

A review of the presentation of LGBTQ identity, Religion and Spirituality:
A research report back to participants.

By JJ Lyon, 2014-02-13

I have been asked to do a review of this report. I am happy to share with you what I learned, and what I felt were significant issues. However, I am neither an academic, not a scholar, but just another member of the LGBTQ community dealing with his own issues of loss and betrayal.

The report makes me very sad that I was unable to participate in this project. I know that Ms Hattie has been working on research for some number of years, around health issues in the community, and this, from what she said in her introduction, is just following up on what she had felt was significant in her previous research.

The report is very long, twenty four pages in length, but is broken down into very well presented sections, and is very insightful in its handling of the personal quotations. One gets a very real sense of being there, and hearing the pain, the struggle, the resolution and the growth.

The first phase of the report separates the Christian and non-Christian group and their collective differences and responses. The groups whose religion had a strong sense of “sin” or “transgression” had significantly more issues to deal with and problems to overcome. The use of banishment from the community seems to have had a significant effect, especially when added to separation from family and condemnation in the workplace. Various attempts to deal with these complicated issues came up in the interviews, and the discussion of how one can deal with the crushing loss of identity and community were very revealing. Some of the issues include, sex-negativity, delaying sexual activity, denying the self, trying to be “healed”, severing relationships, loss of family, dealing with health issue, i.e. drugs and alcohol, cutting and hurting oneself,

The next section deals with some ways that have proved helpful for some of the participants. One person had done some considerable study in Theology, and from that study, had learned that the whole issue of sexuality is a bit ambiguous, at best. Perhaps one of the most surprising conclusions that has come from this study is that the range of ages is from 20 to 68, there does not appear to be a drop in the numbers, or the intensity, of the negative experiences. One might have thought that a drop in the attendance at churches and the opening of dialogue with the community at large, by some faith groups, might have made for a better experience for younger LGBTQ members, but that does not seem to be the case. The whole issue of whether or not “spirituality” is the sole property of “organized religion” is explored with some of the group studied finding new avenues to explore or by being selective about the weight that they give to the teachings of their birth religion. Another approach was to separate the two issues and see spirituality as a more personal, a natural thing, an individual responsibility and journey, and that the acceptance of ones own sexual reality cannot be separated from ones sense of spirituality

The final section brings the issue back to the community itself. While it was difficult for some to be able to hold conversations in the community about spirituality and religious observance, many felt that the community would be enhanced if this could be added to the LGBTQ community. The problems for some was that they had experienced another banishment because the hurt that so many had experienced would not allow them to even open the subject for discussion.

And so, the report asks the question: How do we move to a better place as a community?

Now about the session we had on the afternoon of February 9th

About 20 or so people were in attendance and the meeting opened with Ms Hattie giving a brief overview of the project. Then we were split into discussion groups of about 7 or 8 participants and we were asked to comment on the three general sections that I have outlined above. We had not read the report and so it might have been seen as a chance to check of the general feeling in this group. At least one assumes that the people there were not part of the original study. No one identified themselves as having been part of the original group, at least not to the group as a whole. Many of the same issues arose and the suggestions very much mirrored the original group's discussion. One item that might have caught our researchers a little off base, was the suggestion that more gatherings should be held and more opportunities found to have meaningful discussion on this, and possibly other topics of general interest. Monthly meetings were rather quickly dismissed, but the concept of meeting every quarter, or semi-annually, was left open.