

connection

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Photography & artwork: Bruce Harlow, Tony Paul
Production: Gerry Fox

INFORMATION

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Who we are...

Seventh-day Adventist Kinship International, Inc. (Kinship) is a nonprofit support organization which ministers to the spiritual, emotional, social, and physical well-being of Seventh-day Adventist lesbian, gay men, bisexual, and transgendered individuals and their families and friends. Kinship facilitates and promotes the understanding and affirmation of LGBT Adventists among themselves and within the Seventh-day Adventist community through education, advocacy, and reconciliation. Kinship is an organization which supports the advance of human rights for all people.

Founded in 1976, the organization was incorporated in 1981 and is recognized as a 501a(3) non-profit organization in the US. Kinship has a board of up to 15 officers and 13 regional coordinators. The current list of members and friends includes several thousand people in 20 countries.

SDA Kinship believes the Bible does not condemn, or even mention, homosexuality as a sexual orientation. Ellen G. White does not parallel any of the Bible texts, which are often used to condemn homosexuals. Most of the anguish imposed upon God's children who grow up as LGBT has its roots in a misunderstanding of what the Bible says.

Support Kinship

Kinship operates solely on contributions from its members and friends. Help us reach out to more LGBT Adventists by making a tax-deductible donation to SDA Kinship International. Please send your check or money order to the address below.

SDA Kinship, P.O. Box 7320, Laguna Niguel, CA 92607 — 866-732-5677

Visit SDA Kinship's Web Site at: www.sdakinship.org

REGIONAL COORDINATORS - USA

Region 7 - Northwest
(AK, WA, OR ID, MT)
Dennis Grau
253-503-8363
dgrau10156@aol.com

Region 4 - Midwest
(MN, IO, MO, IL, MI, IN, KY, OH)
Fred Casey 866-732-5677
office@sdakinship.org

Region 6 Mountain-Plains
(ND, SD, CO, NE, WY, UT, NM)
Robb Crouch
402-466-9476
rcdgc@foundation.nebraska.edu

Region 1 - New England
(PA, NY, CT, RI, MA, VT, NH, ME)
Eric Gilleo 617-524-8210
ericg21@hotmail.com

Region 2 - Mid-Atlantic
(WV, VA, NC, DE, MD, DC)
Yolanda Elliot 410-531-5382
yselliott@aol.com

Region 3 - Deep South
(TN, AL, MS, GA, SC, FL)
Rick Shadix 770-489-4184
rick3176@aol.com

Region 5 - Lone Star-South
(TX, OK, AR, LA)
Floyd Poenitz 972-416-1358
floyd@attbi.com

Region 9 - South California / Arizona
(So. CA, AZ)
Jason Edwards 562-983-5662
thespisa@yahoo.com

Region 8 - North California Nevada / Hawaii
(No. CA, NV HI)
Harry Wilmoth 510-523-3461
hwilmoth@earthlink.net

AFFILIATED INTERNATIONAL REGION CONTACTS

Australia Noel Thorpe 61 (07) 33211101 nthorpe@vtown.com.au	Europe Ruud Kieboom 31-70-3231234 kinshipecurope@yahoo.com	Canada Brent Lehmann 604-696-0376 rblehmann@telus.net
Germany Roy Ratzler info@had-ev.de	Brazil Itamar Matos de Souza 55-61-383-2528 matoso25@ibest.com.br	Mexico & Spanish speaking Alexander Gomez Pasco 52-5752-1407 alexpasco@yahoo.com
		Philippines Jonathan Coe 0918-558-3262 cancer108@hotmail.com

Real world relationships

Jennifer L. Jacobsen, Region 8

In the real world people don't look like Jennifer Aniston or Brad Pitt, no one in the real world has that much time to spend on their body and their hair. Now, don't get me wrong, I love them both!

I love their movies and have watched Friends since the beginning. But in the real world we make mistakes, we get angry and we say hateful things. In the real world we break up and get back together again. In the real world love is messy and exhilarating all at the same time, the real world has no script. But, in the real world you find the love that can change your life and everything you thought you ever would or could be.

Everyone I know is out there looking for that "perfect mate". I got lucky and I found her on my second try. I admit, I am naive about a lot of things and I am not always the most aware person in the world, but I met someone who made me believe in me.

I met Chris in 1994, I was 24 years old and newly out to myself, my family and friends. I was lucky in that I had several very supportive friends, my family is still a work in progress, and myself, I am always a work in progress. My first real fear of being gay was that "Would God still love me?"

When I knew in my heart that I was in love with Chris, I prayed. I prayed like I had never prayed before in my life. I prayed and asked God that if she was not the one I was meant to be with, that He take away the feelings that I had for her and that He remove her from my life. He didn't do either one, in fact within a year we were living together. She moved from Kansas to California to be with me, she gave up everything for me.

I flew back to Kansas and she and I drove out to California together, and I knew when we arrived that it would

not be an easy life for either of us. The day we arrived was the first day my parents had met Chris, my mom gave her very "cool" hug, my dad gave her big 'ole "bear hug".

So I knew then which parent was going to be the roughest one to deal with. I already had come out to both parents, my mom asked what she had done wrong and my dad just thought it was a phase I was going through. My brother never said anything.

Chris and I began our life together and to say it was all roses and kisses would be a lie. We have at one time or another argued over everything

God created us and loves us no matter what we look like or if we are gay or straight

from money to which side of the sink is the best to wash the dishes on (I say the side with the garbage disposal, she says the other side, we still haven't settled that one).

I am one of those people that don't believe I am loved just because someone tells me they love me. If someone yells at me I am more apt to believe that they love me. I know I put Chris through hell for the first year. I would pick fights with her over absolutely nothing. I wanted her to yell at me and cuss at me and then I would be okay. But after a few of those, she knew what I was doing and then flatly refused to do it anymore. In fact she would leave me alone to be a complete fool all on my own. I would think she was in the other room crying or something, only to find out she had left the house, gone for a drive or a walk until I

cooled down and had stopped acting out.

I have friends who ask how we stay together. We have had our ups and downs, our times of trial and our periods where we thought it would end. But it doesn't, we keep coming back to each other and the love we share. Chris has made a profound impact on my life, much more than she will ever admit to. When we met, I had dreams of writing and changing the world; she encourages me every step of the way.

I am notoriously afraid of failure, and in a family that seems to enjoy watching another family member fall, failure can be a difficult thing to deal with. But being with Chris has taught me to live life for me, to be who I want to be regardless of who they tell me to be. If I did listen to them I would push myself to live a life that was a lie. I would be married with 2.5 kids, with the big house and the fancy car, but it wouldn't be me and I wouldn't be happy.

God has played a very important part in Chris' and my relationship. I was raised Seventh Day Adventist, Chris was not. Her family would occasionally go to the local Baptist church. So our two views of religion often differ. But we both believe in and love God.

Chris holds to the belief that God created us and loves us no matter what we look like or if we are gay or straight. She came into our relationship with this already figured out.

It has taken me a bit more time to really come to this realization and to get past my family's puritanical belief system. I struggled, it was hard for me. I felt like I was betraying my family and everything I had been taught. So, I prayed and I read. I bought books on homosexuality and religion, and I read my Bible. Chris would search the web for books that she thought would help me, she waited patiently for me to catch up with her.

I had to learn on my own what she already knew. It has been said that

God is Love, and I believe it is true. He is LOVE. I am lucky to have a partner that loves me enough to let me search and find this out on my own, and I thank God everyday for her.

There is no secret to why Chris and I have stayed together as long as we have. We share one common goal; to live the rest of our lives together. We had a very private commitment ceremony almost ten years ago. It was God, Chris, and myself alone in a room. Chris and I promised each other our eternal love, devotion, and support. We felt that the only witness we needed was the One that had brought us together. The only true thing I know about having a long lasting, loving relationship is giving it up to God; because, no one else can choose the perfect mate for you. He brought me my real world love; He can bring you yours too.

This real world relationship depends on Him being a part of it everyday.

Want to make a difference?

This is the second of a three-part how-to get involved in Kinship series.

Get acquainted

If you haven't been to Kampmeeting, there isn't a better way to get acquainted with the Kinship family. KinNet is a great way to stay in touch throughout the year and the Connection will attempt to live up to it's name. When you are ready for more here are some ideas:

in the January issue:

How to: Advertise Kinship in local GLBT press

in this issue:

How to: Establish a local chapter

in the May issue

How to: Volunteer in Kinship

From song service at Kampmeeting to office projects to board positions, there is a Kinship volunteer opportunity to suit your calling.

Make a difference

Establish a local SDA Kinship chapter

Want more to happen in your area? Why not start a chapter!

To start, call the regional coordinator. Tell the coordinator that you want to start a chapter in your area. Before you call, read the first paragraph on the flyleaf of the Connection under the heading, "Who we are". It is important that you are able to tell the coordinator that you want to establish a chapter that fulfills the purpose and mission of SDA Kinship.

Plan 3 meetings

That's right. Three meetings in three months with three or more SDA Kinship members in attendance at each meeting, is what it takes to be certified as a chapter. Once established as a chapter, IRS rules for non-profit mileage and financial contributions apply. See your friendly tax accountant for the details. Guidelines for chapter organization are available if a formal organization is needed.

Plan, Delegate, Encourage

Put a plan in place for the first meeting. People appreciate a vision. Meetings range from getting together for lunch at a restaurant, potluck, pie and ice-cream (it doesn't have to be food, unless you want this editor's attention:) a hike, a movie, an elephant exchange, guest speaker, community service, table games, etc. Remember, it isn't the activity itself that really counts. Most of us have plenty to do. It's about getting together and enjoying the support and encouragement that only we can give each other.

Ask a couple other people to plan an event so that more people are involved and fewer get burned out. Then encourage the core team.

Cheer them on, celebrate successes along the way, "encourage one another and lift each other up."

3C's: Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Successful chapter leaders like Jacob Demetrius will tell you that it takes a lot of phone calls, e-mails, Yahoo group messages, or snail mail to keep everyone informed. Some regions like Region 8, split the regional coordinator role in half with one person responsible for getting the word out.

Kinship how-to series

For the first 3 meetings, while you are getting the chapter started, the Kinship Office, office@sdakinship.org will send out e-mail and snail mail messages. Just send the information to Fred, (what's planned, when, where, what to bring/

wear etc.) one month ahead of the event. Fred does a fantastic job of creating attractive invitations.

Once the chapter is meeting regularly, your area will jump to the top of the local list of consideration for SDA Kinship ads (details in January issue)

Keep meeting

Send pictures from a meeting to the new connection editor and you will make another friend for life. Let your regional coordinator know what is going on, and copy the office office@sdakinship.org. They can help to ensure that needed resources are funneled to active groups.

A meeting every other month is all it takes to keep a chapter alive and well. You'll make new friends. You will make better friends. You will likely make someone else's life much more pleasant in the process.

Support for Adventist family & friends

Parents, families & friends have someone-to-talk-to while adjusting in the coming out journey

The SDA Kinship board has voted to recognize FFLAG as the referral organization for all families and friends of SDA Kinship members who are seeking a supportive environment. The board believes that the needs of both GLBT individuals and their families are best met by parallel but closely aligned organizations that focus on the specific needs of their respective memberships. The office

is receiving frequent requests from families who wish to talk to others in a similar situation or to advocate for the GLBT community.

FFLAG was selected because of its strong track record of providing positive and constructive support for accepting and non-accepting families of Kinship members. FFLAG recently mailed stories and reference materials that encourage compassion to all SDA pastors

in the US, staffed booths at SDA related conventions, and maintains an active web site and discussion group found at www.someone-to-talk-to.net.

Carol Grady, FFLAG founder, recently authored an open letter to a non-accepting mother regarding Biblical "clobber" texts that is being used as the benchmark for development of a similar statement on the SDA Kinship Web site.

SDA Kinship spring board meeting

March 1 & 2, 2003, Crownsville, MD

The need for Kinship is evidently strong as a new member joins Kinship every day. Similarly positive reports on all initiatives were the norm for spring board meeting hosted by Taylor Ruhl and Leif Lind.

John Edwards, '03 Kampmeeting coordinator, visited this year's Kampmeeting site, Green Mountain College, prior to the

meeting. The staff is organized, helpful, and several prominent staff members are quite out.

Accommodations will be in 3 story Limon Hall which is exclusively reserved for Kinship use. Bedding, plenty of towels, and housekeeping services are provided. Bathrooms are very private. The cafeteria is roomy and serves a wide variety of both vegetarian and non-

vegetarian cuisine year-round. A mid-week barbecue will break up the routine. The Kampmeeting registration insert is also available on the Kinship web-site or the office can provide extra copies.

The board also selected July 7 to 14 for Kampmeeting 2005 in St. Louis, MO. Kampmeeting will begin immediately after the closing weekend of the General Conference session. The planning committee is expecting some outstanding speakers in addition to the wonderful camaraderie and fun associated with Kampmeeting.

An important part of Kampmeeting is election of officers for the new year. All positions are open each year, and the incumbent secretary and *Connection* editor will not be running for re-election. Position descriptions are available from the office. In addition, Region Coordinators for Regions 4 (Midwest), 8 (N. CA / HI / NV), and 9 (S. CA / AZ) are needed. Please contact SDA Kinship President, Bob Bouchard, president@sdakinship.org if you have an interest.

The board also spent significant time planning effective financial and organizational strategies and processes for coping with SDA Kinship's rapid growth.

Notes from readers

Jim Kaatz, Ed.D.; President, San Diego Adventist Forum

I received my first copy of *Connection* in the San Diego Adventist Forum mail today. Thank you — it's nicely done.

It might be of interest for your readers to know that the San Diego Forum presentation on October 11 will feature Dr. John Cobb, professor emeritus of Fuller Theological Seminary, presenting: *The Biblical Perspective on Homosexuality*. Dr. Madelynn Jones-Haldeman, professor emeritus of La Sierra University, will respond to his presentation.

Forum presentations are at 3:00 p.m., typically the second Sabbath of each

month except for June and December (recess), at the San Diego Tierrasanta SDA Church.

Persons may request being added to the monthly newsletter mailing roster which is sent out without cost to interested individuals. A listing of past Forum presentations, recorded on audio cassettes, may also be obtained upon request. For the above or further details, contact: ak-jk@cox.net or 619-561-2360 or P. O. Box 3148, La Mesa, CA 91944-3148.

Let me know if this information is of interest.

Thank you.

Health notes: Infectious disease alert

from HIV/AIDS Surveillance Supplemental Report Volume 8, Number 3 and other public sources

On January 27, the LA Times reported a sharp rise in antibiotic resistant staph infections among gay men in the LA area. Since the fall of 2002, the number of gay men in Los Angeles County suffering from boils, inflammation, and abscesses on their hands, legs, and genitals has risen sharply.

Several similar cases have been reported in Boston and New York City. The cases are unique because many of the men affected are not immuno-compromised. They do not have HIV or other factors that would make them more susceptible.

Staph is a common bacterium. Many of you have probably had staph infections before, particularly if you've had surgery or have been in the hospital. However, in recent years new strains of staph have appeared that are more aggressive and difficult to treat. These strains usually appear in hospitals, nursing homes, or other locations where individuals have weak immune systems.

A staph infection is usually first manifested as a boil or abscess on the

skin. If you notice these symptoms, it is worth visiting your physician to have it investigated. Staph infections are rarely fatal and can be treated, but they are serious and painful.

Unfortunately, staph is easily spread by skin-to-skin contact, particularly in warm, moist environments. In LA, it is speculated that sexual contact or the shared use of sauna or gym facilities may be the means of transmission. However there is no evidence that this is the case and health officials caution that the number of cases, while significant by historical standards, is still small. This is not an epidemic by any measure.

For those who think this seems eerily familiar to the first reports of HIV infection, here are a few points that indicate this situation different:

1. Staph is a known pathogen that is familiar to all health-care facilities
2. Staph can be treated, though an infection is serious and treatment involves powerful antibiotics
3. As a community we are much better equipped to spread information about infectious

diseases and protect ourselves as a result of our HIV experiences

On a more serious note, significant outbreaks of syphilis have recently been reported in New York City, Los Angeles, Houston, and Miami. In NYC the number of cases jumped 55 percent in 2002, with the increase concentrated among gay and bisexual men.

Big cities aren't the only danger spots. In Palm Springs with a population of 40,000, the number of cases skyrocketed from 7 in 2001 to 53 in 2002.

Syphilis symptoms, if they appear at all, include sores on the genitals, anus, or mouth; non-itchy rashes on the body; flu-like symptoms and swollen glands; and hair loss. While penicillin and other drugs can easily knock out syphilis in its early stages, left untreated it can damage the heart, eyes, brain, cripple, or even kill.

While syphilis is usually treatable, the rise in cases threatens to boost HIV rates because infection makes it easier to transmit the AIDS virus. Clinics can detect the disease with a simple blood test.

While the official estimate of new AIDS cases in the US continues to decrease, some new data suggests a disturbing reversal. Reuters reported on February 11, 2003 that AIDS cases might actually be increasing. In the 25 states that reported new diagnoses of HIV infection, there was an 8 percent increase in the number of cases between 1999 and 2001.

Dr. Ron Valdiserri, a deputy director of the National Center for HIV, Sexually Transmitted Diseases and Tuberculosis Prevention at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention presented the results at the 10th Annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections, being held in Boston.

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Today, **42 million people are estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS**. Of these, 38.6 million are adults. 19.2 million are women, and 3.2 million are children under 15.

An estimated **5 million people acquired the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in 2002**, including 2 million women and 800,000 children under 15.

During 2002, **AIDS caused the deaths of an estimated 3.1 million people**, including 1.2 million women and 610,000 children under 15.

Women are becoming increasingly affected by HIV. Approximately **50%, or 19.2 million**, of the 38.6 million adults living with HIV or AIDS worldwide are women.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats.htm>

Gay and Lesbian Seventh-day Adventists:

Strategies and outcomes of resisting homosexuality

Rene D. Drumm

This article presents findings from a qualitative study of 37 gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists. Using in-depth interviewing, the research explored participants' accounts of the home environments and examined participants' journeys in trying to reconcile a lesbian or gay sexual orientation with an identity as Christian. Findings offer contextual information regarding the participants' experience growing up in Adventist families and Adventist churches whose religious beliefs prohibited homosexual behavior. Findings highlight various strategies participants used to resist homosexuality, including several change strategies that appear unique to Christian gay and lesbian persons that have not been previously examined in the literature, and the outcomes of those efforts. These findings suggest implications for social work practitioners, social work educators, and faith-based communities.

Many world religions point to the Bible story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah as proof of God's disapproval of homosexuality (Ponse, 1978). Particularly among conservative Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish adherents, the practice of homosexuality is condemned (LeVay & Nonas, 1995). In spite of this, many homosexual persons have religious identities and commitments that they are reluctant to give up (Salais & Fisher, 1995). Studies suggest that "gays and lesbians belong to the various major faiths and denominations in about the same proportions as other Americans" (LeVay & Nonas, 1995, p. 106). Further, research indicates that among gays who were religiously affiliated, the religious attitudes of gay and non-gay members were not

much different (O'Brian, 1991).

In studying religiously affiliated gays and lesbians, researchers note the pervasiveness of the influence of religious socialization on the individual. Religion frequently provides a world view with which all other competing forces must contend (Thumma, 1991). This world view may be so powerful that it

While some of the strategies reported here reflect themes from the literature, I will elaborate on the unique aspects of lesbian and gay Adventists' journeys...

produces measurable differences in attitudes among gay and lesbian persons. Wagner et al. (1994) noted a significant difference between a community sample of gay persons not associated with a religious institution and those affiliated with a particular religion concerning religious beliefs and religious behavior. These findings may indicate important differences in the gay community between religiously affiliated and non-religiously affiliated gay and lesbians.

Internal Conflict and Seeking Change

The more serious homosexuals are about their religious experience, the more conflict they may have over their homosexuality (Bell &

Weinberg, 1978). Some researchers note an association between religiosity and homophobia (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). Individuals reared in families whose religious beliefs define homosexual behavior as sinful may internalize these convictions (Wagner et al., 1994). Some may believe "If I am homosexual, I must not be a true Christian; if I am a Christian, I cannot be homosexual." As a result of the conviction that homosexual behavior is inherently non-Christian, religiously affiliated gays and lesbians often seek to change their sexual orientation (Friedman & Downey, 1994). The search for a change in sexual orientation, however, is often disappointing because such a change appears to be highly unlikely (Friedman & Downey, 1994). Coleman (1988, p. xv) states, "many of the psychoanalytic and behavioral approaches which were designed to purge homosexuality from the individual and create heterosexuality were found to be generally ineffective and ethically questionable." Research concerning "change ministry" within the Adventist church found widespread sexual abuse of the counselees by the "reformed homosexual" center director (Lawson, 1987). While literature exists supporting the possibility of change in sexual orientation, it remains controversial. One reviewer of change therapy concludes that these studies "are consistently flawed by poor or nonexistent followup data, improper classification of subjects, and confusion of heterosexual competence with sexual orientation shift" (Haldeman, 1991, p. 155).

As social perceptions and attitudes have shifted regarding the merit and efficacy of changing sexual orientation, acceptance of one's

homosexuality has become the focus of social work practice and policy. Consequently, the literature has dwindled concerning efforts religiously affiliated gay and lesbian persons make to change their orientations. In addition, there is a significant lack of information about the everyday experience of many homosexual Christians in terms of integrating their religion and sexual orientation. This paper addresses the experiences of gay and lesbian Seventh-day Adventists and reviews their journeys in reconciling a lesbian or gay sexual orientation with an identity as a particular kind of Christian. Seventh-day Adventists view homosexual behavior as sinful (Ministerial Association, 1988). Since this is a typical stance in conservative Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism (Orbach, 1975; Thumma, 1991), this research may have implications for persons of other religious faiths as well.

Methods

The naturalistic paradigm of scientific inquiry provided the structure for this qualitative study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The naturalistic paradigm holds that perceptual realities are "multiple, constructed, and holistic" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 37). In-depth interviewing provided the vehicle to gain a deeper understanding of lesbian and gay Adventists from the perspective of the participants.

Study Participants and Sample Selection

95.8%

Gay/Lesbian Online Census

Q: Are you out to your immediate family, friends and/or at work?

Being out to friends is the most prevalent with more than 9 out of 10 respondents (92.3%) saying their friends know they are gay. Eight out of 10 (80.3%) are out to family members with 66.4 percent out at work. Less than five percent of the respondents are not out (4.2%) at all.

Thirty seven individuals contributed information for the study. Of these, 28 were interviewed, and nine submitted autobiographies for analysis. There were 14 women and 23 men whose ages ranged from 23 to 56. While most were Caucasian, there was one Asian American, one African American, and one person of Hispanic descent. There was also some international diversity in the sample. One participant was a native of Australia and two participants were Canadian. All participants had graduated from high school. Seventeen participants had completed college, eight had continued on to a master's degree, two had graduated from medical school, and three had earned a doctoral degree. This study used purposive sampling methods in accordance with the conventions of the naturalistic paradigm to magnify information and add understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To locate participants, I used the internet computer network developed by members of SDA Kinship International, called KinNet. SDA Kinship International is a support group for Seventh-day Adventist gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered persons. I invited users of this group to reply to a general announcement explaining my project. Members could participate by agreeing to an in-depth interview or by submitting an autobiography. To be included in the study, the participants needed to meet two criteria: (1) identify themselves as homosexual and (2) be a current or former member of the Seventh-day Adventist church.

Data Collection and Analysis

I developed an interview guide based on the research questions from my doctoral dissertation. This guide was used as a starting point to direct the discussion and assist in getting similar information from all participants (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Autobiographies were also gathered from some participants. In this way, I was able to use multiple sources of data. Triangulation "improves the probability that findings and interpretations will be found credible" (Lincoln & Guba,

1985, p. 305). The interviews lasted an average of two to three hours with a maximum of six hours. Participants reviewed and signed an informed consent agreement prior to the interview. Interviewees had an option of being audiotaped or allowing me to take notes on a lap top computer to record the data. The naturalistic paradigm calls for inductive data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data were initially processed using the computer program Ethnograph to assist in coding the emerging themes. As coding continued in the analysis process, I examined specific instances of the codes to clarify similarities and differences. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I generated both descriptive and explanatory categories. This process led to interpretive insights as I noted the emerging themes. To assure accuracy in my interpretations, I used member checking as an analytical tool. Member checking consists of the participants reviewing the report for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of member checking is to provide a direct test of the findings and analysis with the participants themselves. All of the names used through this study are pseudonyms. I chose to use pseudonyms instead of case numbers so that ethnicity and gender would not be masked. In addition, pseudonyms aid the reader in identifying the participants as persons rather than objects used for scientific study.

Growing Up Adventist

For the majority of lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists in this study, understanding the influence of family and religion was fundamental to understanding how their conflicts formed between their sexual orientation and religious affiliation. Most participants grew up in Adventist homes and were firmly entrenched in the Adventist religion. One participant summarized his experience: To answer the question of how I became an Adventist, I'd have to say that I don't know what else I could have been. I was born in an Adventist hospital

(on the Sabbath, no less), to SDA parents who had graduated from SDA schools, sent there by their SDA parents. I went only to SDA churches and my parents socialized almost exclusively with SDA's. My aunts and uncles were SDA's. One set were missionary doctors, another uncle was an academy Bible teacher. My mother's father had been a missionary to Japan (Marvin). Participants in this study overwhelmingly reported growing up experiences of typical Seventh-day Adventist families. The majority of participants described having family worship, following a vegetarian diet, keeping the Sabbath, and other traditions promoted by the church. Nearly all participants related that they had come from a close-knit family. "I come from a very loving and caring family. We are very close to this day. I call them all the time and assure them that I love them. They do the same" (Donald). Seventh-day Adventist education was another important factor influencing these participants. All of the lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample attended a church-affiliated school for at least some portion of their education. "The greatest influence on my development as an Adventist was probably the fact that I attended SDA schools from first grade through a master's degree" (Tom).

The combination of being raised in Adventist homes and attending Adventist schools produced a similar acceptance of Adventist teachings and traditions among the participants. Most participants accepted the Adventist religion and belief system in its entirety. "I went to boarding school for academy and an Adventist college a few hours away after I graduated. I had a good experience. My teachers were great. I really never questioned the Adventist beliefs having grown up in the environment" (Nathan).

Dealing with the Conflict of Religion and Sexual Orientation through Resisting Homosexuality

Having had similar family and educational backgrounds, participants in this study also experienced comparable journeys as

they developed an understanding of their sexual orientations. Much has been written in the literature regarding stages and models of how people come to see themselves as gay or lesbian (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982; Plummer, 1975; Troiden, 1988). Less is known about the specific strategies individuals use to try **not** to be gay or lesbian. Lesbian and gay Adventists offered some insights about how they resisted homosexuality. While some of the strategies reported here reflect themes from the literature, I will elaborate on the unique aspects of lesbian and gay Adventists' journeys in resisting homosexuality. As these participants began to understand their sexual orientation to be other than heterosexual, they engaged in a number of strategies to resist "becoming" gay or lesbian. Participants used change-seeking strategies that included: staying in denial, seeking professional help to change orientation, engaging in suicide attempts, praying, claiming Bible promises, using religious rituals, immersion in religion, and heterosexual marriage. Many participants used tools they had gleaned from church teachings to ward off homosexual urges. Of these eight strategies, five appeared unique to gay men and lesbians with strong religious identities. That is, the strategies of staying in denial, seeking professional help, and engaging in suicide attempts are common in the literature as ways that lesbians and gay men sometimes deal with their homosexuality. While research documents heterosexual marriage among gay and lesbian populations, it is generally not within the context of trying to change sexual orientation. Praying, claiming Bible promises, using religious rituals, and immersion in religion as strategies in changing sexual orientation are seldom mentioned.

Denial

Denial is a typical response in understanding oneself as gay or lesbian (Troiden, 1988). Participants in this sample, however, often connected the denial with religion or God. One participant remembered, "I couldn't admit to myself that I

51.1%

Gay/Lesbian Online Census

Q: What (item) most accurately describes your same-sex relationship status?

More than half of respondents are in a committed relationship with 51.1 percent saying they are partnered and 3.4 percent stating they had a civil union or same-sex marriage ceremony.

Q: What is the length of your current relationship?

Of those respondents who say they are either partnered or had a civil union ceremony, 32.6 percent have been together 1-3 years and 25.4 percent have been together 4-7 years. 13.3 percent have been together less than a year, while at the other end of the spectrum, 16.3 percent have been together a dozen years or more.

Of those currently in a relationship, 19.2 percent say they had a commitment ceremony or civil union ceremony. Female respondents are much more likely to have had some sort of ceremony.

Of those respondents who say they are in a committed relationship, 78 percent of women and 64.4 percent of men say they are in a relationship of seven years or less. Conversely, 22 percent of women and 35.6 percent of men say they are in a relationship of eight years or more.

was gay. It seemed to be such a sin. I just knew it had to be my fault, my choice made wrong somewhere I didn't remember" (Marvin). A woman reported, "My first reaction [to realizing my homosexuality] was screaming inside, 'No! God, No! I'd rather die.'"

Professional Help to Change Orientation

About one-third of this sample sought professional help to change their sexual orientations. The range of modalities included traditional talk therapy, aversion therapy and residential treatment. In each case,

these efforts failed. This supports existing literature which documents the difficulties that are typically encountered in changing orientations (Friedman & Downey, 1994). In some cases, failure to change was only one problem associated with treatment attempts. One participant experienced sexual abuse while attending a church affiliated "change ministry" program. This ministry was operated by a "reformed homosexual" who was a former SDA minister (Lawson, 1987). This participant committed himself to residential "treatment" and was sexually approached by the director from the first weekend at the center until he left over a year later. Subsequent interviews with former residents revealed wide-spread abuse among the counselees in this particular "change ministry" (Lawson, 1987).

Suicide Attempts

Research indicates that suicide among lesbian and gay adolescents is six times higher than the norm (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 1997). It is not surprising, therefore, that about one-fourth of the participants in this study also attempted suicide in response to their homosexuality. These attempts ranged from taking handfuls of pills (whatever they could readily find) to cutting their wrists and hospitalization.

Prayer

All of the participants in this sample used prayer as a means to resist

homosexuality. This generally took the form of praying to God to take away homosexual desires. "I spend entire nights agonizing in prayer with God. Begging Him, 'Please Lord! Please! Don't let me be gay!' I found myself praying, 'Please Lord, let this cup pass from me, but your will be done'" (Joanne). "I have prayed my entire life (since age 13) that the Lord would change me. I didn't want to have these feelings. I didn't want to go to hell. I didn't want to be this way" (Mitch).

Claiming Bible Promises

Adventists believe that God, through the Bible, promises help in times of need. Participants were taught to "claim" these promises, that is, believe that God's help will come to them if they ask, referring to certain Bible texts. "I resolutely decided I could overcome this, with God's help. It was sin and all sin could be overcome through Christ. I began looking for Bible texts to admonish myself. I'd look for promises of overcoming and ask friends to pray for me" (Sue).

Use of Religious Rituals

The "laying on of hands" is a religious ritual where Adventist ministers and elders of the church pray for the person who needs "healing." The laying on of hands is done in a group while touching the individual. One male informant recalled, "Soon after my first affair I was filled with guilt. So the next morning I said to him [my partner], 'You can't stay here. This is wrong.' He left and I got into the religion thing again. People prayed for me with laying on of hands" (Alan).

Immersion in Religion

When trying to resist homosexuality, some lesbian and gay Adventists would immerse themselves in religious activities hoping that the homosexual tendencies would lessen. "I did a lot of praying. I got involved with church activities like leading out in song service, youth activities, helped out with Pathfinders and I led out in Sabbath School" (Nathan). "After my sophomore year in college I decided to become a student missionary. If I had a year off to do nothing but concentrate

on ministering to others, I could overcome this" (Sue).

Heterosexual marriage

One way participants in this study tried to resist homosexuality was to pursue a heterosexual relationship and get married. Most individuals realized that they were gay or lesbian; however, they hoped that marriage would change their orientations. All of the participants in this study who married are now divorced. In general, participants held their former spouses in high regard and expressed much regret for the pain the marriage caused. One female participant remembered her heterosexual marriage, I guess I allowed myself to fall in love with the idea that this guy loved and cared for me. When he asked me to marry him, I was 32 years old and figured this was God's answer to my prayers. After all, we were taught that if we asked God to take away unnatural desires he would do so (Nan). Other participants were less sure that the marriage would change them, but wanted to give it a try. On his wedding day, one participant recalled, "Standing in the church waiting to say, 'I do,' I was thinking, 'I shouldn't do this. Hans, you're gay. But you can't back out now. What will the church think of you?' I wanted to be married. I wanted to be straight. I thought I could pretend" (Hans).

Outcomes of Resistance

While the lesbian and gay Seventh-day Adventists in this study had previously resisted acknowledging and accepting their homosexuality, at the time of interview, they recognized their sexual orientations as a part of them that would not change or go away. This section outlines three basic outcomes or decisions participants made to deal with their homosexuality and religion after abandoning resistance.

Leave the Church while Retaining Gay/Lesbian Identity

Approximately one-third of the participants in this study (12 out of 37) chose to leave the church after realizing that their resistance was not going to change their orientations. In this study, leaving

57.5%

Gay/Lesbian Online Census

Q: Do you identify more strongly with your ethnicity or your sexual orientation? Do you, for instance, think of yourself as a gay person first, then African-American?

Overall, 57.5 percent of respondents say they identify more strongly with their orientation while 8.3 percent identify more with their ethnicity. A third of respondents (33.9%) say they identify equally with both.

the church refers to dropping church membership. In spite of dropping church membership, many of the participants still sustained, to some extent, Adventist traditions. For example, some remained vegetarian and observed the Sabbath, which are traditions of the Adventist religion. There were three conditions under which lesbian and gay Adventists in this sample left the church. These conditions included: (1) no longer believing church doctrines; (2) believing church doctrines, but not being able to conform to them; or (3) feeling righteous indignation and leaving the church.

No Longer Believe Church Doctrine

The majority of participants who left the church did so simply because they no longer believed church doctrines. Nationally, the Adventist church experiences about a 50 percent dropout rate as people change their religious beliefs (Willis, 1998). Being gay or lesbian may or may not itself have been the decisive factor in these participants' decisions to leave the church. One woman shared, "I left because I no longer believed the doctrines nor the dogma of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, even in God. I believe that there is no one truth as SDA's claim" (Anna).

Believe Doctrine, Cannot Conform, Leave the Church

Another condition of leaving the church was that the participants believed the church doctrines, but realized that they could not conform to the expectations of the church (celibacy) and left. These participants believed that homosexual behavior was wrong, and therefore did not want to go to church because they knew they would not remain celibate. I'm no longer in the church, but I'm a lot more comfortable with myself as a gay person. I don't pretend to have the big answer [about homosexuality]. I would take the position that it [homosexual behavior] isn't a sin if I was talking to my mom. But I'm not sure I'm convinced of that myself. It would be very hard to come back to the church. It would make a difference if the church turned its position around. I still hang on to certain Adventist

traditions. I tithe to Kinship, and I'm still a vegetarian, don't drink or smoke. The big issue is the gay issue (Mark).

Believe Doctrines, Feel Righteous Indignation, Leave

A third condition for leaving the church was that participants felt wronged by the church and left. In general, these participants believed most of the Adventist doctrines, but did not attend church because of the church's stance on homosexuality. These participants felt that the church had rejected them and in return, they rejected the church. One participant said: With respect to institutional Adventism, I want no part of it unless I am welcome. Until gay acceptance is written as part of a policy of acceptance, I want no part of institutional Adventism. I have a wonderful worship community that I am a part of. I will not simply idolize my past, nostalgia, or familiarity (George).

Retain Church Membership Through Celibacy

Homosexuals who practice celibacy can hold church membership in good standing since the church's objection is focused on homosexual behavior rather than orientation. Two of the 25 who retained church membership did so by practicing celibacy. These individuals fully recognized and accepted their sexual orientation and believed it would not change. At the same time, they did not want to give up church membership and therefore made a commitment to celibacy. One participant said, "For myself, I have to be celibate because it [homosexuality] is a controversial issue. I might not keep that same reference forever, but for now I'm committed to living a celibate life (Jim).

Integrate Gay/Lesbian and Adventist Affiliation

About 60% of the lesbian and gay Adventist in this study (23 of 37) had fully integrated their sexual orientation with their Adventist church lifestyle and membership. The participants in this group were fairly open regarding their sexual orientation and their Seventh-day Adventist affiliation. In general,

12.5%

Gay/Lesbian Online Census

Q: Do you have children under the age of 18 living at home?

Almost 13 percent of respondent households have children under the age of 18 living at home (12.5%). More than three-quarters of those households with children are female households (78.4% or 857/1093).

Q: If you are either in a household with children under the age of 18 or are the parent of a non-resident child under the age of 18, was that child/ children (select all that apply):

Of those respondents who answered affirmatively to one of the answer options, 68.6 percent say the child comes from a previous opposite-sex relationship. 11.1 percent say the child is related by blood, but not the respondent's or the respondent's partner's own offspring. 9.3 percent say the child was conceived artificially and 7.4 percent say the child is adopted. 1.8 percent say the child is a foster child.

participants who integrated gay/lesbian orientation with church membership were either in a committed same-sex relationship or were looking for a life partner. The following interview excerpts illustrate the integration of homosexual orientation and Adventist affiliation. Despite the church's official opinion, there are two things I've always been — always will be — a Seventh-day Adventist and a lesbian. God doesn't expect me to try to be something I'm not, or say I can't be something I believe in (Nan). I am still a quite conservative Adventist. The Adventist lifestyle is something that works for me and something that I worked out with God on my knees after many hours of prayer and studying and tearful contemplation. The same goes for my homosexuality. I have peace in my heart that God accepts me as I am. Being the omnipotent God that He is, he knew I was going to be gay long before I was a gleam in my Dad's eye. Now I see my

homosexuality as a blessing. It took a long time to get there—34 years (Hans).

continued next issue

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- Disease - continued from page 5
- "We see a 14 percent increase in HIV diagnoses over this two-year period in men who have sex with men and a 10 percent increase in heterosexual transmissions," Valdiserri said.
- About half the new cases of HIV are in women who are infected by men, the CDC says. However, the 25 states reporting represented about 25 percent of HIV cases in the country and do not include New York and California, the two states with the most cases.

63.7%

Gay/Lesbian Online Census

Q: What is your religious affiliation?

Q: Are you currently practicing?

More than 6 out of 10 (63.7%) respondents say they are affiliated with a particular religion; 38 percent say they are practicing members. The largest segment is Catholics (17.2%), although only 29.5 percent of those members say they are practicing.



Rene' Drumm, pictured above at Kampmeeting 2002, is an Associate Professor of social work and coordinates the Advanced Interpersonal Practice track of the MSW program at Andrews University. Dr. Drumm holds a master's degree in Social Work from Michigan State University and a Ph.D. in Sociology/Family Studies from Texas Women's University.

Thank You!

Susan Carver responded to the appeal for advertising funds in the last Connection issue by funding 4 months of ads.