophobia (Tan, 2005). One interpretation of these results would be that the search for meaning and purpose could constitute a coping strategy, in response to social stigma and discrimination (as identified in other studies, such as Jeffries *et al.*, 2008).

While we recognize the contributions of the present study, we also acknowledge some limitations, in particular related to the recruitment procedures and non-representativeness of the sample. Most participants were engaged in LGB communities, through associations, the internet, or public events and celebrations, thus, more socially isolated LGB persons of faith might not have been equally represented. The sample was also highly educated, given that 14% had a masters or a PhD and more than half had a college education. Furthermore, the measures utilized were solely based on self-reported information. Future studies should attempt to seek the participation of more socially excluded LGB persons. Information of family status (including marital status and motherhood/parenthood, which was not assessed in this study) could also contribute to explore the development of existential/spiritual well-being and the development of a sense of meaning, purpose and satisfaction with one's life.

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Table 1 - Demographic Characterization of the Sample

Demographic characteristics		Frequency	%
Age		Mean 30.86	SD 11.19
	18-25 years old	199	42.4
	26-35 years old	120	25.6
	36-45 years old	97	20.7
	46-76 years old	53	11.3
Sex	Female	227	48.4
	Male	242	51.6
Marital status	Single	329	70.6
	Civil union	66	14.2
	Married	16	3.4
	Divorced	15	3.2
	Widower	2	0.4
	Other	38	8.2
Citizenship	Portuguese	455	97.2
	Other	13	2.8
	EU	8	1.8
	Brazilian	3	0.6
	Canadian	1	0.2
	USA	1	0.2
Educational attainment	High school or less	321	49.0
	Undergraduate Degree	161	34.2
	Master's Degree	47	10.0
	Doctoral Degree	19	4.0
	Other	13	2.8
Occupational status	Studying	206	43.7
	Working (part-time or full-time)	282	59.9
Sexual orientation	Lesbian	151	32.1
	Gay	218	46.3
	Bisexual	92	19.5
	Other (e.g. queer)	8	1.7
	Missing / Chose not to answer	2	0.4

Table 2 - Religious History of the Sample

Religious History	Frequency	%
Raised in a religious tradition	362	76.9
Catholic	317	67.3
Christian Non-Catholic	12	2.5
Non-Christian	24	5.1
Other	5	1.1
Current belonging to a religious denomination	81	17.2
Catholic	52	11.0
Christian Non-Catholic	7	1.5
Non-Christian	12	2.5
Other	10	2.1
To what extent do you consider yourself a religious person		
Not at all	250	53.1
Slightly	96	20.4
Moderately	100	21.2
Very	15	3.2
Extremely	3	0.6
Missing	7	1.5
To what extent do you consider yourself a spiritual person		
Not at all	73	15.5
Slightly	120	25.5
Moderately	162	34.4
Very	89	18.9
Extremely	25	5.3
Missing	2	0.4

Table 3. Means, standard deviations and correlations of Spiritual Well-Being and Sexual Identity subscales

	M	SD	RWE	EWE	AC	CM	IU	IH	DP	IS	IA	IC
RWE	2.85	1.41	.94	.25**	-.01	.19**	.08	.10	.03	-.02	.03	.01
EWE	4.33	0.88		.87	-.34**	-.08	-.22**	-.31**	-.32**	-.06	.29**	.03
AC	3.06	1.29			.79	.31**	.26**	.32**	.42**	.14**	-.21**	.03
CM	3.47	1.28				.78	.23**	.30**	.27**	.07	-.33**	-.31**
IU	1.70	0.92					.82	.31**	.32**	.04	-.25**	-.14**
IH	1.73	0.98						.83	.42**	.07	-.45**	-.10*
DP	2.63	1.29							.79	.09	-.30**	-.02
IS	1.60	0.74								.61	.03	.12*
IA	4.64	1.10									.85	.41**
IC	4.00	1.04										.76

Note: Cronbach alpha in the diagonal; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$;

Legend: M - Mean; SD – Standard Deviation; RWE – Religious well-Being; EWE – Existential Well-Being; AC – Acceptance Concerns; CM – Concealment motivation; IU – Identity Uncertainty; IH – Internalized Homonegativity; DP – Difficult Process; IS – Identity Superiority; IA – Identity Affirmation; IC – Identity Centrality.

Table 4. Mean differences on Sexual Minority Identity subscales between Religious and Non-Religious participants

	Religious Participants		Non-Religious Participants		F
	[n _{max} = 81]		[n _{max} = 380]		
	M	SD	M	SD	
MANOVA Model					2.00*
AC	3.26	1.37	3.01	1.27	1.91
CM	3.85	1.25	3.38	1.27	6.59**
IU	1.86	1.03	1.67	0.88	3.21
IH	2.00	1.12	1.67	0.95	5.46*
DP	2.79	1.40	2.60	1.27	0.40
IS	1.70	0.84	1.58	0.72	0.92
IA	4.56	1.18	4.66	1.08	0.23
IC	4.12	0.92	3.98	1.06	1.19

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01;

Legend: M - Mean; SD – Standard Deviation; AC – Acceptance Concerns; CM –

Concealment motivation; IU – Identity Uncertainty; IH – Internalized Homonegativity; DP –

Difficult Process; IS – Identity Superiority; IA – Identity Affirmation; IC – Identity Centrality.

Table 5. Mean differences on Spiritual Well-Being and Sexual Minority Identity subscales between age groups

	Younger Participants		Older Participants		F
	[18-39; n _{max} = 365]		[40-76; n _{max} = 100]		
	M	SD	M	SD	
MANOVA Model					4.16*
RWB	2.74	1.36	3.22	1.49	6.85**
EWE	4.28	0.87	4.49	0.92	3.26 ^a
MANOVA Model					5.49*
AC	3.22	11.23	2.48	1.33	28.99**
CM	3.49	1.26	3.39	1.35	0.56
IU	1.75	0.94	1.54	0.80	6.45**
IH	1.78	0.99	1.54	0.95	5.54**
DP	2.66	1.29	2.53	1.31	0.40
IS	1.61	0.73	1.57	0.79	0.16
IA	4.60	1.09	4.77	1.14	1.85
IC	3.96	1.05	4.16	1.00	3.82 ^a

Note: * p < .05; ** p < .01; ^a p < .10

Legend: M - Mean; SD – Standard Deviation; RWE – Religious well-Being; EWE – Existential Well-Being; AC – Acceptance Concerns; CM – Concealment motivation; IU – Identity Uncertainty; IH – Internalized Homonegativity; DP – Difficult Process; IS – Identity Superiority; IA – Identity Affirmation; IC – Identity Centrality.

Table 6. Multiple Regression Analyses of predictors of Religious and Existential Well-Being

	RWB		EWE		F	Adjusted R ²
	β	t	β	t		
Regression Model					10.41**	0.25
Gender	-0.04	-0.74				
Age	0.21	4.08**				
Raised Religious	0.07	1.49				
Religious Affiliation	0.41	8.48**				
AC	-0.02	-0.25				
CM	0.16	2.92**				
IU	0.08	1.38				
IH	0.02	0.39				
DP	-0.04	-0.61				
IS	-0.07	-1.54				
IA	0.09	1.61				
IC	-0.01	-0.08				
Regression Model					11.24**	0.24
Gender			-0.02	-0.36		
Age			0.05	1.00		
Raised Religious			0.13	2.79**		
Religious Affiliation			0.13	2.83**		
AC			-0.22	-3.98**		
CM			0.08	1.51		
IU			-0.06	-1.26		
IH			-0.14	-2.61**		
DP			-0.13	-2.46*		
IS			-0.01	-0.31		
IA			0.20	3.51**		
IC			-0.06	-1.08		

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Legend: β – Standardized Coefficients; RWE – Religious well-Being; EWE – Existential Well-Being; AC – Acceptance Concerns; CM – Concealment motivation; IU – Identity Uncertainty; IH – Internalized Homonegativity; DP – Difficult Process; IS – Identity Superiority; IA – Identity Affirmation; IC – Identity Centrality.