Fractured Identities, Invisible Selves

- Konrad Noronha SJ

JNANADEEPA
PJRS ISSN 0972-33315
23/1 Jan-June 2019: 83-96

Abstract

Members of minority groups have often been described as marginalized in acculturation research. Being marginalized, affects the identity of persons and groups.One such minority group that is marginalized in India, and whose rights of expression are being denied because of social taboos, are the gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community (LGBTQI). The marginalization, affects the LGBTQI's outlook on God, religion and spirituality, and workplace behavior. For those with minority identities, workplace stressors include discrimination, expectations of stigma, and internalized heterosexism. Understanding of human behavior and persons have changed in modern times, with a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusivity, so that same sex relationships are no longer considered outside the sphere of human behavior. Counseling clients with such identities requires that the therapist have sensitivity that goes beyond the required major culture. This includes training in working with multicultural populations. This article deals with the LGBTQI identity, and how their identity impacts their God image. The issue has importance as it brings together the disciplines of moral theology, value ethics, professional ethics and what it means to be a pastor. Indicators for clinical practice are emphasized.

Keywords

Identity, marginalization, LGBTQI, counseling.

Fractured Identities, Invisible Selves

Identity is an umbrella term used to describe an individual's or a groups comprehension of himself, herself, their selves, as discrete, separate entities. It includes ethnic, cultural, sexual, religious identities, and therefore is not restricted to any single identity. When a person is considered only from one of these lenses, a marginalized identity sets in, and difficulties arise due to being known only through a single lens. In an increasingly globalized world acculturation research talks about marginalized groups i.e. majority groups considering others through only one lens. Aglobal identity is being stressed which plays an increasing role in developing self-concept and psychological and sociocultural adaptation (Kunst, & Sam, 2013).

Globalization is connected with the emergence and reconstruction of new identities. A national identity is one of the different identities that a person has because other identities occur through the appropriation of various voices that manage the origin of the identity and which might demand a host of lifestyles. In identity politics it is important to recognize the limits and acknowledge the necessity for accomplishing goals and building partnerships, without excluding anyone. In building hybrid and multiple identities certain ties with the original society are preserved when the new forms of life of the new culture and society are taken on (Esteban-Guitart, & Vila, 2015). Therefore, in a national identity social identification would necessarily include those who are considered as belonging to marginalized groups, like those with the LGBTQI identity (Bennett, 2006).

Perceptions in India have changed due to changes in the understanding of identity development. This is revealed through changes in the lives of youth. They now weigh changes in the light of losses, gains, and the need for adaptation. Although continuing to identify with traditional Indian collectivist beliefs, values, and practices; they also identify and participate in, minority world beliefs, values, and practices (Rao, Roeser, Berry, Gonsalves, Hastak, & Shah, 2013). In today's changing world there is also a new toleration debate as the understanding of toleration has changed, especially with regard to rights and religious prescription.

Questions about what should be tolerated and what the law should allow or proscribe about personal and family life and religious and cultural identity are creating problems due to new awareness and differences in perspective (Almond, 2010).

A powerful majority group can be repressive and discriminatory when it fails to substantively take total group identity into account. This is because group identity depends on how group members acquire and live out their group beliefs (Fraser-Burgess, 2012). Identifying with a group can contribute to a sense of well-being since belonging to groups brings social identification that impact individuals' beliefs about issues such as "their connections with others, the availability of social support, the meaningfulness of existence, and the continuity of their identity" (Khan, Hopkins, Tewari, Srinivasan, Reicher, &Ozakinci, 2014, p.787). Within a group, when the various identities are not considered, members might get excluded, like those with alternate sexual identities. This automatically means less power and privilege. It has been observed that individuals from social identity groups with differing levels of societal power and privilege like lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, people of color; women, perceived significant increases in esteem resulting from acceptance of their identity when the within the group climate is positive (Miles, & Kivlighan, 2012).

The varying identities just talked about might cause contradictions in the practice of counseling and psychotherapy and gives need to re-conceptualize therapeutic approaches, in the light of a multicultural, multiethnic, diverse world. Power differences and conflicting goals might arise for therapists and the counseling room needs to become a space for critique, dissent and action, allowing for a core experience of the self that will foster replication in society at large (Sorrell, 2006). Given these understandings, it is imperative that counselors and psychotherapists use communication and conceptualization skills to create a more accurate picture of the individual client's conceptualization of the world, within various therapeutic frameworks and most importantly help clients create accurate pictures of the self.

This understanding is essential to having and reflecting the most accurate understanding of the phenomenological view of the client.

As the counselor's multicultural conceptualization skills develop, he or she will be able to understand these multiple identities as interwoven and at times inseparable. Further, the counselor will grow to understand how the client's level of development with regard to one identity may affect his or her level of identity with regard to another identity (Salazar, & Abrams, 2005, pp.57-58)

In the counseling alliance it is important to develop relationships and partnerships with all types of persons in society, once similarities and differences are known and understood. Partnerships define the community, and connect persons with different identities. They give vision, identify individuals and organizations, engage and define roles, give cause for accountability, evaluation and communication, and reassess involvements and satisfaction. They build the capacity to solve problems and increase strengths, and if they are community driven they will emphasize assets (Lee, 2007; Fowler &Kub, 2009). With all the discrimination evident in the world and in India with regard to the rights of minority populations, these populations have begun to give expression to their voice. This is often considered as dissent, because majority voices are not listening. Let us now consider one such marginalized group in India, whose rights of expression are being denied, because of social and religious taboos, i.e. the gays, lesbians, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex community (LGBTQI). This topic is of importance as the fields of moral theology, value ethics, and professional ethics intersect. It also makes us want to consider the global understanding of the word pastor.

The LGBTQI identity

It is important to know that there are differences in the understanding of what it means by gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual, queer and intersex. Also, there is a difference between gender identity, orientation, and behavior. A transgender identity is perhaps not as widely used or understood by the population as other alternate sexual identities (Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2007). Most LGBTQI people in India are in the closet. Very few express their identities because of inherent difficulties, like societal rejection and civil consequences.

Social Taboos and Civil law

The alternate sexual lifestyle is still not accepted in India, and same sex relationships are not spoken of openly. Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, 1860 criminalizes (male) same-sex sexual activity. There are no laws in India criminalizing lesbian sexual activity. In all states of India those with alternate lifestyles face discrimination, intolerance and abuse. Even in the southern states of India where the LGBTQI mobilization has been quite strong, there have been instances where people from the LGBTQI communities have not been allowed to enter hotels, restaurants or clubs ("World Bank, 2012).

The area of concern is that even though Article 14 of the Indian Constitution states "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India," yet discrimination and inequality persists ("ILGA.org," 2013). The question that arises therefore is how to bring an understanding of equality in society so that the rights of those with alternate sexualities are not trampled upon, and that they might live with dignity, without having to be apologetic about anything.

Research suggests that individuals with a marginalized sexual orientation report higher levels of social anxiety than heterosexuals (Wadsworth, & Hayes-Skelton, 2015). Gay men feel pressure to conform to masculine role norms (Hunt, Fasoli, Carnaghi, &Cadinu, 2016). Transgenders experience discrimination, and stigma awareness. Where there is internalized transphobia, transgenders have been helped by individual- and group-level buffers like resilience and collective action (Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013). In studies it was seen that for those with marginalized sexual orientation the exceptions were substance use and academic distress, which were experienced at levels similar to those of heterosexuals.

Discrimination notwithstanding, there has to be a sense of protection to people of all orientations, so that there is no fear in the expression of their sexuality. This population has faced a lot of discrimination from those with a majority sexual orientation, and

quite often from birth or a young age. The discrimination affects the LGBTQI's outlook on God, religion and spirituality. Whatever may be the choice by a person of an alternate sexual lifestyle, the process of accepting one's sexual identity is a challenging and painful process, especially for individuals coming from a religious background. Many LGBTQI individuals fear losing both their family and religious support systems through the coming out process. This apprehension often creates barriers to achieving a healthy sexual identity, resulting in stress more than what would be met with in a heterosexual population (Gates, 2011). These stressors are also seen in the workplace, unless there is a strong push for understanding and acceptance of diverse populations.

Workplace

A professional identity defines a person in the workplace and includes the ethnic, cultural, sexual and religious aspects of the person and his or her professional competencies. For those with LGBTQI identity, numerous stressors impinge into workplace behavior. They include workplace discrimination, expectations of stigma, internalized heterosexism, and therefore for employers, the need to employ different identity management strategies. Stressors in the workplace for minority groups were associated with greater distress and lower job satisfaction. Caution has to be observed in approaching group differences, especially in the cases of minority groups. Lower levels of homophobia in the workplace and concealment strategies like counterfeiting, avoiding, and higher levels of a disclosure strategy were associated with higher job satisfaction in the context of low discrimination. This disappeared as the level of discrimination decreased (Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013).

Despite efforts to dispel prejudice, workplace discrimination still occurs. Advocacy for rights, facilities and equal status is called for in such places, and should be an inherent part of any work place's identity and a necessary part of any professional setup. It should also be recognized that organizations while adopting a multicultural approach that celebrates group differences, might actually reinforce culturally dominant stereotypes. Therefore, it is important to adopt

broad strategies towards diversity in identity management (Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013). It has been demonstrated that growth-fostering relationships may be associated with less psychological distress depending on whether the work environment is open or close to understandings of minorities. Therefore, understanding resilience factors among sexual minorities in the workplace is critical for a culturally sensitive and affirmative workplace, and to make minorities feel more welcomed (Velez, Moradi, & Brewster, 2013).

Effects of discrimination

Mental health professionals need to honestly explore biases or prejudices against members of minority groups and use the information to move forward in less biased manners. In terms of sexual orientation, it may be hard for many faith-based counselors to reconcile scope of competence versus biases. Therefore, counselors should stay abreast of research related to adherence to ethical standards, competencies, and perceptions of clients. They have the responsibility to update their knowledge and constantly pursue continuing education (Balkin, Watts, & Ali, 2014, p.192) with regard to marginalized groups, especially LGBTQI. This is because lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth are often at greater risk for negative health outcomes compared with heterosexual youth. "Isolation is one risk factor cited throughout the literature" (Johnson, &Amella, 2014, p.523). The effects of isolation are seen on the social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual levels. It has been seen that many LGBTQI youth have health issues linked to being and feeling isolated. However, the literature is diverse in describing isolation which needs conceptual clarification (Johnson, &Amella, 2014).

There has to be a focus on group and individual identity, as well as awareness about the dynamics and conditions that adversely affect marginalized groups in the larger community that might appear invisible. This means that counselors should broaden the understandings of self-interest and sense of identity (Boyd, 2010). Thus it is important to understand the complexity of experiences in understanding discrimination (Tran, Miyake, Martinez-Morales,

&Csizmadia, 2016). When the counselor shows an understanding of a variety of experiences; the counselor becomes a source of empowerment. This is because the counselor acknowledges that all experiences, identities and sexualities need to be evaluated with their implications in a multiracial, multi ethnic world, where every single person has multiple identities, visible and invisible.

Advocacy

Counselors may help clients become aware of their personal, emotional, and cognitive responses to anti-LGBTQI movements and policies. They may consider introducing advocacy on behalf of LGBTQI issues as a coping strategy for clients struggling with the impact of anti-LGBTQI policies. Although activism may be an effective coping strategy for some individuals, this involvement may be stressful and draining for others (Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009, p.93). Advocacy occurs at different levels, and always has to do with rights and social change. It means working towards bringing awareness to issues of importance. Accessing and working for anyone, any issue, especially for the marginalized, cannot occur without advocacy. The tasks are many.

Social taboos, majority culture domination with regard to identity and sexuality, discrimination and the civil laws have strong influences on the LGBTQI in India. Similarly, anti-GLBTQI movements and policies affect participants' personal relationships, mental and physical health. Also, perspectives about their country and government, and hopes about the future because movements and policies shape personal identity and beliefs of those who are LGBTQI. It influences the faith and the God image of this population. It also calls for an understanding of how such counselors would address the God of such populations, in relation to their identity and sexuality especially if the counselee professes to a faith tradition.

God Image

Religion and spirituality have often been areas of exploration in which individuals tell their stories to explain their belief systems

and religious practices. It helps in defining the religious identity of persons, especially the God image of persons. (Schwab, 2013). Identity is often spoken of with regard to continuity/ change, and sameness/difference, in relation to other individuals, institutions, and dominant discourses. Major theistic world religions maintain that homosexuality is sinful (Louis Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2007). Individuals with strongly religious backgrounds have clear moral codes with specific prohibitions about certain sexual acts.

Various groups understand homosexuality differently. One group maintains that being homosexual is sinful and is therefore intolerant of homosexuals. A second group believes homosexual behaviors are sinful and there is a third group that maintains that homosexuality, including engaging in same-sex intimacy, is not sinful. This last perspective is often referred to as an affirming or welcoming perspective (Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2007). Often LGBTQI persons experience bewilderment, hurt and anger because a key part of their personal experience, their sexuality is not accepted by religion (Mair, 2010). There needs to be a better understanding of God with regard to diversity issues. The majority of theistic religions believe that God influences the world whether God is understood as a theistic being separate from the world, or the Ground of all Being (Hoffman, Knight, Boscoe-Huffman, & Stewart, 2007). If God does exist and interacts with the world, then consideration needs to be given to the various forms of diversity.

The God Image for the LGBTQI community will frequently be based primarily upon broader experiences, as opposed to primarily parental influences. This has importance for practicing caregivers (Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009). The understanding of sexual orientation was different in the times of the Old and New Testament, due to the strictures of the cultures and thinking of the time. Understanding of human behavior and persons have changed a lot since then, so that same sex relationships are no longer considered outside the sphere of human behavior by sciences like psychology, sociology and most other sciences.

Conclusion

Fractured identities and invisibility for LGBTQI clients, is often the result of dominant identities. Counseling clients from minority backgrounds is not an easy task; it requires that the therapist have sensitivity and training that goes beyond the required major cultural norms. It is the clients' needs that take primary focus and it is the duty of the counselor to define those needs whether it be of the community or the individual and see that there are adequate resources. An awareness of the clients' background, taken in the intake, would form a first step in leading the therapist towards formulating an initial plan in treatment, and as treatment progresses, in formulating variations and better plans. After defining needs and assets, partnerships might have to be considered. For effective counseling it is important to note that the three characteristics of a community are its people, the place and the social interactions that occur, and these should be utilized. A good counselor will build on partnerships and relationships, which are fundamental to the process of treatment of persons especially with regard to socialization, and specifically with marginalized groups.

Improvement or failure depends on the therapeutic relationship and the type of therapy used because therapies can be used appropriately as well as badly. This implies educating counselors in working with LGBTQI clients. Community resources too form an important part of the assessment of any client as community impacts treatment and any counseling work done with an LGBTQI client. A counselor must build on the capacity to solve problems, increase strengths, must be community driven, and must emphasize the assets of the client and the community. This would help tremendously in giving a variety of clients a holistic approach towards treatment.

References

Almond, B. (2010). Education for tolerance: cultural difference and family values. *Journal of Moral Education*.doi: 10.1080/03057241003754849

Arm, J. R., Horne, S. G., Levitt, H. M. (2009). Negotiating Connection to GLBT Experience: Family Members' Experience of Anti-GLBT Movements and Policies *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *56*(1), 82–96. doi: 10.1037/a0012813

Balkin, R. S., Watts, R. E., Ali, S. R. (2014). A Conversation About the Intersection of Faith, Sexual Orientation, and Gender: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives. *Journal of Counseling & Development*. *92*(187). doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6676.2014.00147.x

Bennett, J.A. (2006). Seriality and Multicultural Dissent in the Same-Sex Marriage Debate. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*. *3*(2), pp. 141-161. doi: 10.1080/14791420600633063

Boyd, S. (2010). On Being Here with Others: Space, Identity and Justice. *Journal of Men, Masculinities and Spirituality*. *4*(1), 6-18.

Breslow, A. S., Brewster, M. E., Velez, B. L., Wong, S., Geiger, E., Soderstrom, B. (2015). Resilience and Collective Action: Exploring Buffers Against Minority Stress for Transgender Individuals. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(3), 253–265. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000117

Douglass, S., English, D., Yip, T. (2016). "They Were Just Making Jokes": Ethnic/Racial Teasing and Discrimination Among Adolescents. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *22*(1), 69–82. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000041

Esteban-Guitart, M., Vila, I. (2015). The voices of newcomers. A qualitative analysis of the construction of transnational identity. *Psychosocial Intervention.24*. 17–25. doi 10.1016/j.psi.2015.01.002

Fowler, C. C., Kub, J. (March 6, 2009). *What is community assessment? Workshop training by Mid-Atlantic Public Health Training Center*. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Fraser-Burgess, S. (2012). Group Identity, Deliberative Democracy and Diversity in Education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *44*(5). doi: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2010.00717.x

Gates, G. J. (2012). LGBT identity: A demographer's perspective. *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review*., *45*, 693.Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/llr/vol45/iss3/2

Hoffman, L., Knight, S., Boscoe-Huffman, S., Stewart, S. (2007). Diversity issues and the God image. *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, *9*(3/4), 257-279. doi:10.1300/J515v09n03-13)

Hunt, C. J., Fasoli, F., Carnaghi, A., Cadinu. M. (2016). Masculine Self-Presentation and Distancing from Femininity in Gay Men: An Experimental Examination of the Role of Masculinity Threat. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, *17*(1), 108–112. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/a0039545

"ILGA Asia: India" – Law http://ilga.org/ilga/en/countries/INDIA/Law, Retrieved 14 September, 2016

Johnson, M. J., Amella E. J. (2014). Isolation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: a dimensional concept analysis. *Journal of Advanced Nursing.70*(3), 523–532. doi: 10.1111/jan.12212

Johnson, M. J., Amella, E. J. (2014). Isolation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth: a dimensional concept analysis. *70*(3). 523-532, doi:10.1111/jan.12212 [doi]

Khan S. S., Hopkins N., Tewari S., Srinivasan N., Reicher S. D., Oza-kinci G. (2014) Efficacy and well-being in rural north India: The role of social identification with a large-scale community identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. *44*, 787–798, doi: 10.1002/ejsp.2060.

Kunst, J. R., Sam, D. L. (2013). Expanding the Margins of Identity: A Critique of Marginalization in a Globalized World. *International Perspectives in Psychology: Research, Practice, Consultation*, *2*(4), 225–241. doi: 10.1037/ipp0000008

Lee, C. C. (Ed.). (2007). *Counseling for social justice*. Alexandra, VA: American Counseling Association.

Lee, C.C. (Ed). (1995). *Counseling for diversity*. Allyn and Bacon: Needham Heights, MA

Mair, David. (2010). Fractured narratives, fractured identities: cross-cultural challenges to essentialist concepts of gender and sexuality. *Psychology & Sexuality. 1*(2), 157

Mereish, E. H., Poteat, V. P. (2015). The Conditions Under Which Growth-Fostering Relationships Promote Resilience and Alleviate Psychological Distress Among Sexual Minorities: Applications of Relational Cultural Theory. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity,* 2*(*3), 339–344. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000121

Miles, J. R., Kivlighan, D. M. (2012). Perceptions of Group Climate by Social Identity Group in Intergroup Dialogue. *Group Dynamics:*

Theory, Research, and Practice, *16*(3), 189–205. doi: 10.1037/a0028634

Rao, M. A., Roeser, R. W., Berry, R, Gonsalves, A, Hastak, Y, Shah, M. (2013). Globalization and the Identity Remix Among Urban Adolescents in India. *Journal of Research On Adolescence,23*(1), 9–24. doi: 10.1111/jora.12002

Salazar, C. F., Abrams, L. P. (2005). Conceptualizing Identity Development in Members of Marginalized Groups. *Journal of Professional Counseling: Practice, Theory, & Research.33*(1).

Schwab, J. R. (2013). Religious Meaning Making: Positioning Identities Through Stories. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *5*(3), 219–226. doi: 10.1037/a0031557

Shih, M., Young, M. J, Bucher, A. (2013). Working to Reduce the Effects of Discrimination. Identity Management Strategies in Organizations. *American Psychologist*. *68*(3), 145–157. doi: 10.1037/a0032250

Sorrell, J. H. (2006). The Pleasure of Dissent: A Critical Theory of Psychotherapy as an Emancipatory Practice. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*. *60*(2)

The World Bank South Asia Human Development Sector: Report 55: Charting a Programmatic Roadmap for Sexual Minority Groups in India, July 2012. Retrieved from http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2012/07/16514787/charting-programmatic-roadmap-sexual-minoritygroups- India)

Tran, A. G. T. T., Miyake, E. R., Martinez-Morales, V, Csizmadia, A. (2016). "What Are You?" Multiracial Individuals' Responses to Racial Identification Inquiries. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology,22*(1), 26–37. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/cdp0000031

Velez, B. L. Moradi, B., Brewster, M. E. (2013). Testing the Tenets of Minority Stress Theory in Workplace Contexts. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*., *60*(4), 532–542. doi: 10.1037/a0033346

Wadsworth L. P., Hayes-Skelton S. A. (2015). Differences Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Heterosexual Individuals and Those Who Reported an Other Identity on an Open-Ended Response on Levels of Social Anxiety. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, *2*(2), 181–187. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000092

Quotes for Noam Chomsky

(Famous for *Noam Chomsky: A Life of Dissent* by Robert F. Barsky)

"We shouldn't be looking for heroes, we should be looking for good ideas."

"If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all."

"The whole educational and professional training system is a very elaborate filter, which just weeds out people who are too independent, and who think for themselves, and who don't know how to be submissive, and so on -- because they're dysfunctional to the institutions."

"The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum...."

"Optimism is a strategy for making a better future. Because unless you believe that the future can be better, you are unlikely to step up and take responsibility for making it so."

"I was never aware of any other option but to question everything."

"All over the place, from the popular culture to the propaganda system, there is constant pressure to make people feel that they are helpless, that the only role they can have is to ratify decisions and to consume."

"Education is a system of imposed ignorance."

"It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and expose lies."

"For the powerful, crimes are those that others commit."

"I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom."