Conflicting Identities?: Being Black, LGBT, and Religious

Ja'Nina J. Walker, Ph.D

Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
University of San Francisco

Racial, Religious, and Sexual Identities

- Positive racial identity has been associated with positive self-concept, high self-esteem, and positive adjustment to stressful life events (Cross, 1995; Phinney, 1989; 1990; 1992; Sellers et al., 1998; Sellers, Caldwell, Schmeelk-Cone & Zimmerman, 2003).
- Concealment of sexual identity can have a negative impact on one's psychosocial well-being (Erikson, 1968; Dubé & Savin-Williams, 1999; Grov, Bimbi, Nanin & Parsons, 2006; Minton & McDonald, 1984).
- Religiousness enhances cognitive and affective well-being and quality of life (Ellison, 1991; Lee, 2007; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar & Hahn, 2004).

Study 1:

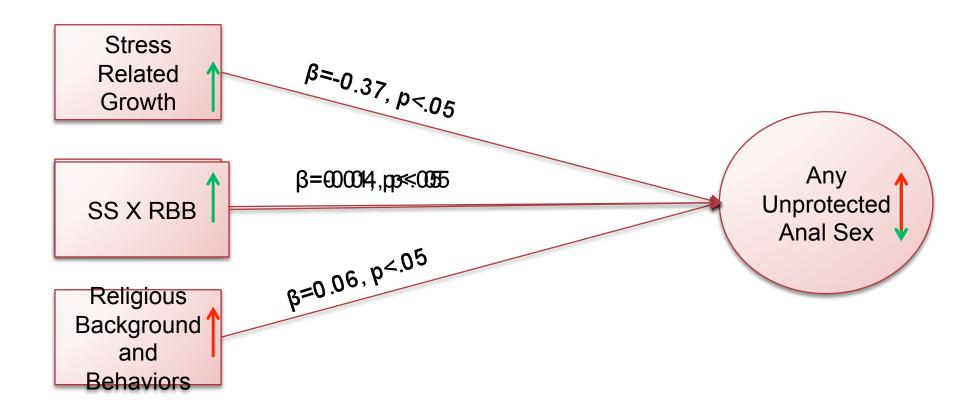
The Role of Religiosity, Social Support, and Stress-related Growth in Protecting Against HIV Risk among Transgender Women

Golub, S.A., Walker, J. J., Longmire-Avital, B., Bimbi, D. S.& Parsons, J. T. (2010). The Role of Religiosity, Social Support, and Stress-Related Growth in Protecting Against HIV Risk among Transgender Women. Journal of Health Psychology, 15(8), 1135-1144.

Methods and Participants

- Project T-Girls
 - Baseline assessment prior to a 4 week workshop series which addressed life concerns of transgender women
- 75 transgender women (80% women of color)
 - Mean age was 35.37 (SD=10.48)
 - 50% were HIV positive

Logistic Regression



Step 1: Nagelkerke R²= .24, Step 4:44Nagelkerke R²= .13, X²=9.45

% of Participants Reporting Unprotected Sex by Levels of Religious Background & Behaviors and Social Support

Social	Su	p	p	0	r	t

	Low	High
RBB		
Low	50%	14%
High	36%	35%

Study 2:

The Impact of Religious Faith and Internalized Homonegativity on

Resiliency for Black Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Emerging Adults

Walker, J.J., & Longmire-Avital, B. (2013). The Impact of Religious Faith and Internalized Homonegativity on Resiliency for Black Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Emerging Adults. Developmental Psychology, 49, 1723-1731.

Linear Regression: Full Model

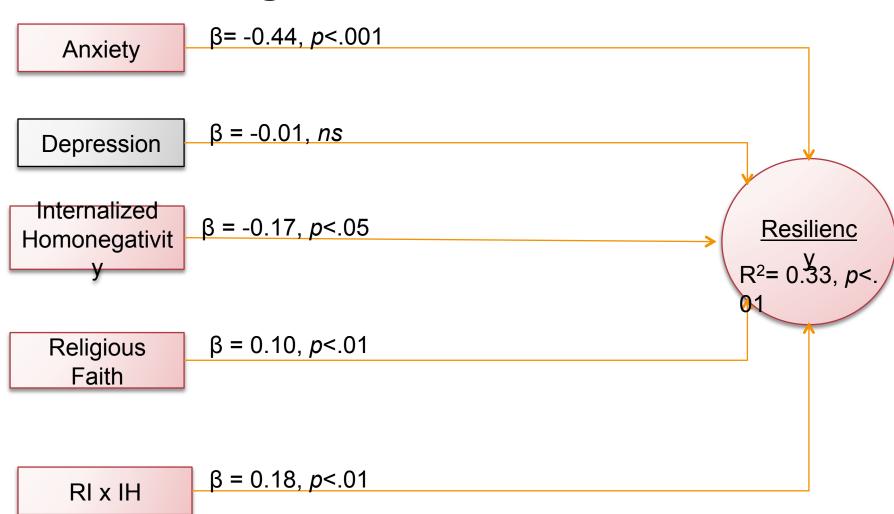
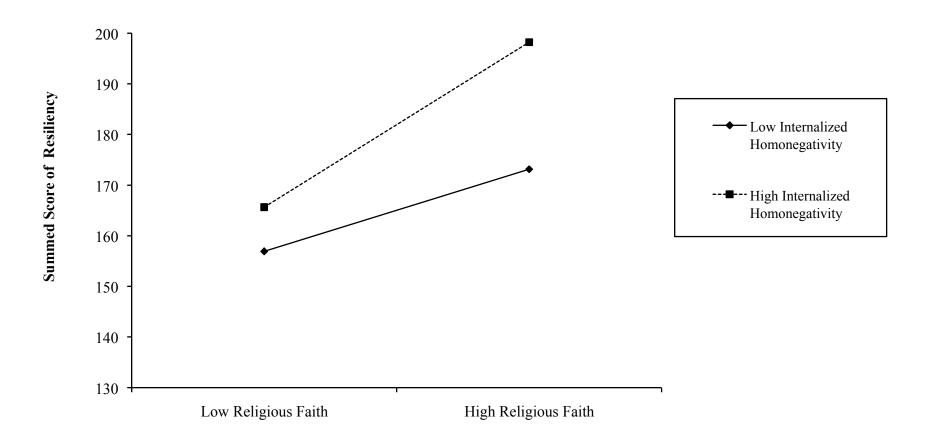


Figure 1. Interaction of Religious Faith and Internalized Homonegativity



Study 3:

Consequences of Negative Religious Rhetoric in the Lives of Black Gay and Bisexual Emerging Adult Men

Sermons Against Same Sex Relationship

- Men were often shocked by the messages and felt that such sermons did not reflect the love that encompassed their understanding of religion and God.
 - But hearing them sermons, them anti-gay, or beat you with the word-bashing sermon-doesn't represent the love of Christ, it doesn't represent the true love or relationship that I think God wants to have with us, so it made me uncomfortable (Earl, 25, bisexual, Christian)

Sermons Against Same Sex Relationship

- These experiences often made young men develop negative feelings toward their pastors and their church homes.
 - At first I started to feel very upset, because I was upset with my church, and the man whose voice it came out of (Roman, 21, gay, personal connection)
 - When I went to a church, I didn't go to a church that said being gay was evil. Even though I did encounter, from my grandmother she would use the Bible, before she knew that I was gay, or before I was out to her, I would hear her having conversations about her using the Bible to sort of justify gay being evil, something the devil's work, and stuff like that. (Abraham, 22, gay, unknown)

Personal Consequences of Negative Religious Rhetoric

- Young men felt lonely as a result of the ways in which negative religious rhetoric was utilized to condemn same-sex behavior.
 - It made me feel like I wasn't me. It made me feel that, okay, I have to put this front on because the bible said so... So it was hard. It wasn't the best. I took what I could. I felt the loneliest. It came to that (Ronald, 21, gay, Christian)

Personal Consequences of Negative Religious Rhetoric

- Men began to feel self-conscious about themselves and even began to question their faith and relationships with God.
 - It made me really re-think myself, going through a lot of years of questioning myself and questioning my faith and questioning God, really. And trying to make myself straight. And once that didn't really work out, by the age of about fourteen, I was like – forget it! (Alexander, 20, gay, spiritual)

Personal Consequences of Negative Religious Rhetoric

- Men were particularly uncomfortable with the idea of having to leave their church homes.
 - But yeah, that was just really the icing on the cake, to go to a place where I feel so comfortable, and hear them tell me basically that God doesn't love me because I identify in a certain way, or as a certain way, that made me feel really bad about my faith or my religion (Alexander, 20, gay, spiritual)

Growth From Negative ReligiousRhetoric

- Men found scriptures within religious text that helped them gain a level of comfort with the idea that God made them and loves them.
 - I also read in the word that nothing can separate you from the love of God, and that – not height or depth or creature or nothing can separate you from the love that God has for you, so that really encouraged me, too. (Earl, 25, bisexual, Christian)

Growth From Negative ReligiousRhetoric

- Men became comfortable with their personal relationships with the Bible and God and no longer felt they needed the approval of society or their church to be true to themselves.
 - It really made me do some searching, some internal searching, and asking of questions, because I really wanted to know what was acceptable, not by society, but in terms of the word and in terms of me communicating with god, who is almighty. (Earl, 25, bisexual, Christian)

What does all of this mean?

- For Black LGBT individuals, one's religious background and behaviors may facilitate risk behavior
- Conversely, one's religious faith may protect them from impaired psychological well-being even in the face of internalized homonegativity
- Helping Black LGBT individuals develop a cohesive inner self is critical

Where Do We Go From Here?

Practical Implications

- Counselors, researchers and public health officials should be made aware of the role of racial, religious, and sexual identities in the lives of Black LGBT individuals
- Religious institutions should seek to better understand the experiences of LGBT individuals
- This research serves as a call to researchers, religious institutions, and community providers to develop *culturally competent* services when addressing the needs of Black LGBT individuals.

Thank You

Ja'Nina J. Walker, Ph.D Department of Psychology University of San Francisco jwalker@usfca.edu