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When Religion Meets Sexuality

TWO TALES OF INTERSECTION

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For many nonreligious people in secular liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom, religion is widely perceived as a constraining and restrictive force, antithetical to a contemporary society that values personal liberty, difference, pluralism, and diversity. In my view, this perception is most evidently manifested in contestations about gendered and sexual bodily subjectivities, performances, and practices, such as the controversy surrounding religious dress codes (e.g., the veil), sexual equality legislation (e.g., parenting rights for same-sex couples), and sex education in schools (e.g., the proposed curriculum in Ontario; see Shipley, Chapter 4, this volume). From this perspective, the intersection of religion and sexuality necessarily leads to tension and conflict, manifested in individuals' deference to religious institutional and community diktats, exacting high psychological and social costs for those who do not fall within the rigid and narrow definition of acceptable sexual and gender expression, namely (heterosexual) sex only within marriage. Therefore, it often baffles nonreligious people why any individual, particularly the young, would choose to align with an institutional space that seems to curb the full expression of one's humanity. This is of course a simplistic and exaggerated account of the intricate relationship between religion and sexuality, underscored by the "secularism-democracy-choice" ideological nexus. Although there is undeniably an empirical basis to this discourse, there is also another tale to be told, which presents a more positive outcome, encapsulating voices of integration and accommodation.

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Within this context, this chapter aims to present my broad reflections on the intersection between religion and sexuality. My reflections are based on empirical data drawn from various research projects on, generally, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) Christians, Muslims, and Buddhists, as well as on heterosexual and LGB religious young adults of diverse religious faiths. Whereas some chapters in this volume focus on broader political and cultural processes embroiled in the debate on sexual and religious pluralism, this chapter's spotlight is on religious social actors' diverse experiences in managing such tensions in everyday life and on their social and political implications. Although the research on which this chapter is based was undertaken in the United Kingdom, the broad theme on the intersection of sexuality and religion is also relevant to the study of LGB people with religious faith in Canada as social actors who endeavour to construct integrated sexual and religious identities by engaging with different enabling and constraining factors.[1]

I would like to emphasize two more points at this stage. First, the corpus of empirical data from which I draw focuses primarily on Christianity and Islam. Bearing in mind that there are inter- and intrareligious similarities and differences across religions, any attempt to essentialize and generalize religion should be discouraged. This is particularly crucial if we are committed to a "lived religion" or "everyday religion" perspective that prioritizes the multifaceted lived experience and the agentic capacity of religious actors rather than the institutional dimension of religious teachings and praxis (e.g., Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008). Second, the two broad tales this chapter presents should not be considered exhaustive, static, and mutually exclusive. As will become clear, these tales could represent a trajectory or a journey from a space of tension and conflict to one of integration and growth. Often, this process is conceived as a journey of spiritual growth, where one matures in one's relationship with oneself, others, and the divine. There could be a host of factors that facilitate this process, such as access to, and consumption of, online and offline social and theological support (e.g., support networks and LGB-affirming popular and scholarly sexual theology). From a sociological and psychological perspective, this process could be seen as the development of a positive identity, often leading to a heightened politicization of religious faith and sexuality, as well as to better social adjustment. This is not to say that the journey is unidirectional. Rather,

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it has the potential to take different twists and turns, making the management of tension and conflict and the development of integration very much an everyday experience and practice of religious and sexual actors.

The First Tale: Tension and Conflict

The uncomfortable and awkward relationship between sexuality and Christianity is widely documented in scholarly literature. This interaction is well summarized by Hunt (2010, xi):

> Sexuality ... has long been a matter of taboo for the Christian Church, remaining marginalized, even ostracized, rarely discussed in polite ecclesiastical circles. Above all, its sensual, provocative and unpredictable nature, particularly when expressed through fornication, adultery and homosexuality – hedged in by prohibitions inherited from its Judaic origins – has endured as an anathema to Christian spirituality and the ethos of Christ-like purity.

Structuring this Christian construction of sexuality is the dualistic conception of the human: with the mind and the body as polar opposites. One is supposed to train the mind, which directs bodily performances, to focus its gaze on the divine, the transcendent, the nonphysical – in other words, everything that sanctifies and makes one close to holiness. The mind, therefore, is closely associated with the spiritual and the sacred. In contrast, the body is constructed as a repository of corrupted and corrupting desires that could distract one from what is pure or, worse, tempt one to sin through unacceptable bodily performances. The body, therefore, represents the profane. It is a vehicle that could lead one to sinfulness; thus its desires must be controlled by the mind (e.g., Ellingson and Green 2002; Yip 2010b).

Admittedly, this characterization is broad and general. Nonetheless, it underpins the diktat of sex only within marriage that the Christian Church generally upholds. Furthermore, empirical research continues to show that the management of bodily desires and performances, particularly those of a sexual nature, continues to preoccupy much of the Christian Church and its believers. For instance, Sharma (e.g., 2008, 2011), in her study of primarily heterosexual young women in conservative Protestantism, has shown that her participants were constantly aware of the

dominant sexual discourse of appropriate or respectable female sexuality, generating much conflict in their lives, as the discourse does not reflect the diverse ways that they understood and practised their sexuality. Therefore, there was a gap between the dominant sexual discourse and lived experiences. This tension, of course, exists not only among Christian religious actors. Scholars have shown that it is also present in other religious faiths (e.g., Machacek and Wilcox 2003; Morgan and Lawton 2007).

This dominant discourse of sexuality polices sexual desires and expressions, executing surveillance on religious actors' subjectivity and behaviour, significantly through the web of institutional and interpersonal power relations. The internalization of religious norms – at times strengthened by cultural norms – that legitimize and perpetuate heteronormativity also leads to self-policing that complements institutional and social policing. Often, this self-policing is made even more potent by the recognition of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent divine power (e.g., God), who is discursively constructed as the origin and guardian of such heteronormative norms and values. This multilayered surveillance and policing produces a "panoptic gaze" from which no one can escape. Thus one feels that one is constantly being watched and judged, which creates the need to be "proper" or "respectable," mindful of the costs of transgressing orthodox sexual and gender orders (Foucault 1977, 1979). Of course, religious believers, as social actors, are not cultural dupes who conform to such norms uncritically. Reponses to such a "panoptic gaze" are diverse, a point that is emphasized throughout this chapter. Indeed, this disciplinary power could generate outcomes that extend beyond social control and regulation because "under certain conditions, disciplinary power may expand the possibilities of the self" (Green 2010, 331).

However, in this section, I focus on the theme of tension and conflict, which is prominent in all the projects this chapter covers. Undoubtedly, this theme represents a significant lived reality for religious actors who depart from the injunction of sex only within marriage, heterosexual and nonheterosexual alike. These experiences and voices are documented in the project Religion, Youth and Sexuality.[2] For instance, only 59.5 percent of self-identified heterosexual participants claimed to "agree" or "strongly agree" that "my religion is positive towards sexuality."[3] Among participants who self-identified as "lesbian," "gay," "homosexual," or "bisexual," the percentage was noticeably lower at 36.8 percent.[4] In addition, only

39.3 percent of heterosexual participants[5] – and 34.9 percent of non-heterosexual participants[6] – claimed to "agree" or "strongly agree" that "my religion understands the issues lesbian, gay and bisexual people face."

The qualitative data of this project offers us a closer look at the challenges that this scenario presents. A good example of this is the story of Jodie, an orthodox Jewish bisexual woman, who repeatedly narrated stories about the tension and conflict theme in the interview and the video diary. She went to great lengths to reduce such tension, first by terminating a same-sex relationship and then by toeing the official line, as it were, by plunging herself into a cross-sex relationship only to discover that there were also many challenges in relation to intimacy, sexuality, and religious faith. Her narrative, recorded over a week, has been organized as follows to enhance continuity and to illustrate the prominence of this struggle in her life:

> I am bisexual, and my decision [is] that I want to actively try to limit myself to dating only men because I can't see myself living [in] a long-term relationship with a woman because of my community and my religion ... I started having a relationship with a girl, and then at some point during the relationship, I admitted to myself that I was gay. [But] I didn't feel comfortable being Orthodox Jewish and gay, in that I don't want to live in a fringe community. So my choices were: leave orthodoxy and embrace myself as gay ... or break off the relationship and embrace my orthodoxy ... If you are homosexual and still want to actively identify as Jewish, then you are pretty much part of a fringe group ... I couldn't leave Orthodox Judaism. That was my home, my people, where I feel comfortable. I was willing to give up a good relationship that I had been in for two years ... [Referring to her current cross-sex relationship where the partner self-identified as Jewish and gay] I am more attracted to girls and he is more attracted to boys, so how do we really know that we are interested in each other? It is a difficult call, so we decided to be physical in our relationship ... [Initially,] I had clear limits. I would go so far as kissing and perhaps some feeling, exploration, but I draw the line at mutual masturbation and any sort of penetrative, oral or anal sex ... [But] in the past week there has definitely been some oral sex and ejaculation and that is a bit confusing to me, and I presume it is confusing him in the same way ... If you were to ask me straight out if it is allowed or

> forbidden, I would say forbidden. But I did it and didn't feel emotionally bad afterwards. Emotionally, I feel great about that because it means that I can keep doing what comes naturally without having to feel stressed about it. But mentally, I am a bit worried about that.

This narrative clearly illustrates Jodie's experience of tension and conflict, precipitated by her keen desire to belong to an ethnic and religious community that gave her an ontological anchor in life. However, this belonging, as she acknowledged, had strings attached. She was painfully aware of the heterosexist nature of the community's requirements regarding her emotional attachment and bodily performances, which made her same-sex relationship unsustainable. And she was concerned about observing the requirement of sex only within marriage, which filled her with a sense of guilt and shame about her heterosexual relationship. On both fronts, she felt that she had failed to live up to the religious and ethnic ideal of a "proper" relationship.

Interestingly, research has shown that religious actors have varied understandings of what constitutes "sex." In contrast to Jodie, some draw a firm line between vaginal penetration as "real" or "full" sex and other sexual acts as tolerable – or at least less unacceptable – experimentation (e.g., Johansson 2007; Regnerus 2007; Freitas 2008). Some of the single heterosexual participants in the project Religion, Youth and Sexuality deployed this rationalization. Tariq, a heterosexual Muslim man, firmly drew a line of demarcation between vaginal penetrative sex (i.e. "full sex"), which he considered wrong outside of marriage, and other types of sexual activity that were deemed less "sinful." This line of demarcation at least partly informed his decision not to have a long-term relationship. Therefore, for the time being, he limited himself to recreational sex that he rationalized as not "full" or "real" sex. This strategy helped him to reduce the tension between his bodily desire and his commitment to religious injunction:

> Obviously, I have done things with girls, but I have never actually had sex ... I have never actually had full sex ... Oral, like blow jobs and other things, which I have had ... but I have never had penetrative sex because that is a boundary which I cannot cross, because I know it is another sin I am committing. I am committing a sin indulging in oral

> sex, etc., but I don't want to go to the higher platform of penetrating a girl. [*Interviewer:* It is more sinful outside of a marriage?] Yeah. If you are married, you are a one-person girl or one-person guy ... [Oral sex] is not sex ... I have refrained from getting into relationships, and I like being single ... because if I got into a serious relationship, I am going to have [full] sex ... It would be wrong ... If I end up having penetrative sex and it doesn't work out between me and the girl, then I have sinned ... I can't have [full] sex, yeah, because it is against my religion. The thing is that I want sex, but in the middle is a whole battlefield. So I am always in conflicting emotions ... I think if I wasn't Muslim, I would be sexually active on a regular basis. But because I see the context of Islam and the reasons why they don't want you to be sexually active as such, I see it as more pure and more holy, etc. So ... I do refrain myself ... It is a battlefield of emotions and thoughts that I am in a constant struggle with ... So it is a balance I have to personally find.

Among LGB religious actors, one of the most commonly deployed strategies to reduce tension and conflict is to compartmentalize their religious faith and sexuality. This strategy involves a conscious effort to conceal their sexual orientation in heteronormative spaces such as a place of worship or the family, where they know being open about their sexual orientation could potentially exact a high cost. Thus sexuality is deliberately downplayed in such spaces, and religiosity is sometimes heightened to overcompensate for sexuality. The presentation of the heterosexual self (i.e., acting the heterosexual role) is therefore crucial in this context, at least in signposting one's ability to conform to heteronormative religious and cultural norms such as marriage.

In contrast, in spaces that are deemed safe, LGB religious actors foreground their sexuality, and their religious identity then assumes a secondary position. Interestingly, these safe spaces, including the LGB community, could be inhospitable to those who profess a religious faith due to the anti-religion undercurrents of such spaces, which arise from the connection between LGB identity and secularity in the dominant discourse of LGB identity construction. The following comments by Muhammad, a gay Muslim, illustrate that such a strategy of compartmentalization is multifaceted:

> I think until I can confidently tell everybody that I am gay and Muslim, two in one, I will have to, you know, in a way, lie about who I really am ... Except my sister, nobody at home and in my extended family knows I am gay. What they see is a nice Muslim boy, and one day I will get married and stuff, have children, you know, I will be respectable in the community ... So I play along really, being a nice Muslim boy. People just assume I am heterosexual but not ready for marriage yet. But when I am in the gay scene, some people laugh when I tell them I am Muslim. They don't seem to understand why this South Asian gay boy wants [to have something] to do with Islam ... I think Islamophobia is rife in the gay scene, just like in the society. So [when I am] there, I am just gay, and an exotic Asian boy, [and] my religion is thrown out of the window ... It is rather one-dimensional, don't you think?[7]

In the same vein, Alyson, a self-defined "queer" Christian woman, also talked about this kind of experience in multiple entries in the video diary she kept for the project Religion, Youth and Sexuality, arranged as follows to enhance continuity and flow:

> I suppose I've grown up compartmentalizing bits of my life ... because I just divide things into compartments like my girlfriends and my parents, they don't meet ... And in some ways, my gay friends and [straight friends] ... At one point I was in the Catholic students' group ... Catholic Students' Society and the LGBT Society, and I had these two completely [separate] sets of friends and they never met. And I'm quite good at that and I don't think it is necessarily a good thing ... For ten years I was keeping bits of my life completely separate ... I had a queer life, I had a queer community ... and for a year I moved back with my parents ... But where we live, there is not really any kind of gay community, and I think that in some ways I really, really miss that. Just having the assumption that not everyone here is straight ... And anyway, it was just this very isolated experience really, and I think in some ways that had made me realize that actually I do want these parts of my life to be connected together, and for things to be less disjointed and less isolated and less compartmentalized.

Muhammad's and Alyson's narratives demonstrate intricate presentations of the self in diverse spaces. Their own norms, requiring appropriate bodily

performances and vocabulary, informed how they positioned themselves in the interactional web. As they intended, this positioning was crucial to the social meanings that others attached to some aspects of their self.

In addition to the compartmentalization strategy, a host of other strategies have been documented in LGB religious actors' management of tension and conflict. One strategy is to suppress sexuality in order not to undermine belonging to a religious community, which often means opting for abstinence. Some go even further and attempt "healing" with spiritual intervention in order to lead a "normal" life of heterosexuality. Another strategy is to leave religious spaces and forgo religious pursuits altogether. In these cases, sexuality and religious faith become mutually exclusive. A third strategy is to embark on a journey to locate and construct LGB-friendly religious and spiritual spaces that allow sexuality and religious faith to flourish (e.g., Kubicek et al. 2009; Browne, Munt, and Yip 2010).

The Second Tale: Integration

The above section has focused on the experiences of heterosexual and LGB religious actors in managing the tension and conflict generated by the ideal of sex only within marriage, which also carries a heterosexist undertone. In this section, the spotlight is turned on three categories of religious actors who relate to this ideal in different ways, all of whom are largely comfortable with the integration of religious faith and sexuality in their lives. Of course, as I have mentioned, this does not mean that they no longer experience tension in their sexual and spiritual journeys since new decisions need to be made and old decisions are subjected to re-evaluation in this ongoing process of constructing a meaningful life.

The first of these categories comprises heterosexual religious actors who are committed to the ideal of sex only within marriage and who refrain from any sexual activity until marriage, thus "saving themselves for marriage." Quantitative data from the project Religion, Youth and Sexuality show that 76.1 percent of the heterosexual participants who were single did not consider themselves "sexually active."[8] As I have shown above, there were different understandings about what "sex" and "being sexually active" meant. Nonetheless, qualitative data show that some participants were indeed committed to not having any kind of sexual activity outside of marriage. Samarah, a heterosexual Muslim woman, asserted her commitment to this ideal:

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> [Being a heterosexual woman means] ... just like getting married to a man, I'm going to get married ... Because in my religion you are not allowed to have relationships outside of marriage, and you are only allowed to have relationships to the person you are married to ... I do think it is wrong to do that, to have different partners, or just to have sex before marriage, because you should only have one partner ... I would say the point of getting married is to know them intimately and if you know them like that before getting married, what would be the point of getting married?

In addition, 39.5 percent of heterosexual participants who were in an unmarried partnered relationship did not define themselves as "sexually active."[9] Layla, a heterosexual Muslim woman who was in a relationship, also decided to refrain from engaging in any sexual activity. She talked to her partner about not wanting to kiss, let alone to go any further, but was fully aware of the challenge this would entail:

> I'm not going to lie, it [abstaining from sex in a relationship] does [prove to be challenging]. But then at the end of the day, there is a goal [marriage] that you're working towards that just helps dull it. It's another challenge, but yes you just have to deal with it ... We actually had that talk [about kissing]. In my head I'm saying probably no, but then again as the situation arises I told him you never know what the moment is. It's not like you're going to switch on in your brain, no don't kiss him, as this moment arises ... I wouldn't say I'm the best Muslim in the world because I still learn every day ... But the little that I do know, I will stick firmly to that, so I am not going to compromise my beliefs for this relationship ... He actually said that that was one of the reasons that attracted him to me ... because he's been looking for that kind of girl for a while ... I'm definitely not having sex until marriage ... To me I believe it [sexual pleasure within marriage] will actually be ten times more because you're with someone that you waited for.

It is tempting to interpret the narratives above as evidence that religious faith put constraints on the participants in the management of their sexual desires and bodily performances. This reading would fit into a taken-for-

granted yet pervasive secular discourse that constructs religion as necessarily sex-negative, or at least sex-constraining. If pushed too far, this discourse could frame the decision making illustrated by Samarah and Layla as ill-informed, even irrational and nonagentic. I contend that such an interpretation is inaccurate because it does not recognize the agency of the social actors concerned: their capacity to construct values and practices regarding their sexuality that draw from their religious faith as a primary source. In fact, such decisions could be a reflection of self-expression and self-actualization in the effort to construct a meaningful and integrated life. A parallel debate can be found among the views of scholars and commentators on Muslim women who wear the veil to consciously demonstrate religious and/or political piety and/or to defy popular discourse that constructs the veil as a symbol of gender oppression and as anathema to liberty and choice (e.g., Gehrke-White 2006; Ahmed 2011).

The second category of heterosexual religious actors comprises those who are emotionally committed to marriage as an appropriate rite of passage in their lives but who, for various reasons, are not in the position to marry due to, for instance, the unavailability of a suitable partner. For those already in a relationship, the reason might be that the right time for marriage has not yet arrived due to, say, a lack of financial and/or occupational security. In the Religion, Youth and Sexuality study, these religious actors explained that they engaged in sexual activity within the context of the relationship without developing a sense of failure over not conforming to the ideal of sex only within marriage. A case in point was Martin, who defined himself as Christian-Muslim but did not define his sexuality. He was in a cohabiting, heterosexual, unmarried relationship against the religiously informed wishes of his and his partner's parents. He rationalized the situation as follows:

> Me and my fiancée we are not married ... we live together, and obviously we do have sexual relations, which my mum's religion [Christianity] would condemn, and so would Islam ... The reason we don't get married is because we want to have good jobs, and we want everything to be sorted out and marry afterwards and be secure. We do feel that we are married. We do everything together, I cook, I help ... it's like I'm living a married life ... Even though the religion says that you shouldn't [have sex] before

> marriage, we think that we are more than married, and so as long as we are happy with each other, and we are not forcing on each other ... And so we do live like a married couple ... Obviously, we are very cautious and, you know, I would not get her pregnant ... and she wouldn't try to do that, to upset the family. So I think we have a very good relationship as a couple, and we know that when it comes, it comes ... and we will be able to have kids and everything will be fine ... Our god is a god of love, so He does understand, and we are not doing something that is just sex. And I think that comforts us ... So till we get married we just kind of save [money] and build our lives ... We are pretty much in love, and from the three years I know her, nothing really changed. My feelings never changed.

In this account, Marcus evoked qualities that characterize a religiously sanctioned relationship, such as love, care, commitment, and faithfulness, even though these qualities were not experienced within the context of a marriage – as yet. Although he acknowledged the tension that others' lack of affirmation of their living arrangement might entail, he and his fiancée were able to reconcile their religious commitment and sexual and emotional needs in their marriage-like relationship. He acknowledged the religious and cultural ideal as a part of their future sexual and religious biographical narratives and, indeed, as an appropriate stage in their life course, one embedded in their future planning (for more details, see Page, Yip, and Keenan 2012). However, as far as the present was concerned, their departure from the ideal was rationalized to minimize tension. This strategy demonstrates the individualization of sexual ethics, where sexual bodily performances that fall outside the remit of the ideal are constructed as progressing toward a future that will eventually embrace the ideal.

Stories of Transgression and Transformation

The third category of religious actors within this "integration" theme refers specifically to those who identify as "lesbian," "gay," or "bisexual."[10] Compared to their heterosexual counterparts, who benefit from heteronormativity, LGB religious actors occupy a unique position within the dominant religious discourse of sexuality. More often than not, they are, to use a term that Collins (1986) deploys within the context of race and gender in reference to black women, "outsiders within": gendered and

sexual bodies that are out of place and experientially disconnected from the gender and sexual orders. Specifically, they are outsiders within a space that in principle includes them on the basis of religious faith, but the incompatibility between their counternormative sexuality and the heteronormative sexual and gender orders militates against the development of a complete and consistent sense of "insiderness." This intricate insider-cum-outsider status can exact high psychological and social costs in terms of identity integration and interpersonal relationships, at times leading to "moving out of the space" as a stategy to reduce or resolve conflict. Stories of conflict, alienation, and fear told by LGB actors across religious faiths are well documented in academic and nonacademic literature (e.g., Browne, Munt, and Yip 2010; Yip, Keenan, and Page 2011; Yip and Page 2013). I have also covered them to a certain extent in the first empirical theme of this chapter.

Here, I would like to focus on stories that are less audible and present in dominant scholarly and popular discourses. These are stories about transgression and transformation that offer hope and optimism. I must emphasize that we should not essentialize such stories. They are dynamic and emergent, often coming out of – and building upon – stories of conflict, alienation, and fear. They are voices that were once banished to the marginal space – silenced even – but that are gradually being mainstreamed into the discourse of religious principles and praxis. The marginal space is no doubt a space of oppression and alienation, but it also contains the seed of productive and transformative energy. The following comments by Jemimah, a lesbian Muslim, powerfully demonstrate this aspect of marginal space:

> I think there are particular gifts that come by being in a sexual minority and having to remake your spirituality outside of the mainstream of a faith. I think the gift in that is that we have to learn to love and to practise our faith in a different way, and we have to consider what purpose creation might have in having created us. I think there is always a gift in being marginalized and that gift is always a way of transforming the notion of identity altogether into something higher, it's actually to transcend stuff ... We experience exclusion both in the way scripture is understood and expounded and in the way that religious worship and faith practice is actually set up. There is no blueprint for our participation

> in those things, and sometimes we are excluded or executed or eliminated explicitly and sometimes implicitly. And that is the story of queer sexuality anyway in society at large, [so] why should it be any different in religion? It's more acute in religion because people think they've got the word of God behind them.[11]

A paradigmatic and epistemological shift takes place when LGB religious actors, having learned to trust their own positive lived experiences, turn shame and guilt into pride and courage, unleashing an emancipatory energy that liberates and transforms not only their own lives but also the institutional and cultural underpinnings of the religious space. From the Simmelian perspective of the "stranger," this shift represents an intricate balance in the union between closeness/involvement (i.e., attachment to, desire for, full membership) and remoteness/indifference (i.e., lack of access to full membership). This balance offers a simultaneously near and far positionality that generates a criticality and a political sensibility that together transform a religious actor's relationship with the self (i.e., one learns to accept sexuality as a legitimate part of personhood and humanity), with others (i.e., one learns to relate to others as an integrated person), and with God/the divine (i.e., one learns to believe that sexuality does not precipitate God's rejection).

Therefore, on the personal level, sexuality is no longer a sinful appendage of one's personhood but the core of one's spiritual self, a means to connect, relate, and unite with oneself, others, and God/the divine truthfully and honestly. In other words, sexuality and spirituality coalesce in one's personhood, spiritual path, and social relationships (for more details, see Yip 2005b). Indeed, the transformation of shame into pride, as Munt (2007, 3-4) reminds us, could lead to psychic, political, and cultural realignment and empowerment:

> Shame is peculiarly intrapsychic: it exceeds the bodily vessel of its containments – groups that are shamed contain individuals who internalise the stigma of shame into the tapestry of their lives, each reproduce discreet, shamed subjectivities, all with their own specific pathologies ... Shame has a compound materiality, including a compound mentality, and its effects therefore can be unpredictable. Shame is also an emotion

> that can flow unrecognisably through the subject, it can saturate a person and s/he may yet remain oblivious to its results, merely experiencing a diffuse unyielding sadness ... Shame has political potential as it can provoke a separation between the social convention demarcated within hegemonic ideals, enabling a re-inscription of social intelligibility. The outcome of this can be radical, instigating social, political and cultural agency amongst the formerly disenfranchised.

Such transformation also applies to the spiritual dimension. Once this transformation is achieved, scriptural verses such as the following take on new and inclusive meanings of connection and acceptance to which an LGB religious actor can relate:

> God, *you* fashioned me in my mother's womb ... For I am awesomely and wondrously made. (Psalms 139: 13-14, emphasis added)

> O people, We created you all from a male and female and made you into *different* communities and *different* tribes, so that you should come to know one another, acknowledging that the most noble among you is the one most aware of God. (Qur'an 49: 13, emphasis added)

This transformation of shame into pride is not limited to the personal level. Indeed, LGB politics and scholarship within religious spaces – with support from their heterosexual counterparts in some cases, as well as with interreligious and religious-secular collaboration – have transformed theology as well as institutional culture and praxis. Space here does not allow for a detailed discussion of such scholarship, but this transgressive corpus of work, particularly on Christianity, is increasingly compelling religious actors and religious authorities to re-examine fundamental issues such as how theology ought to be done and how God ought to be conceived, with the aim of grounding conceptions of the divine in lived experiences, contemporary knowledge, and socio-cultural realities (for a detailed analysis of such scholarship on various religious faiths, see Yip 2010a).

On a political level, LGB religious actors – having trusted the integration of their religious faith and sexuality and decided to embody this

integration in everyday life – directly and indirectly assert a difference of salient spiritual significance in the acquisition of sexual rights. The concept of "sexual citizenship" or "intimate citizenship" is useful in theorizing their effort in this respect. Sexual/intimate citizenship emphasizes the rights to practice/conduct, identity, and relationship without discrimination, regardless of sexual and gender identities (Richardson 2000a, 2000b; Plummer 2003). Within the British context, this discourse is increasingly well established in the secular sphere, particularly in light of the expansion of sexual equality and human rights legislation with the enactment of the Equality Act of 2010, which establishes "sexual orientation" as a "protected characteristic" (Government of the United Kingdom 2010). Thus sexual rights are linked inextricably to civil, social, and political rights to which every citizen is entitled. As Oleksy (2009, 4) explains,

> Intimate citizenship theory describes how our private decisions and practices have become intertwined with public institutions and state policies, such as public discourse on sexuality, legal codes, medical system, family policy, and the media ... Processes appearing at the overlap of the public and the private realms have an immense impact on the redefinition of the concept of citizenship ... A broad approach to the concept of citizenship makes it clear that it is no longer possible to theorize citizenship in universal and abstract terms, but that it should always be situated in the context of an individual lived experience. Seen from this perspective, citizenship's territory must be extended beyond the conventional public sphere and, consequently, located at the intersection of many axes of social, political, and cultural stratification ... It is impossible to interpret and articulate citizenship without always situating it in a lived experience.

Admittedly, such social, political, and legal progress has not been as evident in religious spaces, demonstrated by religious institutions' repeated attempts to seek exemption from sexual equality legislation on the basis of religious conscience. Such attempts have mainly been unsuccessful (see also Jakobsen, Chapter 1, this volume). There is no denying that religiously motivated homophobia and biphobia are still rife in religious spaces. Nonetheless, equality and human rights discourses from the secular sphere are infiltrating the religious sphere, evidenced by the discursive

shift from LGB rights to human rights. If one's humanity is part and parcel of the created order, then exercising one's right to live a full life, including sexual life, is not merely a sexual matter but also a religious matter and indeed a human and citizen matter. If stratification within broader society on the basis of sexual orientation is untenable, unethical, and indeed illegal, the religious sphere cannot be insulated from this development even though it continues to perpetuate such stratification. LGB religious actors who, despite all the risks and costs, have chosen to remain within the religious sphere could bring about this move toward human rights. They are emboldened by an ontological security that is firmly anchored in God or the divine, who understands their oppression and will deliver them from this plight. Therefore, the social and political capital that they construct is buttressed by "spiritual capital," part of which is the belief that the quest for sexual justice is inalienable from the broad quest for social justice because God is justice. Such endeavours are often characterized by a desire to return to the essence of religious faith, its broad principles and norms, as opposed to institutional rules.

Some may consider this view of the transformative potential of the marginal space to be overly optimistic given the incontrovertible rise of increasingly media-savvy and financially secure anti-LGB politics in religious and secular spaces (e.g., Sullivan-Blum 2009; Viefhues-Bailey 2010). I acknowledge that the battle of sexual politics is far from over, particularly within religious spaces. However, I also think that there is incontrovertible evidence of progressive developments within religious and secular spaces that are a reason for optimism and an impetus for future work.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has highlighted two primary manifestations of the intersection of religion and sexuality. Using the themes of "tension and conflict" and "integration," informed by various empirical research projects, I have shown that, although varying degrees of tension and conflict are indeed a lived reality for many religious actors, their management strategies are diverse. In this respect, there is evidence that some heterosexual and LGB religious actors individualize sexual ethics not only to reduce tension and conflict but also to integrate various aspects of their lives. Their understandings of, and relationships with, the diktat of sex only within marriage

is therefore multilayered. Objective, institutional, and externally imposed norms are often reinterpreted, being informed by subjective, positive, personal experiences and individualized approaches to ethical behaviour in sexual bodily performances.

In the case of LGB religious actors, the intersection of religion and sexuality can also spark transformative energies that challenge the cultural ideology of heteronormativity. Essentially, such stories are about the re-orientation of identity: the sick and unacceptable sinner is transformed into the wholesome human being who has been created and blessed by God and is worthy of equal rights. This is an important epistemological shift because it liberates LGB religious actors from constructing subjectivities and bodily performances in line with negative social definitions. This shift enables them to develop positive and proud self-definition and self-expression. As Wetherell (2010, 4) reminds us, "Identity continues to be the place where collective action, social movements, and issues of inequality, rights and social justice come into focus and demand attention." Indeed, the political dimension of this identity is salient, reminiscent of identity politics of other kinds that are used to transform oppression into liberation in individual and collective life:

> Historically, identity politics has had both an activist and an academic existence. Activists involved in successful social movements, such as the civil rights movement and the women's movement, who self-consciously invoked the concept of identity in their struggles for social justice held at least the following two beliefs: (1) that identities are often resources of knowledge especially relevant for social change, and that (2) oppressed groups need to be at the forefront of their own liberation. (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006, 2)

In the case of LGB religious actors, this identity politics is more than a human political strategy for resistance and change. It also has salient spiritual significance and symbolism because of the belief that God is on their side as a god who delivers people from oppression, in line with the divine vision of justice, inclusivity, and fairness. This belief that God and other significant religious figures (e.g., Jesus and Muhammad) are on their side significantly emboldens their spirit, strengthens their resilience, and expands their individual and collective agency for change.

Notes

1 Indeed, a parallel project, Religion, Gender and Sexuality among Youth in Canada, which makes use of the questions used in the UK study Religion, Youth and Sexuality: A Multi-faith Exploration (Yip and Page 2013), is presently underway in Canada (see http://www.queensu.ca/religion/Faculty/research/dickeyyoung.html).

2 The project Religion, Youth and Sexuality: A Multi-faith Exploration (Yip, Keenan, and Page 2011; Yip and Page 2013) was funded in the United Kingdom by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the by the Economic and Social Research Council under the Religion and Society program. The research team consisted of Andrew Kam-Tuck Yip (principal investigator), Michael Keenan (co-investigator), and Sarah-Jane Page (research fellow). The project, conducted between 2009 and 2011, involved 693 participants, each of whom completed an online questionnaire. In addition, 61 participants were interviewed, and a further 24 completed a week-long video diary. The participants, aged between eighteen and twenty-five, were drawn from six religious faiths. More details of the project can be found at http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/sociology/rys. The research team is grateful for the funding, as well as for the invaluable contribution of the participants, the individuals and groups who helped to recruit the sample, and the members of the advisory committee (see also Yip and Page 2013; and Keenan, Yip, and Page forthcoming).

3 The valid responses totalled 421.

4 The valid responses totalled 106.

5 The valid responses totalled 415.

6 The valid responses totalled 106.

7 This quotation is from my primarily qualitative project A Minority within a Minority: British Non-heterosexual Muslims, conducted in 2001-02 (see Yip 2004, 2005a). Twenty female and twenty-two male participants completed a brief questionnaire and were interviewed individually. In addition, two focus group interviews (one mixed and one all-women) were held. I gratefully acknowledge the financial support of the Economic and Social Research Council in the United Kingdom and the important contribution of all participants and user groups.

8 The valid responses totalled 331.

9 Some participants who were in this type of relationship defined themselves as nonheterosexual (e.g., as "bisexual"). The valid responses to the question totalled 153.

10 It must be acknowledged that although I use the term "LGB," the discussion focuses on lesbians and gay men primarily. Undoubtedly, there are significant similarities between these three groups, but the politics surrounding bisexuality often takes on a different dimension in the discourse of sexual rights and sexual morality. Bisexuals, for instance, are often subjected to greater pressure to opt for heterosexuality, compared to their lesbian and gay counterparts, because they supposedly have such a choice. Further, they are often erroneously considered incapable of monogamy in a coupled relationship because of the perception that they need to have partners of

different sexes simultaneously. Misunderstandings such as these have led to the stigmatization of bisexuals within heterosexual, as well as lesbian and gay, communities (e.g., Toft 2009).

11 This quotation is from the Queer Spiritual Spaces project (Browne, Munt, and Yip 2010), conducted in 2008-09, which was funded in the United Kingdom by the Economic and Social Research Council. Sally Munt was the principal investigator, and Andrew Yip and Kath Browne were the research advisers, partly supervising the research fellows.

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