

POSTTRAUMATIC SPIRITUAL GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY
IN THE MIDWESTERN US AFTER EXPERIENCED RELIGIOUS TRAUMA

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POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine posttraumatic spiritual growth in the LGBTQ+ and Ally-identifying communities after self-identified religious or spiritual trauma. In this two-phase mixed-methods study, we utilized both interview and survey techniques. In the qualitative Phase I, twenty-four (24) participants were interviewed yielding a vast amount of narrative data and meaning bits that assisted in understanding the nature of the trauma, pivot points, and subsequently growth. The survey Phase II yielded 407 complete responses and the Posttraumatic Spiritual Growth Index (PTGI-X) was utilized to investigate LGBTQ+ and Allies growth after self-identified religious or spiritual-based trauma. Additionally, the survey captured the nature of trauma, as well as affiliation with a spiritual/religious-based organization, and the spiritual identity of each participant when the trauma first occurred and after growth was experienced. Results revealed the experiences of individuals in the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities who self-identify as having experienced religious/spiritual trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth were more similar than different. The study also shed light on those few areas where the experience of religious/spiritual trauma among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities may differ, although no differences were found between the posttraumatic growth reported by members of these two communities. The primary outcomes of posttraumatic growth observed among both LGBTQ+ and Ally participants were with respect to the religious/spiritual affiliation and identity reported by both groups before experiencing trauma, compared with after posttraumatic growth. Results

suggested that following posttraumatic growth participants often shifted from formal religion to identifying as spiritual. Suggestions for further research include investigating spiritual/religious trauma, pivot points, and growth in the LGBTQ+ community.

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Chapter 1. Overview of the Study

Research Topic and Background

Social scientists have long been intrigued by the effects of trauma on individuals within certain minority groups. Trauma is frequently recognized as individuals who experience highly stressful events that can often result in immense psychological distress (Hodgkinson & Stewart, 1991; Keane, Marshall, & Taft, 2006; Raphael, 1986). Much research has been conducted on the positive spiritual growth following trauma, although trauma resulting from religious or spiritual experiences have been researched less, especially among members of minority groups such as the LGBTQ+ community.

Posttraumatic growth is defined as not simply a bounce back to the status quo state prior to the trauma, but a growth beyond simple resiliency (Smith et al., 2010). Recent developments in the study of posttraumatic growth have created opportunities for additional research and studies. These developments include the observation that growth following adversity or significant challenge can take numerous forms including increased personal strength, improved ability to relate to others, greater appreciation for life, ability to see new possibilities, and spiritual/existential growth (Tedeschi et al., 2017; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Anecdotally, trauma has is routinely reported by members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially among youth who are rejected by their family or caretakers.

According to Ryan (2009), affiliated with the Family Acceptance Project,

Highly rejected LGBTQ+ young people are more than 8 times as likely to attempt suicide, nearly 6 times as likely to report high levels of depression, more than 3 times as likely to use illegal drug, and more than 3 times as likely to be at high

risk for HIV and sexually transmitted diseases compared with LGBTQ+ youth who are not at all or only slightly rejected by their parents and caregivers because of their identity (p. 10).

Additionally, LGBTQ+ individuals have a much larger risk of attempting and completing suicide. Kaniuka et al. (2019) state that individuals identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are at six times the risk of lifetime suicide attempts compared to heterosexual counterparts (as cited in Haas, Eliason, Mays, Mathy, Cochran, D'Augelli, Clayton, 2010), and individuals who identify as transgender are at even greater risk, with approximately 41% reporting a lifetime history of suicide attempts.

Additional stress and mental health obstacles for LGBTQ+ individuals contribute to elevated amounts of trauma. According to Kaniuka et al. (2019), LGBTQ+ individuals report depressive symptoms at a rate 1.5 times higher than that of the general population (as cited in King, Semlyen, Tai, Killaspy, Osborn, Popelyuk, Nazareth., 2008), with 53.9% of transgender individuals and 33.4% of LGB individuals reporting clinically significant levels of depressive symptoms (Su, Irwin, Fisher, Ramos, Kelley, Mendoza, Coleman, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

A significant amount of research has been conducted on the nature of posttraumatic growth (Baker et al., 2008; Currier et al., 2013; Keane et al., 2006; Shaw et al., 2005; Tedeschi et al., 2007; Tedeschi et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2018). Some of this research has focused on posttraumatic growth within the LGBTQ+ community (Bower et al., 2021; Solomon et al., 2015; Sumerau, 2017; Taube & Mussap, 2020). Additionally, there is a notable amount of literature addressing how religion or spirituality aids or

assists in the posttraumatic growth process (Leo et al., 2021; Overcash et al, 1996; Paloutzian, 2005, Shaw et al., 2005). Nevertheless, there is a gap in literature focused on posttraumatic spiritual growth following religious/spiritual trauma. This study expands on this literature to include posttraumatic spiritual growth where the trauma experienced stemmed or was rooted in spiritual or religious traumas perceived by individuals within the LGBTQ+ community and allies. The problem is that we lack understanding in the experiences and difference in experiences of the LGBTQ+ community from other minority groups more extensively researched. Therefore, closing the gap in research allows for more understanding and then additional research that would then ultimately lead to potential outcomes in healing, education, and training.

Despite the extensive research demonstrating spiritual/religious outcomes of post-traumatic growth, little research has been conducted addressing spiritual or religious growth following self-identified religious trauma within the LGBTQ+ community. Similarly, there is a lack of empirical research documenting potential differences in the LGBTQ+ population with respect to understanding the nature of religious/spiritual trauma and the outcomes of PTG following such experiences.

There is an imperative intersection between religious trauma and the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, one of the most significant avenues to explore more in depth is the intersection in what manner trauma shapes and molds currently/previously held religious beliefs. Posttraumatic growth is defined as not simply a bounce back to the status quo state prior to the trauma but a growth beyond simple resiliency (Smith et al., 2010). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2007) set the stage for exploring this complex growth after traumatic experiences occur. The PTGI is expanded

to include a more well-defined spiritual component to explore the junction between the LGBTQ+ community, religious trauma, and the posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017).

Currently, little is known about LGBTQ+ individuals' posttraumatic spiritual growth compared to that of non-LGBTQ+ identifying individuals. Understanding the nature or origin of religious or spiritual trauma experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community could provide a foundation for developing more targeted programs addressing the specific traumas experienced. Determining whether there are differences between LGBTQ+ identifying individuals and non-LGBTQ+ identifying individuals could help develop specialize interventions targeting the unique needs of these populations.

Similarly, there could be value in determining whether members of the LGBTQ+ community differ with respect to the outcomes of their post-traumatic growth following religious/spiritual trauma. Two outcomes of post-traumatic growth ripe for further assessment are: affiliation with a spiritual organization or no affiliation with a spiritual organization, and the potential component of posttraumatic spiritual or nonspiritual (agnostic) belief systems.

Purpose of the Study

A lack of understanding in potential differences that the LGBTQ+ and ally communities face when explored and researched more in depth could allow there to be additional education, training, and healing for these communities. How the LGBTQ+ community is distinct from other minority groups could lead the way in further understanding and research that then potentially leads to tangible outcomes (such as paths

to healing, growth, and enhanced opportunities for posttraumatic growth). Additionally, educational outcomes could allow for various professions to expand their current knowledge around how this trauma occurs and how individuals heal or grow from that trauma to help serve the LGBTQ+ populations more effectively.

More research is needed to understand how members of the LGBTQ+ community experience post-traumatic growth following religious trauma. One area for further exploration is how trauma relates to current and previously held religious beliefs. The purpose of this study is to explore posttraumatic growth among members of the LGBTQ+ community following self-identified religious traumas, by comparing the spiritual growth they report to that reported by allies of the LGBTQ+ community who also report having experienced growth following religious trauma. Phase I of this study will focus on capturing the lived experience of members of the LGBTQ+ community who self-identify as having experienced post-traumatic growth following religious trauma, with particular attention to capturing the nature of the trauma and subsequent growth experience. Data collected in Phase I will be analyzed for similarities and differences in the narrative accounts of post-traumatic growth following religious trauma among member and allies of the LGBTQ+ community. The insights, stories, and experiences collected in Phase I will provide a phenomenological perspective on the dimensions to be assessed quantitatively in Phase II of the study.

In Phase II, both members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community will respond to the PTGI-X (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017). The PTGI-X is the expanded version of the PTGI extended by Tedeschi et al. (2007) in 2017 to include a more well-defined spiritual component. This study will utilize the PTGI-X to compare the outcomes of posttraumatic

growth following religious trauma among members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community. Additional data will be collected from members of both populations regarding the nature of the spiritual or religious trauma experienced, and two outcomes of posttraumatic growth pertaining to current: 1) religious or spiritual beliefs, and 2) affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization. Differences and similarities between members and allied of the LGBTQ+ community will be compared. Analysis of Phase II data focus on whether dimensions of post-traumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X are differentiated on the basis of the nature of religious trauma experienced, or by current affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization or orientation toward religious or agnostic beliefs.

Theoretical Framework

The focus of this study was on understanding the subjective experience of members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community following religious trauma, with particular attention to elements of spirituality or religion in their posttraumatic growth. Phase I solicited phenomenological accounts of posttraumatic growth and the nature experienced by Allies and members of the LGBTQ+ community following religious trauma . Particular attention was placed on documenting the nature of the religious trauma experienced by d these participants, and their spiritual or religious beliefs and affiliation with a spiritual or religious organizations following posttraumatic growth as illustrated in Figure 1.

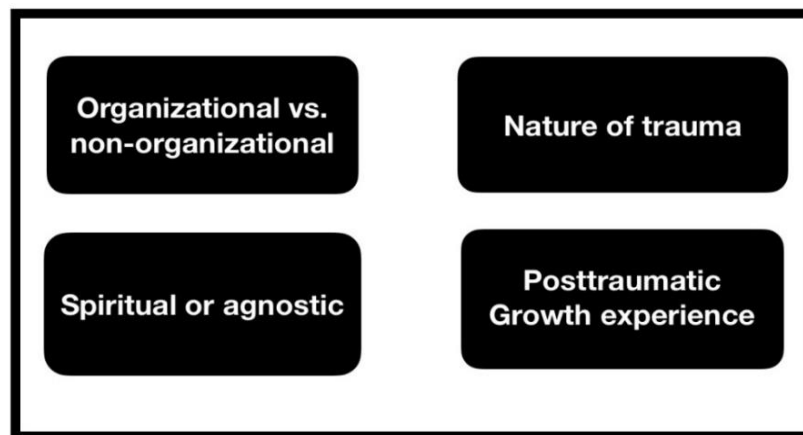
Affiliation with a spiritual/religious organization refers to identifying with an organized religion and/or belief system based out of an organization or is purely guided through their own spiritual path not associated with a formal organization (i.e., church,

yoga class, spiritual training/schools). Self-identified religious or spiritual experiences/beliefs refers to spiritual/religious beliefs or practices or the absence of these beliefs/practices (which is referred to as agnosticism). The phenomenological portion of this study captured the firsthand accounts of interviewees' posttraumatic growth experience. This narrative analysis captured the subjective journey and story of the growth beyond the trauma endured by a small number of LGBTQ+ identifying and allies who self-identify as having experienced trauma and achieved growth following those trauma-based experiences.

PHASE I: INTERVIEW

Phenomenological Perspective

Lived experiences of individuals who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic spiritual growth from a phenomenological perspective



Theoretical Framework: Phase I, Allen & Latta 2021

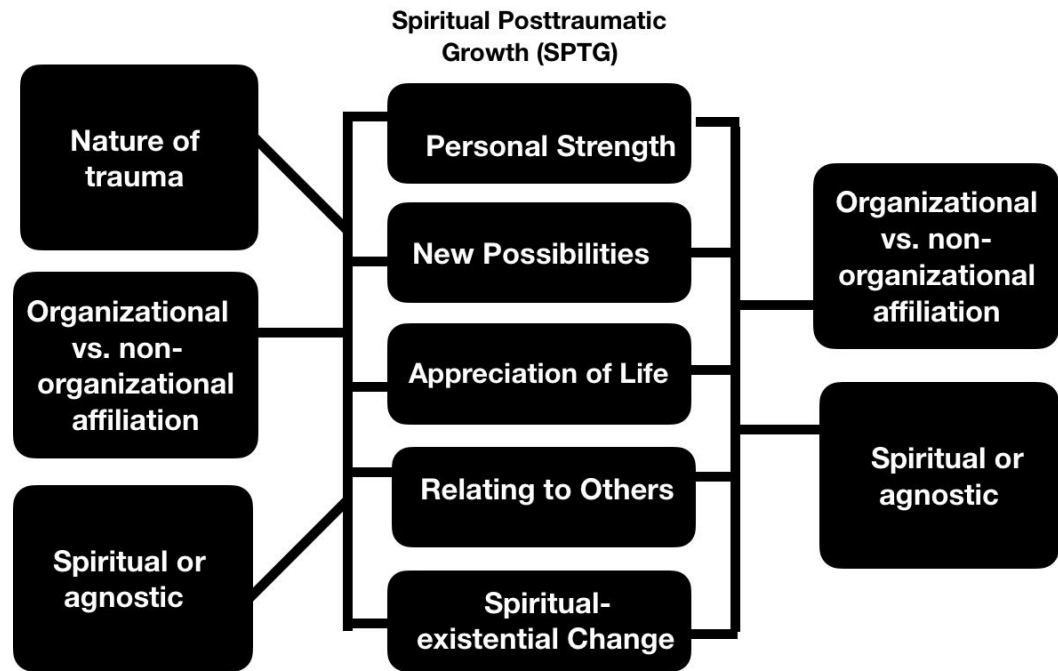
Figure 1. Theoretical Framework for Phase I

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In Phase II quantitative survey responses to the PTGI-X were collected from members and Allies of the LGBTQ+ community. The five aspects or domains of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017) are: personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation of life, and spiritual change. Personal strength is defined as the building blocks of achieving difficult tasks. New possibilities refer to having a plethora of different paths or avenues in life. Relating to others reflects harmony and building current or new relationships. Appreciation of life is how grateful and lucky one feels for their current situation in life or simply being appreciative to be alive. Spiritual-existential change is the growth and development of one's connection to the world, the universe, or divinity and possibly an enhanced introspection of existence.

Results of the PTGI-X were analyzed with respect to their relationship with the nature of religious trauma experienced, as well as participants' affiliation or non-affiliation with a spiritual or religious organization, and the self-identification of being spiritual/religious or agnostic prior to and following posttraumatic growth. (See Figure 2). The three factors on the left-hand side of Figure 2 are the antecedents that were assessed in relation to dimensions of post-traumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X. On the right-hand side are the two outcomes of post-traumatic growth that were assessed in relation to scores on the PTGI-X, participants' reported organizational or non-organizational affiliation and spiritual or agnostic identification.

PHASE II: SURVEY



Theoretical Framework: Phase II, Allen & Latta 2021

Figure 2. Theoretical Framework: Phase II

Research Questions

This mixed methods study included two sets of research questions a set of descriptive questions relating to the qualitative phenomenological analysis of interview data, and a set of inferential questions relating to the quantitative analysis of survey responses.

The qualitative portion of the study will address the following four (4) research questions:

RQ1: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to their lived experience of spiritual or religious trauma?

RQ2: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to their lived experience of post-traumatic growth following spiritual or

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religious trauma?

RQ3: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect how they describe their affiliation with spiritual or religious organizations over the course of their posttraumatic growth experience?

RQ4: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect how they describe their spiritual or agnostic identification over the course of their posttraumatic growth experience?

The quantitative survey portion of the study will address the following 11 research questions:

RQ5: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to the nature of trauma experienced?

RQ6: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to the spiritual or religious aspects of trauma experienced?

RQ7: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma differ with respect to the antecedents of posttraumatic growth relative to: a) organizational affiliation and b) religious/spiritual identity?

RQ8: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma differ with respect to the outcomes of posttraumatic growth relative to: a) organizational affiliation and b) religious/spiritual orientation?

RQ9: With respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma does affiliation with a

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spiritual or religious organization following posttraumatic growth differ significantly from affiliation prior to trauma?

RQ10: With respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma does spiritual or agnostic identity following posttraumatic growth differ significantly from spiritual or agnostic identity prior to trauma?

RQ11: Among members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious affiliated trauma, how do the dimensions of spiritual posttraumatic growth (SPTG) differ based on the nature of their trauma?

RQ12: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, does prior affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization predict dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X?

RQ13: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced post-traumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, does prior spiritual or religious identification predict dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X?

RQ14: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, do dimensions of post-traumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X predict current affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization?

RQ15: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-

identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, do dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X predict current spiritual or religious identification?

Methodology

The population for this study were members and Allies of the LGBTQ+ community in the Central Midwest (Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, or Tennessee) who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth. Phase I included interviews with participants solicited from among the executive leaders of 38 nonprofit and social/human-service organizations serving the LGBTQ+ community in the targeted geographic region. The survey in Phase II was more widely disseminated to an expanded list of 87 nonprofit and social/human service organizations' leaders, personal, professional, and social media networks serving LGBTQ+ community in the same geographic region.

This mixed-methods study utilized semi-structured interviews in Phase I to examine the nature of the spiritual or religious trauma experienced and posttraumatic growth stories of 24 interviewees (14 LGBTQ+ members and 10 Allies) and survey methods in Phase II to assess dimensions of trauma and posttraumatic growth of 407 participants. The interview process in Phase I and survey process in Phase II will be independently and simultaneously conducted.

Phase I. For Phase I open coding of interview transcripts was conducted to assist in understanding individuals' unique experiences. The 45-75 minute interviews were transcribed via the transcribe function on the Zoom video-conferencing platform. Excel was utilized to organize and analyze the coded data from the interview process.

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Phase II. The Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-X) survey instrument (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017) was utilized for Phase II, accompanied by additional questions assessing the ‘nature of trauma’ experienced. The five (5) dimensions of posttraumatic growth were measured on a 6-point Likert scale (0 on the scale represents no effect and 5 represents an extreme effect on the participant). The survey was completed by both individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and allies of the LGBTQ+ community.

Analysis of results from the survey in Phase II focused on identifying patterns in the outcomes of post-traumatic growth among individuals based upon: 1) the nature of the trauma experienced, and 2) the religious or spiritual affiliation (i.e. organizational or non-organization) and orientation (spiritual vs. agnostic/non-spiritual) of individuals following post-traumatic growth. Figure 3 reflects the four logical combinations of the traumatic resolution states to be analyzed: organizational and agnostic/nonspiritual, non-organizational and agnostic/nonspiritual, organizational and spiritual, and non-organizational and spiritual.

	Organizational Affiliation	Non-organizational affiliation
Agnostic/Non-spiritually oriented	SPTG Profile of Organizational affiliation and Agnostic/ Non-spiritually oriented individuals	SPTG Profile of Non-organizational affiliation and Agnostic/ Non-spiritually oriented individuals
Spiritually oriented	SPTG Profile of Organizational and spiritually oriented individuals	SPTG Profile of Non-organizationally affiliated and spiritually oriented individuals

Figure 3. Outcomes of Posttraumatic Growth

Definition of Terminology

This study provides definitions and explanations to distinguish between spirituality and religion. Additionally, we identify trauma, religious trauma, posttraumatic growth, and posttraumatic spiritual growth. We include terms from the LGBTQ+ community that might not be common knowledge to most readers including LGBTQ+, Queer, Transgender, non-binary and other community terms.

Religion. Leo et al. (2021) note that traditionally, religion is defined as a personal belief system that is aligned or quasi-aligned with additional united members towards a common ideology or set of core beliefs. Organized religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Folk religions, Wicca, Paganism, Humanism, Sikhism, Confucianism, and over 4,000 additional religions.

Spirituality. Religion can also be observed independently countered to organized religion and is often then referred to as spirituality. Spiritual belief systems or practices often include meditation, non-traditional healing via herbs or energy work, mindfulness, elemental (earth, water, fire, wind) processes, connection to nature (Gaia), and other non-conventional avenues to a connection to universal/creator/divine energy. Leo et al. (2021) summarize, “spirituality is used to refer to broader, individualistic descriptions of human connections to the transcendent, while religion is perceived to relate to formal and shared belief systems” (p. 162).

Trauma. According to the APA (American Psychiatric Association) trauma can be defined as, “combat, exposure to actual or threatened death, assault, serious injury, accident, or sexual violence” (Leo, Fein, & Forooshani, 2021, p. 162). In their recent review and meta-analysis Leo, Fein, and Forooshani (2021) summarize much of what has

been learned about the nature and effects of trauma: They note that trauma is subjective to each survivor of that perceived or actual event or series of events. Traumatic events might include: an unexpected death of a loved one or even pet, car accident or other type of accident, divorce or other significant interpersonal relationship changes (for the two parties and those in close proximity to them including children effected by said changes), sexual and domestic abuse or even witnessing the abuse of others in close proximity, being attacked physically and psychologically or even spiritually, and countless other situations ranging from war, famine, heartbreak, natural disaster, illness, disease, and near death experiences. An event that might be traumatic to one might have little to no effect on someone else.

Religious Trauma. Researchers have defined religious trauma as trauma received via religious/spiritual experiences where the survivor feels or perceives that religion or spirituality is the core cause of said traumas (Leo et al., 2021). Examples of religious traumas include stories of hell - fire - brimstone, certain groups of people being ostracized or left out based on their beliefs or who they are, feeling forced into certain situations or ideologies, cult like behaviors/actions, isolation, punishment, and other experiences that trigger a trauma response.

Posttraumatic Growth. Tedeschi, Cann, Taku, Senol, and Calhoun, (2007) defines PTG as “usually characterized by finding a clearer meaning and purpose in life, a closer connection with others, and a greater sense of personal strength and self-reliance, as the result of confronting and dealing with a difficult life event” (p. 220). Taube (2020) expands by stating, “measures of growth from adversity are typically subjective, self-reported, and focus on events (both the adverse event and the ensuing growth) that

occurred in the past (p. 2).

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (and expanded spiritual inventory: PTGI-X). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory instrument (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; 1996) has become the most widely used measure of the positive changes people report as they struggle with the aftermath of highly stressful and potentially traumatic events (Helgeson, et al., 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi, et al., 2017). The PTGI is used to measure posttraumatic growth, and the PTGI-X is the expanded instrument that has increased factors to account for spiritual-existential growth.

LGBTQ+. The LGBTQ+ community includes those individuals who self-identify as having a sexual orientation or gender identity that differs from heterosexual (straight) cis-gender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth) individuals. The community is comprised of members who have one identity to multiple identities within the community (i.e., an individual might simply identify as a gay male, whereas another member of the community might identify as a transgender lesbian female). L-lesbian, G-gay, B-bisexual, T-transgender, Q-queer, I-Intersex, N-non-binary, A-Asexual, P-Pansexual, D-Demisexual, Q-Questioning, P-Polyamory, etc.

Queer. Queer is a term coined and reclaimed in the last decade to mean those in a community where their gender identity and/or sexual orientation differ from heterosexual cis-gender identifying individuals

Transgender. Transgender simply means that a person does not identify with their birth marker. A transgender person doesn't identify with the gender that was assigned at birth to them.

Non-binary. A subset within the transgender community. Non-binary individuals

identify as: neither male or female, as both genders simultaneously, or identify with one gender during a certain time and another gender at other times.

Ally. An ally is a cis-gender (identifies with the gender given at birth) straight/heterosexual member of the community who supports and often advocates for LGBTQ+ community members or the community as a whole.

Coming-Out. The process as self-identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. The coming out process is infinitely unique for every individual within the LGBTQ+ community. My experiential knowledge shows basic and preliminary characteristics that effect the coming out process to include simple demographics such as age, socioeconomic status, religion, education, geographical area, cultural components of a region, parents/caretakers/family/friend relationship dynamics, and even political aspects. Additionally, depending on what letter or letters (LGBTQIAPDPN+) the individual identifies with the coming out process takes on different and unique experiences.

Assumptions

This study included the following assumptions: (a) participants had little to no Hawthorne Effect present when knowing they will be interviewed or surveyed, (b) participants answer honestly and thoroughly in Phase I during the interview and during Phase II on the survey (which will be administered via Qualtrics), (c) the data collected will be representative of the larger LGBTQ+ or Queer community since only regional (Central Midwest: Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee) participants will be utilized. Additionally, the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory was utilized as the foundation of the study, although there are other theories that might be more suiting for the content, the

assumption is that PGTI was the best route to take to examine the dimensions of posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community who have self-identified as having religious trauma.

Limitations

The study will have the following limitations:

1. Data was only be collected from only the Central Midwest in the United States.

Caution must be exercised in extrapolating results to the entire United States or within a global context.

2. Sample size was potentially a limitation due to a limited participant pool, especially in the qualitative study.

3. Many variables could contribute to spiritual growth outside of trauma or traumatic experiences, therefore, it's important to consider additional avenues and paths of how individuals reach spiritual growth outside of trauma.

Delimitations

The delimitations utilized in the study place self-imposed boundaries while examining posttraumatic growth within the LGBTQ+ following self-assessed religious trauma, therefore four states in the Midwest of the United States will be chosen to conduct the research. Different geographical areas could be chosen other than the Midwest, including the Pacific Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, Southwest, Deep South, non-continental, etc. More states/geographical regions could have been utilized to increase external validity, but was limited due to research constraints associated with cost and time. An additional delimitation was that the collective LGBTQ+ community was utilized (through self-identification) to participate in the study. A focused subsection of

the LGBTQ+ community (i.e. gay identifying males (G), or bisexual individuals (B), or transgender identity members (T)) could be concentrated on and could possibly yield different results.

Significance of the Study

The potential significance in the study has implications not only in the LGBTQ+ community but across various communities and organizations. The intersection and conjunction between these various areas of missing research could allow for researchers to more accurately identify how LGBTQ+ individuals navigate PTG. Analysis of the posttraumatic growth of LGBTQ+ identifying individuals who have experienced religious trauma can help sculpt culture within organizations (spiritual/religious and nonspiritual/nonreligious), identify areas of future study around trauma within the LGBTQ+ community, and propel research forward that create models for how to heal or overcome religious or spiritual trauma. The qualitative phase of the study served as a base level of understanding of healing/growth following spiritual/religious trauma emerged from the study and reflected evidence of how one who has been challenged by religious trauma grows, expands, and triumphs past resiliency (or simply a bounce back) to growth. Additionally, this study hoped to help therapists, counselors, nonprofit organizations, and religious organizations understand that the trauma experience is dynamic, everchanging, expansive, and ever-complex within the LGBTQ+ community. A further hope was that more emphasis is placed and centered around healing and preventing these traumas within institutions, organizations, and churches by eradicating the teachings and rhetoric that propels and creates significant traumas for many people including the more vulnerable LGBTQ+ populations.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is presented in five chapters, Chapter 1 includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and the assumptions of the study.

Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature, which included significant research around religious trauma, posttraumatic growth (PTG), and posttraumatic spiritual growth (SPTG). Chapter 3 describes the methodology used for this research study. It includes the selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 consists of the data analysis from Phase I and II of the study.

Chapter 5 presents the implications of the data presented in Chapter 4 through interpretation of the data, answered the 15 research questions, the implications and applications were explored, followed by the limitations of the study, and the chapter ended with suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Introduction

The following review of the literature presents a broad view of religious trauma, followed by a more narrowed view and intersection with posttraumatic growth, and finally a pinpointed plunge into posttraumatic spiritual growth. Specifically, Chapter II is structured into three main sections: (a) religious trauma, (b) posttraumatic growth, and (c) posttraumatic spiritual growth.

Religious Trauma

Trauma is a well-studied and extensively utilized aspect of cognitive behavioral therapy in the fields of social work, psychology, and various other social sciences. According to the APA (American Psychiatric Association) trauma can be defined as, “combat, exposure to actual or threatened death, assault, serious injury, accident, or sexual violence” (Leo, Fein, & Forooshani, 2021, p. 162). In their recent review and meta-analysis Leo, Fein, and Forooshani (2021) summarize much of what has been learned about the nature and effects of trauma: They note that trauma is subjective to each survivor of that perceived or actual event or series of events. Traumatic events might include: an unexpected death of a loved one or even pet, car accident or other type of accident, divorce or other significant interpersonal relationship changes (for the two parties and those in close proximity to them including children effected by said changes), sexual and domestic abuse or even witnessing the abuse of others in close proximity, being attacked physically and psychologically or even spiritually, and countless other situations ranging from war, famine, heartbreak, natural disaster, illness, disease, and near death experiences. An event that might be traumatic to one might have little to no

effect on someone else. This is due to lived experiences, psychological state, temperament, and an individual's core characteristics, values, or belief systems. Defining trauma can be complicated due to variations in perceived events coupled with the differences in these lived experiences/core characteristics of each individual. Specifically, “for a stress response to occur, an event needs to be appraised as threatening and greater than the person's perceived resources (Leo, et al., 2021, p. 162). The perception of each individual as to what is threatening varies and allows for trauma to include numerous dichotomies of situations with vastly different lived experiences.

With respect to spiritual trauma, Leo et al. (2021) note that traditionally, religion is defined as a personal belief system that is aligned or quasi-aligned with additional united members towards a common ideology or set of core beliefs. Religion can also be observed independently countered to organized religion and is often then referred to as spirituality. Organized religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Folk religions, Wicca, Paganism, Humanism, Sikhism, Confucianism, and over 4,000 additional religions. Spiritual belief systems or practices often include meditation, non-traditional healing via herbs or energy work, mindfulness, elemental (earth, water, fire, wind) processes, connection to nature (Gaia), and other non-conventional avenues to a connection to universal/creator/divine energy. Leo et al. (2021) summarize, “spirituality is used to refer to broader, individualistic descriptions of human connections to the transcendent, while religion is perceived to relate to formal and shared belief systems” (p. 162). The distinction between religion and spirituality conceptualized by Leo et al. (2021) will be adopted throughout this chapter when referring to research addressing one or the other, although sometimes religion will be used to represent the

overarching umbrella term for both religion and spirituality.

Researchers have defined religious trauma as trauma received via religious/spiritual experiences where the survivor feels or perceives that religion or spirituality is the core cause of said traumas (Leo et al., 2021). Examples of religious traumas include stories of hell - fire - brimstone, certain groups of people being ostracized or left out based on their beliefs or who they are, feeling forced into certain situations or ideologies, cult like behaviors/actions, isolation, punishment, and other experiences that trigger a trauma response. A recent search of scholarly databases revealed significant research on the presence of religion within healing/overcoming trauma, while much less research has been conducted specifically in the area of religion or spirituality as a root cause for the trauma endured. Consequently, the first part of this literature review will focus on the intersection between religion, trauma, and the LGBTQ+ community. The purpose of this review is to derive possible avenues for continued research around trauma created or perpetuated by religion.

Religious Trauma in the LGBTQ+ Community. In my experience as the Executive Director for a LGBTQ+ based nonprofit for 5 years I have recognized and experienced that all traumas including religious trauma frequently inundates minority groups to a larger extent. LGBTQ+ identifying individuals often receive cultural, societal, and religious messaging from the day they are born that they differ from cultural/societal/religious norms. The LGBTQ+ community includes those individuals who self-identify as having a sexual orientation or gender identity that differs from heterosexual (straight) cis-gender (identifying with the gender assigned at birth) individuals. The community is comprised of members who have one identity to multiple

identities within the community (i.e., an individual might simply identify as a gay male, whereas another member of the community might identify as a transgender lesbian female). These complexities and intersections within the community make it difficult at times for heterosexual cis-gender identifying individuals (even many individuals within the LGBTQ+ community) to understand the intricacy of the LGBTQ+ community. For example, just because someone identifies as a lesbian woman doesn't mean they understand the experience, complexity, or journey of someone who identifies as transgender. Additionally, just because someone is transgender doesn't mean they understand what it's like to live as a gay or lesbian individual. These internal hyper-complexities create spaces where the LGBTQ+ community is constantly working to understand each other and to work together for common movements forward on behalf of the community. The increasing amount of complexity is important to note because the community itself is dynamic, ever-changing, and adapting within societal/cultural constructs. In my experience the community subculture is often a combination of learned experience coupled with perceived lived experience. Therefore, self-identifying within the community does not innately mean that the individual understands other pieces or letters (L-lesbian, G-gay, B-bisexual, T-transgender, Q-queer, I-Intersex, N-non-binary, A-asexual, P-pansexual, D-demisexual, Q-questioning, P-polyamory, etc.) of the community or even aspects of their own subculture (letter) within the community, and this ultimately leads to even more intricacies and complexities that are important to be mindful of throughout this review.

Though the focus of this review is geared towards religious trauma it is important to take note that societal and cultural norms help perpetuate and nurture religious norms

that then potentially lead to forms of religious trauma. One cannot postulate religious trauma in this community without at least reviewing and being mindful of the other forms of societal and cultural traumas inflicted within the LGBTQ+ community. The LGBTQ+ community members often perceive their individuality being challenged by societal and cultural norms that are then progressed or solidified within religious norms, thus creating massive amounts of micro, meso, and macro-level traumas for many LGBTQ+ identifying members through religion.

For instance, historically when a child was born in the US, they received blue items and clothing for a boy and pink for a girl to help identify gender. For a transgender individual these societal and cultural norms may become the foundation for a lived (unconscious or conscience) trauma. Numerous stories within the trans community that I have witnessed showcase someone who identifies as transgender often knows from a young age that they were born into the wrong body. The transgender experience varies to a great degree even including non-binary individuals who identify as: neither male or female, as both genders simultaneously, or identify with one gender during a certain time and another gender at other times. A common story heard within the LGBTQ+ community are those assigned at birth as a male gender and by the age that they start picking out clothing are drawn to dresses, high heels, and other clothing traditionally identified as female created clothing. This is also often seen in transgender individuals who identify as male but were assigned at birth as female and are drawn to more culturally masculine-based clothing.

The lived experiences of many individuals within the LGBTQ+ community showcases a narrative that they are not “normal” and this is the baseline for many

macrolevel traumas experienced within the community. I've seen (and personally experienced) these macrolevel traumas be rooted in several thought processes and messaging including feeling or being told: one isn't normal, one doesn't belong, and who one is at the core of their being is hurting oneself, others, or the world. This messaging is often perpetuated by many world religions including much of Christianity, where many LGBTQ+ members have heard similar narratives since a young age. Being told and taught their community goes to hell solely for who they identify as. In the nonprofit community work I have undertaken with youth and young adults I have noticed that when a core aspect of one's being is challenged from often such a young age that it creates vast amounts of trauma within the LGBTQ+ community. According to Bower (2021), "messages of being condemned by a higher power and prospects of "going to hell" stigmatize homosexuality as sinful" (p. 243).

The idea that one is condemned to hell solely for who they inherently are and or who they love is the basis for much of religious Christian trauma seen within the LGBTQ+ community. "Christian sexual minorities face significant stigma within mainstream Christianity" (Sumerau, 2017, p. 4). During my time as the executive director I worked on numerous interfaith events and recognized many other world religions and spiritual belief systems also hold this intense stigma and condemnation for those identifying as a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Typically, though not always, more spiritual based practices are accepting and affirming of LGBTQ+ individuals than traditional religions. Affirming can be defined as not only accepting someone but allowing them to participate in the religious/spiritual practices without having to change their sexual orientation or gender identity to a heterosexual cis-gender orientation. Often

a major sign of an affirming belief system to one that allows LGBTQ+ individuals to serve in leadership in a particular religion or spiritual practice/space.

The feeling of being alone, unsupported, not seen, and isolated is a common narrative within many members of the LGBTQ+ community. This feeling of being alone has been identified as a cornerstone of countless macrolevel trauma experiences for these individuals (Bower, 2021). Bower reports this sense of aloneness, noting “some participants felt isolated from their religious communities when they revealed their sexuality” (2021, p. 243). Often when members of the community “come out” they are further ostracized, removed from the religion or spiritual practice, and in extreme (though common) cases excommunicated completely not just from the religion or belief system but even debarred from friends and family members who are associated with the religion or spiritual belief system. Thus, I have witnessed that such an exchange can create macrolevel traumas from the institution or religious/spiritual organization, mesolevel traumas within the interpersonal relationships within said community, and microlevel traumas with close friends and family. Coming out can be extremely difficult for many individuals in the LGBTQ+ community for this exact reason. Even in situations where a religious organization or spiritual belief system is accepting of the individual quite often, they are not affirming. Without affirmation one is allowed to be a part of a community without genuinely being a fully respected participant there is the potential for further expanding on existing macrolevel traumas from childhood/early adulthood. However, there has been limited empirical research conducted around trauma caused by religion, while conversely there is a considerable amount of research that has been performed around the intersection of how trauma affects religious belief. It could be advantageous

for future studies to emphasize and focus on patterns in religious trauma, religious trauma within minority groups, and how individuals have circumnavigated such trauma.

Trauma Effects on Religious Beliefs. Inevitably, trauma has a vast potential of provoking change within previous, current, or future religious or spiritual beliefs held. Trauma often acts as the catalyst for change to occur and can be seen in a plethora of current research that focuses on how trauma creates opportunities for resiliency, expansion on previous held beliefs, and ultimately growth. In their study of the impact of trauma on previously held religious beliefs, Overcash, Calhoun, Cann, and Tedeschi (1996) conclude that, “For many persons, the [traumatic] events actually resulted in beliefs being held with greater conviction” (p. 462). This situation can often be seen at the offset of near-death experiences. For example, frequently those who have been in life threatening car accidents draw closer to their faith or religious/spiritual belief systems due to that trauma. On occasion the near-death experience leads to a new found spiritual or religious attachment to a belief system either held loosely before or not held at all. Overcash et al’s (1996) results correlate and provide additional (although indirect) evidence and support that in crisis many hold on to their religious beliefs and form a resiliency for their faith/beliefs from their perceived traumas (p. 462). After resiliency has been established there’s an opportunity for growth beyond “bouncing back” and this is often referred to as posttraumatic growth.

Posttraumatic Growth

Tedeschi, Cann, Taku, Senol, and Calhoun, (2007) defines posttraumatic growth as “usually characterized by finding a clearer meaning and purpose in life, a closer connection with others, and a greater sense of personal strength and self-reliance, as the

result of confronting and dealing with a difficult life event” (p. 220). Taube (2020) expands by stating, “measures of growth from adversity are typically subjective, self-reported, and focus on events (both the adverse event and the ensuing growth) that occurred in the past (p. 2).

Resiliency is often defined as a bounce back to normalcy or status quo (Smith et al., 2010), whereas PTG is a measurable, felt, or experienced growth beyond just a regulation back to normalcy after a traumatic event or series of events. The distinction between PTG and resiliency is imperative to note as there has been a heavy and well-encompassing amount of research and study in the field of resiliency while there has been much less research in the field of PTG.

Conversely, Baker (2008) coins the term posttraumatic depreciation where not only growth is examined, but also potential detriment or depreciation occurs after a perceived trauma event/s. This allows not only a dichotomy to emerge, but additionally allows for more encompassing intricacies of growth and depreciation while highlighting that both might be present at the same time. According to Baker (2008), posttraumatic growth is typically self-assessed using two major instruments, the Stress-Related Growth Scale (SRGS) (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996) and the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory examines self-assessed growth, development, expansion, and tangible learning after a trauma has occurred.

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) created a self-assessment inventory with a 5-factor structure comprising domains of Personal Strength, New Possibilities, Relating to Others, Appreciation of Life, and Spiritual Change

(Tedeschi, 2017) and called it the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI). Individuals struggling to cope with traumatic events may experience a significant change in life priorities, an increased potential to appreciate life and an increased importance given to spiritual and religious issues (Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2000; Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2005).

The PTGI attempts to allow trauma to be set as the catalyst for growth in five possible areas. The five areas of growth include: personal strength (where adaptations and increases in self-identified strength are highlighted), new possibilities (where the trauma created an avenue and expanded previous paths of potential opportunities), relating to others (where growth can be seen in how one views themselves in relation to others or simply shifts how they connect with others), appreciation of life (where growth allows the person to look at life in a different or elevated light compared to how they viewed life pre-trauma), and spiritual change (where previous religious or spiritual views are shifted, deepened, or elevated due to the trauma endured). According to Solomon, “the current model of stress-related growth proposed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) posits that such growth occurs because of cognitive changes that result from the struggle with difficult events, and accordingly the amount of stress experienced by an event is related to growth (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006)” (2015, p. 1530). Therefore, the increased amount of stress or trauma potentially generates heightened growth in these five areas.

Posttraumatic Growth in the LGBTQ+ Community and The Coming Out Process.

The coming out process is infinitely unique for every individual within the LGBTQ+ community. My experiential knowledge shows basic and preliminary characteristics that effect the coming out process to include simple demographics such as age,

socioeconomic status, religion, education, geographical area, cultural components of a region, parents/caretakers/family/friend relationship dynamics, and even political aspects. Additionally, depending on what letter or letters (LGBTQIAPDPN+) the individual identifies with the coming out process takes on different and unique experiences. For example, the coming out experience for a lesbian identifying cis-gender woman who was raised and is currently a member in the Episcopalian church by a moderately Democratic family in the Northeast region of the US might have an immensely dissimilar experience than a transgender identifying person coming out in the Deep South who was raised Southern Baptist and comes from a more conservative area culturally and politically. I have experienced that factoring in areas such as race, social economic status, ethnicity, education level of parents or caretakers, one's own educational experiences, previously held traumas, etc. create avenues of experiences where there is not one typical or predictable coming out experience or story.

While the experience of coming out is experienced as unique and personalized, researcher have documented aspects of the internal and external elements of the process common across individuals. In Solomon's study, "individuals who come out without much difficulty are less likely to experience growth from the processes" (2015, p 1530). At the same time, due to the incredibly dynamic coming out process for each individual there is great variation in trauma associated with the coming out process. Some individuals struggle and are perpetually traumatized until the day they leave this earth due to conflicting internal and external belief systems that inhibit one from owning their true identity, whereas other individuals who have vastly unlike experiences can ultimately own their gender identity or sexual orientation from a very young age.

Despite these variations, Solomon et al. (2015) found the more difficult the coming out process the potential for increased growth is a likely possibility.

“Furthermore, research indicates that individuals who are resilient enough to persevere after the event experience more growth” (Hooper, Marotta, & Lanthier, 2008). It is therefore possible that some individuals who experienced negative social reactions likely had the resilience to cope with such reactions, while others may not” (Solomon et al., 2015, p, 1530). Resiliency has been shown to play a key factor in the coming out process, the trauma associated with that process, and the impeding growth potentially obtained through the trauma. Resiliency may play a minor or major role in each individual's coming out process in various ways and is dependent upon countless aspects, dimensions, and characteristic of the process per each specific person. I have recognized through helping hundreds of youth and adults in their coming out process that this resiliency is placed as the foundation of potential growth.

To accomplish posttraumatic growth an individual must bounce back to the status quo state prior to the trauma. Due to the extreme complexities of this process research is sometimes challenging to obtain because of an ever increasing and dynamically evolving LGBTQ+ community in addition to the complex characteristics and combination of those characteristics listed above. Religion and spirituality often play a major role in posttraumatic growth (this can be referred to as posttraumatic spiritual growth) and can be elementary measured using the PTGI.

Posttraumatic Spiritual Growth

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; 1996) has become the most widely used measure of the positive changes people report as they

struggle with the aftermath of highly stressful and potentially traumatic events (Helgeson, Reynolds, & Tomich, 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi, Cann, Taku, Senol, & Calhoun, 2017). These positive changes vary significantly within the LGBTQ+ community due to an expansive number of various characteristics, relationship dynamics, cultural and societal norms, and lived experiences. Religion and spirituality play a major role in the trauma experienced by LGBTQ+ identifying individuals and can be seen paralleled in the posttraumatic growth experienced after traumas occur. Religion plays a key factor in the traumas present within many LGBTQ+ individuals while simultaneously providing many avenues for healing and growth in a post trauma context. According to Tedeschi (2017), “Spiritual Change (SC) is one of 5 domains of posttraumatic growth (PTG)” (p. 12).

The current Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) assesses this area of growth with only 2 items, one focusing on religiosity and the other focusing on spiritual understanding (Tedeschi, Cann, Taku, Senol, & Calhoun, 2017; Tedeschi, Calhoun, Proffitt, & Cann, 2007). Further development to the PTGI includes an expansion on these two items allowing for a more encompassing view of spiritual change after a traumatic event. This expansion of the PTGI model is extremely advantageous to pinpointing religious/spiritual PTG within the LGBTQ+ community due to the complexities that surround both the trauma and growth process for this community. Variations and related measures of the PTGI according to Tedeschi include, a short form (PTGI-SF; Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, Taku, et al., 2010), forms for children (PTGI-C; Cryder, Kilmer, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2006; PTGI-C-R; Kilmer et al., 2009), and a version that enables researchers to examine both positive changes, termed posttraumatic growth, and negative

changes, termed posttraumatic depreciation, on the same five dimensions (PTGI-42; Growth and Depreciation; Baker, Kelly, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2008; Cann, Calhoun, Tedeschi, & Solomon, 2010) (Tedeschi, 2017, p. 11). Additionally, PTGI-X (Tedeschi, 2017) emerges as an expansion of the inventory that focuses and measures spiritual-existential growth beyond PTGI's original capacity.

PTGI-X expanded from the original two statements/factors, “‘I have a better understanding of spiritual matters’ and ‘I have a stronger religious faith’” (Tedeschi, 2017, p.13) to six statements. The four additional statements/factors according to Tedeschi are, “‘I have greater clarity about life’s meaning,’ ‘I feel better able to face questions about life and death,’ ‘I feel more connected with all of existence,’ and ‘I have a greater sense of harmony with the world’” (2017, p. 13). This expansion of PTGI allows the inventory to have a broader understanding and a more holistic view of spirituality and religion in the role it performs in posttraumatic growth. The six factors of the PTGI-X bring to light healing and growth after perceived traumas or sufferings. According to Shaw, “Most of the world’s great religions including Christianity, Hinduism, and the Islamic faith view suffering as having an important positive role in our personal development, the development of wisdom (Linley, 2003), and in our relationship with a higher being (Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 1995; Woodcock, 2001)” (Shaw, 2005, p. 2). One of the main benefits of this expansion is a more encompassing view of outcomes of trauma or suffering, and the six statements/factors now incorporate various unincorporated possibilities that the original PTGI missed out on capturing accurately and fully. This is advantageous for those who are LGBTQ+ identifying who take the PTGTI-X because of the complexity around many individuals’ relationships with spirituality and religion as a

piece of their past trauma and or current growth.

Posttraumatic Spiritual Growth in the LGBTQ+ Community. The LGBTQ+ community has its own culture and set of subcultures that are highly complex and intricate. According to Tedeschi et al. (2017), “the PTGI-X appears to provide additional insight into the experience of posttraumatic growth in diverse cultures (p. 17). The PTGI-X lends itself to extend quite naturally into the LGBTQ+ community due to its ability to be adaptive to a broader range of participants and captures many non-traditional religious/spiritual views in the existential realm. Taube (2020) expands on gender diverse (TGD) identifying individuals (comprised of transgender and non-binary individuals) by stating, “in the context of gender non-conformity, religion, religious organizations, and religious individuals can be instrumental in perpetuating trans-negativity and transprejudice” (p.13). This sentiment can be mirrored in the other letters of the LGBTQ+ community where prejudice, phobias, and perpetuation of religious dogmas/teachings create traumas throughout the community via religion/religious institutions. Additionally, Taube (2020) explains, “that perhaps it is not surprising that spiritual/existential growth, when it occurs in TGD people (e.g., as greater sense of harmony with the world, connectedness with existence, ability to face life/death, and clarity about life’s meaning) does not necessarily extend to the religious context” (p. 13).

Taube’s study found significant data that concluded that TGD identifying individuals “faced growth after adversity” (trauma) in a spiritual regard (particularly once the statement ‘I have a stronger religious faith’ was removed from the results). Once again, we see the distinction between spirituality and religion being evermore important in the LGBTQ+ community due to the potential elevation or increase in religious trauma.

Furthermore, this indicates that many individuals, especially within the transgender community, have a difficult time identifying with religion in the traditional sense and the expansion of PTGI to PTGI-X permits for the LGBTQ+ community to be more accurately represented within spiritual growth after traumatic events.

Spiritual practices including mindfulness are paths of spiritual growth that are and can be generally non-religious in nature. The Sauer (2013) Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) is a tool used to measure mindfulness and I intuit that a large amount of LGBTQ+ identify individuals incorporate mindfulness practices formally or informally into their spiritual growth following a traumatic event. Mindfulness research is in its beginning stages and further research could potentially delve into the junction of mindfulness as a posttraumatic spiritual outcome. Mindfulness practices could be incorporated as a seventh statement in the PTGI-X or as a replacement for the statement 'I have a strong religious faith' because that statement may possibly have an adverse reaction to minority groups or other cultural groups conceivably including the LGBTQ+ community.

Summary

Religious trauma is prevalent in many cultures and subcultures including a concentration of elevated trauma within the LGBTQ+ community. This trauma then sets the foundation for vastly differing lived experiences with some commonalities that emerge. After trauma has taken place there tends to be a regulation or bounce back to normalcy which can be defined as resiliency. A step beyond resiliency is posttraumatic growth where growth is achieved after a trauma has been endured. Posttraumatic growth via PTGI and posttraumatic spiritual growth via PTGI-X assist in creating opportunities

for girthy amounts of growth, expansion, and learning.

Understanding the intricacies and intersections between religious trauma, posttraumatic growth, and posttraumatic spiritual growth allow a better understanding of what minority groups persevere through regarding trauma and growth from that trauma in a spiritual manner. Narrowing the focus onto the LGBTQ+ community provides an opportunity to delve deeper and highlight the intersections of trauma and posttraumatic growth within a minority group that frequently gets disregarded. The proposed study will focus on these complexities and junctions in current research and observe where there are significant gaps, ultimately pushing out a call to action for further research in this field. The more visibility and inclusion the LGBTQ+ community receives the increased likelihood that stigmas and prejudice decrease.

Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

The primary goal of the study was to test the research questions that connect religious trauma, posttraumatic growth, and the LGBTQ+ community as stated in Chapter 1. The methodology utilized to test the research questions is presented in this chapter. The chapter is arranged into four sections: (a) theoretical framework, (b) research questions, (c) population, (d) selection of participants, (e) instrumentation, (f) data collection, and (g) data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The focus of this study was to understand what role spirituality or religion may play in the posttraumatic growth experienced among members and allies of the LGBTQ+ community following religious trauma. Phase I presented a phenomenological account of the nature of the religious trauma experienced by members of the LGBTQ+ community, and their Allies, and their subsequent posttraumatic growth. Particular attention was placed on describing these participants' spiritual or religious beliefs and affiliation with a spiritual or religious organizations following posttraumatic growth (see Figure 1).

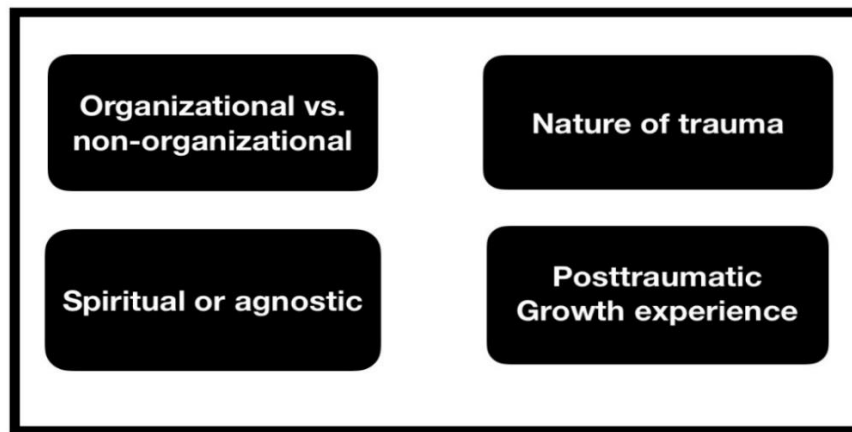
Affiliation with a spiritual/religious organization referred to identifying with an organized religion and/or belief system based out of an organization or is purely guided through their own spiritual path not associated with a formal organization (i.e., church, yoga class, spiritual training/schools). Self-identified religious or spiritual experiences/beliefs referred to spiritual/religious beliefs or practices or the absence of these beliefs/practices (which is referred to as agnosticism). The posttraumatic growth experience is the journey and story of the growth beyond the trauma endured. These four

areas of concentration provided a phenomenological perspective on the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ identifying individuals and Allies who experienced trauma and self-identify as having growth from those trauma-based experiences.

PHASE I: INTERVIEW

Phenomenological Perspective

Lived experiences of individuals who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic spiritual growth from a phenomenological perspective



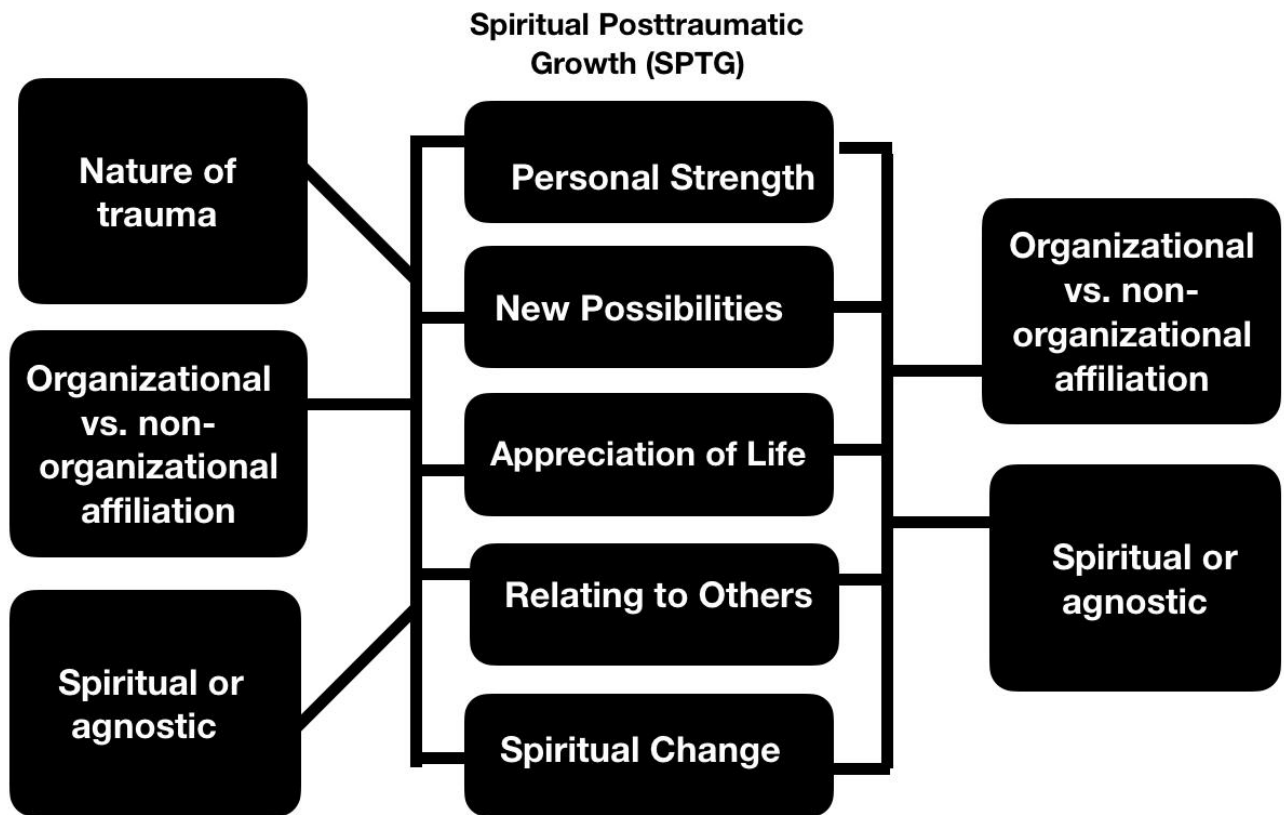
Theoretical Framework: Phase I, Allen & Latta 2021

Figure 1. Theoretical framework for Phase I

In Phase II quantitative survey responses to the PTGI-X were analyzed for members and Allies of the LGBTQ+ community. The nature of religious trauma, affiliation or non-affiliation with a spiritual or religious organization, and the self-identification of being spiritual/religious or agnostic informs the posttraumatic growth measured in the PTGI-X portion of the survey. The outcomes measured are the

differences in the organizational or non-organizational affiliation and spiritual or agnostic identity of participants. (see Figure 2).

PHASE II: SURVEY



Theoretical Framework: Phase II, Allen & Latta 2021

Figure 2. Theoretical Framework: Phase II

The five aspects of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X are: personal strength, new possibilities, relating to others, appreciation of life, and spiritual change. Personal strength is defined as the building blocks of achieving difficult tasks. New possibilities refers to having a plethora of different paths or avenues in life. Relating to others reflects harmony and building current or new relationships. Appreciation of life is how grateful and lucky one feels for their current situation in life or simply being

appreciative to be alive. Spiritual change is the growth and development of one's connection to the world, the universe, or divinity and possibly an enhanced introspection of existence. Figure 2 illustrates the three factors on the left-hand side which inform and assist in understanding why and how posttraumatic growth occurs. On the right-hand side the outcomes measure the differences in the organizational or non-organizational affiliation and spiritual or agnostic identify of participants.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

This mixed methods study included two sets of research questions a set of descriptive questions relating to the qualitative phenomenological analysis of interview data, and a set of inferential questions relating to the quantitative analysis of survey responses.

The qualitative portion of the study will address the following four (4) research questions:

RQ1: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to their lived experience of spiritual or religious trauma?

RQ2: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to their lived experience of post-traumatic growth following spiritual or religious trauma?

RQ3: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect how they describe their affiliation with spiritual or religious organizations over the course of their posttraumatic growth experience?

RQ4: How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect how they describe their spiritual or agnostic identification over the course of

their posttraumatic growth experience?

The quantitative survey portion of the study will address the following 11 research questions:

RQ5: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to the nature of trauma experienced?

RQ6: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to the spiritual or religious aspects of trauma experienced?

RQ7: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma differ with respect to the antecedents of posttraumatic growth relative to: a) organizational affiliation and b) religious/spiritual identity?

RQ8: How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma differ with respect to the outcomes of posttraumatic growth relative to: a) organizational affiliation and b) religious/spiritual orientation?

RQ9: With respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma does affiliation with a spiritual or religious organization following posttraumatic growth differ significantly from affiliation prior to trauma?

RQ10: With respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma does spiritual or agnostic identity following posttraumatic growth differ significantly from spiritual or agnostic identity prior to trauma?

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

RQ11: Among members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious affiliated trauma, how do the dimensions of spiritual posttraumatic growth (SPTG) differ based on the nature of their trauma?

RQ12: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, does prior affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization predict dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X?

RQ13: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced post-traumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, does prior spiritual or religious identification predict dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X?

RQ14: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, do dimensions of post-traumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X predict current affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization?

RQ15: Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, do dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X predict current spiritual or religious identification?

Population

The population for this study consisted of individuals who self-identified as a member or Ally of the LGBTQ+ community in the Central Midwest region of the United

States that additionally self-identified as having overcome and experienced spiritual growth from religious trauma. This population was identified and structured through Midwestern LGBTQ+ non-profit organizations, affirming faith-based and religious organizations, and social service organizations that focus or have an emphasis in the LGBTQ+ community. The Central Midwestern geographical region was identified as Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee.

Selection of Participants

Phase I. The interview portion (phase I) of this study solicited 14 LGBTQ+ identifying participants who self-identified as having overcome and experienced growth from religious trauma and 10 participants identifying as allies of the LGBTQ+ community who self-identify as having overcome and experienced growth from religious trauma. Recruitment of these participants was initiated through dissemination of a letter of request (see Appendix A) sent via email to the directors of 38 nonprofit organizations directly serving the LGBTQ+ community in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee, and the volunteer networks affiliated with them. The letter included the link to Qualtrics that was requested to be disseminated to the directors' personal and professional networks. The Qualtrics link then screened for participation requirements (informed consent, over age of 18, location within Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee, and self-identified as an Ally or a member to the LGBTQ+ community) and have the participants filled out their contact information (name and email) to be contacted later in the selection process.

The solicitation process for Phase I was 28-days (a reminder was sent out 14-days into the dissemination process). All 24 interviews were conducted over a 21-day time

span and coded in the 28-days that followed. The total interview process spanned 77-days.

Phase II. Recruitment of participants for the survey portion of the study (Phase II) involved dissemination of a call for participants through the executive directors, VP or director of related programs in a broad range of social service nonprofit organizations, religious and spiritual based organizations, and LGBTQ+ organizations in Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee. The principal investigator built out a vast personal and professional web of networks while working in the social service nonprofit field over the past 8 years through leadership within Love Must Win, GLAST (Gays and Lesbians Achieving Sobriety Together), The Building Bridges Community Center, Gateway Community and Technical College, The Horizon Fund of Northern Kentucky, The Children's Home of Northern Kentucky, and through volunteer work in various other area nonprofits that I have volunteered with. Solicitation was intentionally sent via email to community leaders who have distinctly different networks than the principal investigator to ensure the survey information is widely distributed via a letter of request (Appendix B). This phase included more heterogeneous sampling beyond immediate contacts to achieve a robust sample of participants. The letter of request asked these community leaders to disseminate a survey flyer and announcement text (see Appendix C) to their personal/professional networks and post on their organization's social media accounts (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn). Additionally, the principal investigator is the proprietor of a pre-existing email list of LGBTQ+ and ally identifying individuals in the Greater Cincinnati, Ohio metropolitan area (including respondents in Indiana, Kentucky, and Ohio). This email list consists of roughly 400 individuals who are

invited to both participate in the study and to help recruit survey participants for Phase II by further disseminating the flyer and announcement (Appendix C) via email to their contacts.

Data collection for Phase II spanned 44 days and the survey was disseminated originally to 62 nonprofit, religious/spiritually-based, and education centered organizations. The leaders of these organizations were then invited to disseminate the survey to their personal and professional networks via social media, direct message, and email. Two additional updates and reminders were sent out during the process (14 and 30 days into the data collection process). 30 days into the data collection process 25 additional organizations were sent the initial survey dissemination email with an update on the data collection process requesting them to disseminate the survey. In total, 87 organizations were reached out to directly within the first 30 days of dissemination.

Participants in Phase II self-identified as either a member of the LGBTQ+ community or an ally of the community and can still participate if they are not “out” yet or ever plan on coming out. The confidential assurance stated in the Informed Consent aided participants to be at ease if they are not comfortable sharing their sexual orientation or gender identity publicly.

Instrumentation

Phase I. The interview protocol for phase I of the study consisted of various interview questions designed to elicit insights about the experiences and nature of the trauma present. These questions were designed to be open-ended and to give a depth of first-hand trauma experiences. The interview began with thanking the interviewee for their participation and asking if they needed any additional information or had questions

before we started the interview. There were seven questions based around how the religious trauma endured, the catalyst moment that they realized there was some type of religious or spiritual trauma, and then the point when they had growth past that trauma. The interview then concluded with a debriefing thanking the participant and asking if they needed additional resources or needed to process for a few minutes before concluding the interview. Appendix D consisted of the interview layout and questions for phase I of the study.

Phase II. The Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-X) survey instrument accompanied with the ‘nature of trauma’ questions were utilized for Phase II. The 5 dimensions of posttraumatic growth will be measured on a 6-point Likert scale (0 on the scale represents no effect and 5 represents an extreme effect on the participant). The most recent version of the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-X) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017) was utilized for Phase II of the study. Tedeschi’s original PTGI (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2007) instrument consists of 21 questions. The expanded version with an increased focus in spiritual aspects (includes 25 questions) via the PTGI-X instrument was utilized. There are five domains within the PTGI-X (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017) including personal strength (i.e., ‘I know I can handle difficulties’), new possibilities (i.e., ‘I am able to do better things with my life’), appreciate of life (i.e., ‘I appreciate each day’), relating to others (i.e., ‘I have more compassion for others’), and spiritual-existential change (i.e., ‘I have a better understanding of spiritual matters’).

In addition to the PTGI-X, there was a few qualifying questions including location and age verification. Nature of trauma lists allowed participants to check up to 9 types of general traumas experienced, as well as 5 additional types of spiritual/religious

traumas. Additionally, questions were posed to participants around affiliation or non-affiliation with a spiritual or religious organization at the start of the participants self-identified trauma experienced and currently how they identify their affiliation or non-affiliation. Lastly, questions asked if the participant identified as religious, spiritual, agnostic, atheist, or something not listed when the self-identified trauma started to occur and how the participant currently identifies. See Appendix E.

Data Collection

Phase I. Once the initial solicitation occurred for the interview portion (phase I) of the study the participant utilized the link provided via Qualtrics to complete the Informed Consent form (see Appendix F). During the Informed Consent process contact information was gathered. After confirmation of the form was submitted the participants were selected, the principal investigator scheduled the interview portion from the email address provided via Qualtrics and then sent the participant a Zoom link. Remote interviews consisted of a 45-75 minute interview where the audio was transcribed via the Zoom transcribing function. Open coding of the transcribed interviews were carried out to identify meaningful bits within the interviews responses.

Phase II. Following solicitation, the participants in Phase II of the study followed the Qualtrics survey link provided and answered the Informed Consent question (see Appendix G). After consent was obtained the screening questions were asked (including verifying that the participant is 18 years of age or older, that the participant self-identifies as an ally or member of the LGBTQ+ community, that the participant lives within the geographical area of Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, or Tennessee). Those who met the criteria proceeded to the survey.

Data Analysis

Phase I. The aim of phenomenological research is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings may be derived capturing the collective essences or structure of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). For Phase I content analysis focused on understanding individuals' unique experiences. According to Bernard (2012), "The explanation-building approach to qualitative data analysis requires the researcher to search for trends in the data" (p. 391). Organization of the data was step one. Excel was utilized to organize and analyze the coded data from the interview process. Category generation was step two in this process where hierarchical coding will be utilized, and lower-level coding categories were nestled within higher level categories (Bernard, 2012). This allowed for narrow and broad coding categories to both be utilized. Horizon coding of the data regards every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value is vital in this process (Moustakas, 1994). Clustering of common themes then occurred. The clustered themes and meanings were used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience. From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon were constructed (Moustakas, 1994). There was an emphasis placed on understanding participants' 'inner worlds' and the degree to which the research participants viewpoints, thoughts and intentions were accurately understood.

Bias mitigation. It's always easier to notice and pay attention to data that fit our theories than to data that contradict them (Bernard, 2021). Focusing on the manifest

content in the coding scheme aided in mitigation of potential bias in the coding process. A good general rule is that because coders can differ in the interpretations they make of a behavior or message content, they should code only the manifest content of the behavior or message itself: what is there, not what it means (Bernard, 2012). Additionally, consistency in applying codes is essential for mitigating against potential bias. One way to prevent coders from having to make inferences is to write definitions that include a list of behaviors that fall within the scope of the concept being coded (Bernard, 2012). This method was utilized in the coding process to ensure we captured and analyzed the data accurately and thoroughly.

Phase II. The results of the self-report regarding trauma and the antecedents and outcomes of posttraumatic growth were analyzed for associations with dimensions of post-traumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X. A combination of ANOVA, chi-square, and Wilcoxon signed rank analyses of the survey results in Phase II focused on identifying patterns in the outcomes of posttraumatic growth among individuals based upon: 1) the nature of the trauma experienced (coded emergent themes), and 2) the religious or spiritual affiliation and orientation of individuals following posttraumatic growth (i.e. organizational or non-organizational and spiritual vs. agnostic/non-spiritual affiliation). Descriptive and inferential statistics allowed the researchers to infer whether these results were potentially widespread for the LGBTQ+ and Ally populations. Most notably, the ANOVA, chi-square, and Wilcoxon signed rank test results and analyses displayed numerous connections (and the potential significance of these connections) between relationships around trauma, religious/spiritual trauma, affiliation or non-affiliation with a spiritual or religious organization, and the self-identification of being

spiritual or agnostic.

The two-way ANOVA with replication was utilized, because there were two groups (LGBTQ+ and Allies) and multiple variables (organization affiliation or non-organization affiliation/self-identify as spiritual or agnostic) to examine the means of the various variables. The Chi-square test illuminated any statistically significant differences in the pattern of distributions among participants in organization affiliation/non-affiliation and spiritual/agnostic identity prior to the trauma and after posttraumatic growth had occurred.

Figure 3 reflects the four logical combinations of the traumatic resolution states to be analyzed: organizational and agnostic/nonspiritual, non-organizational and agnostic/nonspiritual, organizational and spiritual, and non-organizational and spiritual.

	Organizational Affiliation	Non-organizational Affiliation
Agnostic/Non-spiritually oriented	SPTG Profile of Organizational affiliation and Agnostic/ Nonspiritually oriented individuals	SPTG Profile of Non-organizational affiliation and Agnostic/ Nonspiritually oriented individuals
Spiritually oriented	SPTG Profile of Organizational and spiritually oriented individuals	SPTG Profile of Non-organizationally affiliated and spiritually oriented individuals

Figure 3. Outcomes of Posttraumatic Growth

Protection of Human Subjects

In Phase I the informed consent form was collected via Qualtrics and notices of remote interviews scheduled with consenting participants were sent from the principal investigator's Xavier email address. The Zoom based interviews were audio transcribed. All emails were then permanently destroyed. All personal information was de-identified

including the participant's name, names of others, and all other identifying information and then the interview were coded for analysis.

In Phase II participants completed the informed consent process prior (question 1 of the survey) to taking the survey via Qualtrics. The survey remained completely anonymous during and after the data collection and analysis. In Phase II there was a slight potential for re-traumatization to occur for participants, therefore an extensive resource list concluded the survey after the thank you message. The resource list (see Appendix H) provided to participants included websites, telephone numbers, and text services for those impacted/re-triggered by certain types of traumas ranging from addiction and recovery-based services, abuse-based services, and several LGBTQ+ specific resources.

Summary

This chapter restated the purpose of the research and presented the research questions. The participants selected for this study were carefully and randomly selected through dissemination of word of mouth and an existing nonprofit (spiritual/religious or LGBTQ+ community) connections and networks (including an email list of 400 contacts). Phase I of the study consisted of a 45-75-minute interview to expand on the nature of trauma within our target population. Phase II consisted of a survey utilizing PTGI-X that was administered to 407 participants (who fully completed the survey). Open coding was utilized for phase I of the study and the PTGI-X instrument assisted in analysis of Phase II of the study.

Chapter 4. Data Analysis

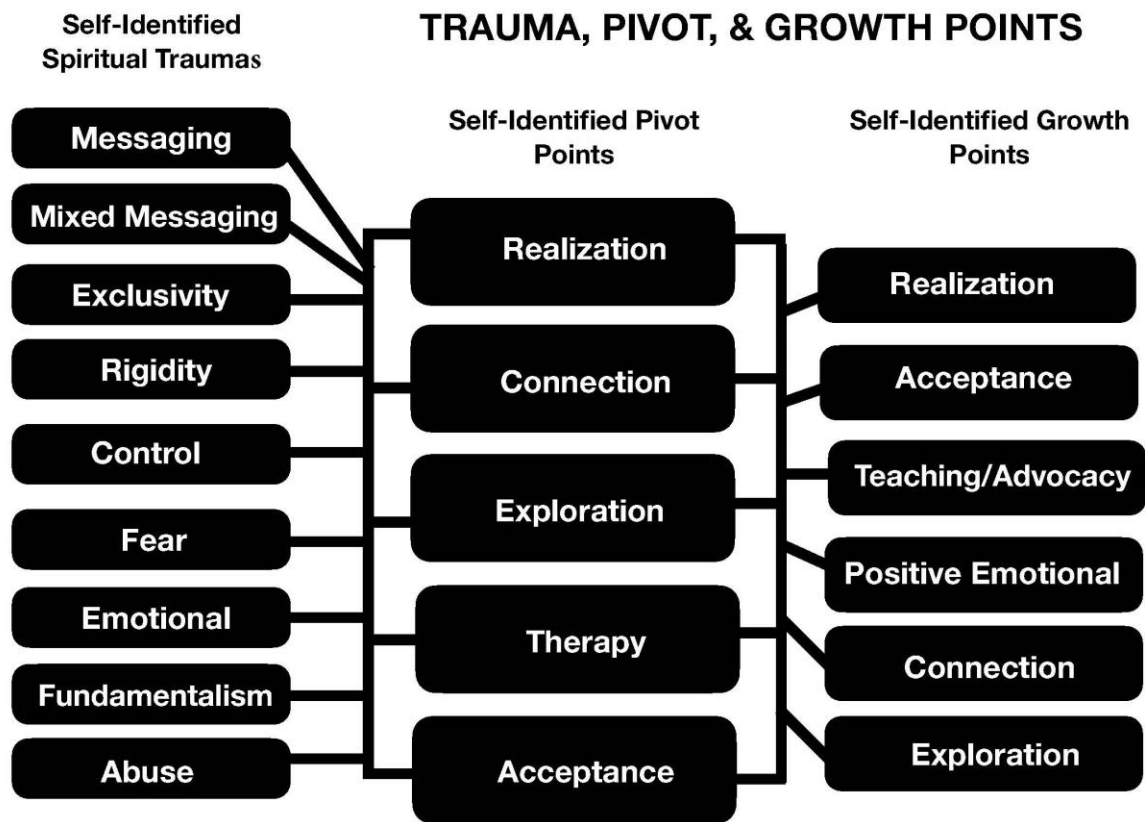
Data collection spanned 44 days and the survey was initially disseminated to 62 nonprofit, religious/spiritually-based, and education centered organizations. Leaders of these organizations were invited to disseminate the survey to their personal and professional networks via social media, direct message, and email. Two updates and reminders were sent out 14 and 30 days into the data collection process. Thirty days into the data collection process, the survey invitation was sent to 25 additional organizations, with an update on the data collection process, requesting them to disseminate the survey. A total of 87 organizations were contacted directly in the first 30 days of dissemination.

Qualitative Results

In the qualitative phase (I), 24 interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, yielding 14 interview participants who self-identified as LGBTQ+ and 10 interview participants who self-identified as an ally of the LGBTQ+ community. The interviews with this non-representative sample consisted of 7 questions identifying and providing anecdotal stories and insights into participant's experiences with religious/spiritual trauma and the subsequent growth that followed. There were an additional 42 potential prompts embedded within the 7 key questions to assist in eliciting these delicate and often complex narratives. The interviews were conducted and transcribed via Zoom (audio only) and the duration of each interview ranged from 45-70 minutes in length.

Open-coding was used to identify 946 meaning bits in all the interviews, 780 related to the three broad themes (see Figure 4) of trauma (trauma event/aspect), pivot (shift or pivot moment), and growth points (where prolonged permanent growth occurred), and 168 related to 7 additional themes present in all interviews. The 7

additional themes related to 1) whether participants experienced single or multiple traumas, 2) organization affiliation when trauma first occurred and 3) after posttraumatic growth occurred, 4) if applicable the organization affiliation denomination when trauma first occurred and 5) following posttraumatic growth, and 6) spiritual, agnostic, or atheist affiliation when trauma first occurred and 7) following posttraumatic growth.



Trauma, Pivot, & Growth Points Phase I, Allen & Latta 2022

Figure 4 Trauma, Pivot, & Growth Points Phase I

Results of the open coding reported below reflect the frequency of interviewees whose interview reflected each theme. These frequencies are presented to demonstrate the saturation of themes in the interviews conducted, but given the non-representative nature of the sample in this qualitative phase of the study, frequencies should not be misinterpreted as reflecting the relative frequency of occurrences in the population of

LGBTQ+ or Ally communities. Presentation of these themes below will focus on understanding what each theme contributes to understanding the common threads in the experience of religious/spiritual trauma and posttraumatic growth relayed by this non-random sample of LGBTQ+ and Ally participants who volunteered to share their stories.

Of the 24 individuals who volunteered to be interviews, 23 reported being in a formal religious or spiritual organization at the time religious/spiritual trauma first occurred (see Table 1). The organizations identified (some interview participants provided multiple affiliations) were Southern Baptist (9), Catholic (7), Methodist (3), Nondenominational (3), Jehovah's Witnesses (2), African Methodist Episcopal, Evangelical Church of Christ, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Atheism, Jewish, and Traditional Hinduism.

Table 1. Religious/Spiritual Affiliation of interview participants at time trauma occurred

	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	n	%
Formal religious/spiritual organization affiliation	9	90.0%	14	100.0%
No affiliation	1	10.0%		

Upon experiencing posttraumatic growth, 10 interview participants reported being affiliated with a formal religious or spiritual organization, and 14 reported having no spiritual or religious affiliation (see Table 2). The organization affiliations interviewees reported following posttraumatic growth were nondenominational (5), Catholic (2), Presbyterian, United Methodist, and Unity Worldwide affiliations.

The majority of interview participants (22 of 24) identified as religious or spiritual when the trauma first occurred (see Table 3). Two (2) interviewees, both ally identifying,

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

reported their spiritual affiliation as agnostic (1) or atheist (1).

Table 2 Religious/spiritual affiliation of interview participants following posttraumatic growth

	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	N	%
Formal religious/spiritual organization affiliation	2	20.0%	8	57.1%
No affiliation	8	80.0%	6	42.9%

Table 3 Percentage of interview participants who self-identify as spiritual when trauma occurred

	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	n	%
Spiritual/Religious	8	80.0%	14	100%
Agnostic	1	10.0%		
Atheist	1	10.0%		

The majority of both LGBTQ+ (12) and Ally (9) interviewees identified as spiritual/religious following their posttraumatic growth (see Table 4). Both the allies who identified as atheist or agnostic at the time their trauma occurred identified as spiritual after experiencing posttraumatic growth. The ally who identifies as agnostic following posttraumatic growth was spiritual when their trauma first occurred. Similarly, two (2) LGBTQ+ participants who identify as either agnostic or atheist following their posttraumatic growth identified as spiritual when their trauma first occurred.

Thus, the vast majority of both LGBTQ+ and Ally individuals who volunteered to be interviewed for this study were rooted in religious or spiritual organizations at the time they reported experiencing religious/spiritual trauma and continue to identify as spiritual/religious after posttraumatic growth. Their stories are unlikely to shed light on

the experiences of members of LGBTQ+ or Ally communities less closely affiliated or identified with religious or spiritual organizations and identities.

Table 4 Percentage of interview participants who self-identify as spiritual after posttraumatic growth occurred

	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	n	%
Spiritual/Religious	9	90.0%	12	85.8%
Agnostic	1	10.0%	1	7.1%
Atheist			1	7.1%

Trauma

All 24 participants interviewed reported multiple trauma events and these events were categorized into 9 themes of spiritual/religious-based traumas: messaging, mixed messaging, exclusivity, rigidity, control, fear, emotional, fundamentalism, and abuse. In recounting the nature of their trauma, LGBTQ+ participants provided more detailed accounts, reporting on average 4.5 more trauma markers (37.8%) than ally participants. Since a single trauma event may contain multiple trauma markers embedded within it, further analysis of each type of trauma reported is presented below.

Table 5 Frequency of trauma markers reflected in the descriptions of LGBTQ+ and Ally interviewees

	N	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	10	119	11.9
LGBTQ+	14	230	16.4
Total	24	349	14.5

Messaging

In the context of this analysis, messaging was defined as the religious and

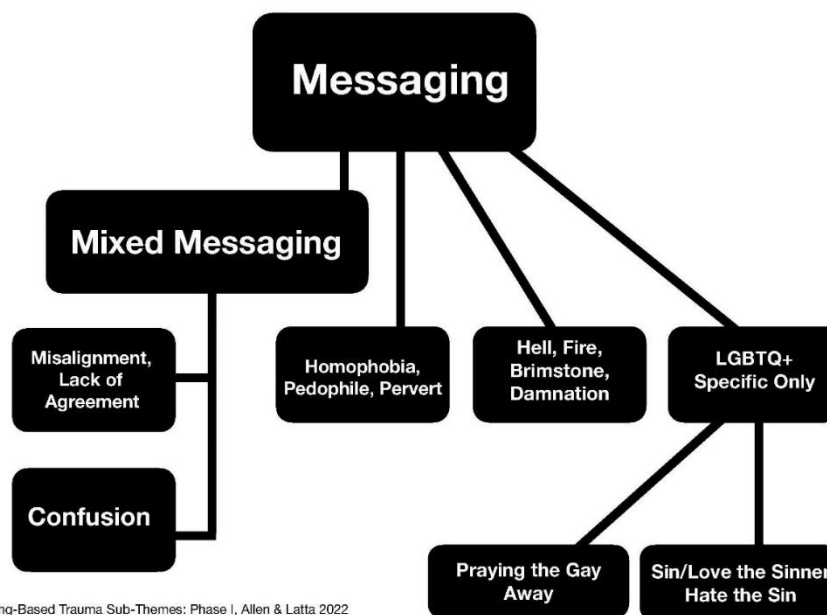
spiritual communication, words, stories, signs, symbols, and rhetoric used towards others. Over 40% of all the trauma markers recorded across all 24 interviews were messaging-based traumas, and were reported equally by LGBTQ+ (92.9%) and ally (90%) of interviewees (see Table 6). Combined, over 90% (22) of interview participants reported some form of messaging-based trauma during their interview. These interviews revealed vast complexity within the messaging-based traumas reported, however, the two largest sub-themes were: 1) hell, brimstone, fire, and eternal damnation, and 2) homophobia, being gay/LGBTQ+ is wrong, pedophiles, perverts. In addition, two areas of messaging (praying the gay away and sin/hate the sin love the sinner) were reported only by LGBTQ+ interview participants. Each of these will be explored in more depth below. Mixed messaging emerged as an additional theme with two extended sub-themes (see Figure 5). Other messaging clusters emerged that were not analyzed further: suicide/self-harm, fundamentalism, fear, practices/customs, and hate. There was some overlap between some of these themes and others that will be explored later in this analysis, i.e., rigidity, fear, emotional, fundamentalism.

Table 6 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme messaging				
	N	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	9	90.0%	48	5.3
LGBTQ+	13	92.9%	92	7.1
Total	22	91.7%	140	6.4

Hell. Hell, brimstone, fire, and eternal damnation messaging was reported by 64.3% of the LGBTQ+ and 20% of the Ally participants interviewed (see Table 7). One of the LGBTQ+ interview participants stated, “I was struggling with my own identity and

damnation threats constantly. And, so I suffered from depression and suicidal thoughts from this.” We will explore more on the intersections within mental health in the emotional trauma theme. A constant onslaught of perpetuated messaging inundates all the fractures in life as another participant shared, “This idea of eternal damnation, gnashing of teeth, Judgment Day was a part of our faith, and the point of where I felt the most trauma, the aspect that there are people that are going to burn in hell forever and ever.” Often a core pillar of many religious and Christian belief systems is eternal salvation or damnation. Battling against the core essence of one’s innate being, such as being a member of the LGBTQ+ community, is painstaking and in constant conflict against something that can’t be genuinely changed. Therefore, to be condemned for something one has no control over is a prison in which there is no true escape. Furthermore, an eternal prison, such as how hell is described, for something one has no power over impales such a deep pain that no one should be forced to endure.

Messaging-Based Trauma Sub-Themes



Messaging-Based Trauma Sub-Themes: Phase I, Allen & Latta 2022

Figure 5 Messaging-Based Trauma Sub-Themes: Phase I

The messaging reported ensued through societal, organizational, cultural, and familial avenues and was either intrapersonal, interpersonal or both. One LGBTQ+ interview participant described how as a teenager after coming out that he was forced to attend church and was only allowed to attend church related events and go to school. He stated, “It felt very much like this was a forced experience, and that was just Christianity, that Church, that God, were all being weaponized by my mother to save me from eternity in hell and that’s really hard.” For this participant, messaging intersects with the control (forced rituals/church and disempowerment) and fear (possibly from this participant’s mother’s perception she is trying to save her child from an eternity in hell and is blinded by her intense fear) themes discussed later.

One LGBTQ+ participant who was in an abusive marriage said, “If I leave this marriage I’m going to hell. I’m going to break the vow with God, that I made with God and this man, no matter how abusive this guy is I’m not going to hell. And, you know, I need to do the right thing to save my soul.” One of the Ally participants echoed this as well when explaining what the church taught her to do, “Everything surrounded him, his comfort. He came first, and then the kids and I came after that. That's what we were trained to do in church, we were supposed to be serving him.” This patriarchal-based messaging is shrouded in control, rigidity, and hell-based messaging that sometimes assists people in holding onto unhealthy, unhappy, and unsafe relationships.

Another Ally participant stated that their childhood in their Methodist church was never in alignment with their core values, “It was just everything was always if you do this, you're going to hell if it wasn't a teaching in the bible.” Later in the interview, this

Ally continues to share an account of their secondary trauma from one of their LGBTQ+ college scholars they recently educated, “I would classify it as torture, where they are constantly being told their wrong, being told it's a sin, being told they're going to hell.” Secondary messaging-based trauma can at times be experienced through close or even distant relationships, situations, and events. Even though this trauma might be defined as secondary it doesn't make the trauma less impactful for the one reporting the secondary trauma, more so it solely highlights that the trauma is often indirect to that participant.

Table 7 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme of messaging: Hell, brimstone, fire, eternal damnation

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	2	20.0%	5	2.5
LGBTQ+	9	64.3%	22	2.4
Total	11	45.8%	27	2.5

Homophobia. Messaging focused on homophobia identified LGBTQ+ as wrong or as pedophiles or perverts was clustered together as connecting homophobia to homophobic beliefs or actions. Homophobia has been defined as, “irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against homosexuality or gay people” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). The incidents of trauma from homophobic messaging were reported equally by Ally (40%) and LGBTQ+ (35.7%) participants (see Table 8).

One Ally participant stated, “The trauma occurred because one of my children who is gay was being discriminated in a church we were attending. So that's where the trauma started in my journey.” The participant's son was in the choir at this church and continued to share that, “The pastor said, well would you let a pedophile lead worship?

And, I'm like what what's that got to do with anything?" A LGBTQ+ participant recalled a trauma that is to some extent paralleled, "The pastor said, I have pity and sympathy for homosexuals, and I will pray for them, and I will pray with them, and I will counsel them and work with them to try and exercise this evil demon of Satan that's in their bodies. But, I will be God damned if one of them perverts, is going to preach to me." The homophobia in this statement made has multiple messaging-based traumas inserted within including praying the gay away, demonic possession, innately evil, and that homosexuals are perverts.

Categorizing messaging-based traumas into a single category is often difficult for there are frequently multiple blatant traumatic elements used, and additional embedded meanings, thoughts, and feelings for the participant. The complexity of the statement above gives insight into the depth and multiple layers that messaging-based traumas sometimes hold. This participant had stated that he repressed all the memories of church and anything religious based, minus this experience that was a message shared from the pulpit when he was 16. He shared, "For whatever reason I was allowed that one sermon to break through and remain in my memory, but none of the other sermons that were ever preached while I was attending there I can remember. It was a very challenging time. I was struggling with my own identity and sexuality."

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared a familial messaging-based trauma experience where after their mom outed them as gay kicked them out of the house at the age of 12-13, "She told me that she didn't trust me around any of the younger members of my family." The participant went on to explain, "My mom was insinuating that she didn't trust me around my little brothers. As like, all homosexuals are pedophiles and that she

couldn't have me living in the house anymore.” Once again, in this single trauma event shared, there are multiple traumas to report including: being outed, being kicked out, not trusting someone based on their sexual orientation, and that homosexuals are pedophiles.

One LGBTQ+ participant recalled a memory from childhood shortly after they started having same-gender attraction where, “I was sitting there in church hearing that message, and it's very traumatic for somebody who's having these feelings and being screamed at, which is the style of preaching that it was, and you're feeling traumatized because of sin in your life and you need to repent and get right, or you'll go to hell.” Homophobia from the pulpit and from a place of place counsel is also observed in this Ally's experience, “The pastor told me that it says in the Bible that it's against what God wants for him, to be gay, and I was completely freaked out and didn't know what to do.” This Ally participant then transferred this messaging onto her son who had just came out his senior year in high school. At this point in the interview, you could hear her voice shake and her tone shifted as she shared how regretful she was that she perpetuated that message from her pastor to her son.

Table 8 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme of messaging: Homophobia, being gay/LGBTQ+ is wrong, pedophiles, pervers

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	4	40.0%	5	1.3
LGBTQ+	5	35.7%	7	1.4
Total	9	37.5%	12	1.3

Praying the gay away. There were two major messaging-based traumas that were LGBTQ+ specific and only appeared in our LGBTQ+ interviews. Praying the gay away emerged in 50% of LGBTQ+ identifying interviews conducted and can be oversimply

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defined as the want, desire, or longing to repent, pray, or ask one's higher power in the form of prayer to take away one's LGBTQ+ identity. This messaging-based trauma often occurred in situations where the participant shared experiences of wanting to change their sexual orientation/gender identity to fit the messaging they heard in church (then often additionally perpetuated and instilled into them by society and familial relationships).

One participant reported, "From 10 to 12, I was praying every day for God to take away my sexuality, to change it, to adapt it, to give me some shortcuts, or some of anything that would make me not what I was." This participant continued, "I didn't get an answer and so I assumed based on what I was being taught within the doctrine of their Christianity that it was because this was my sinful challenge, and if I failed, then I wasn't worthy of life. Then at 12 years old I tried to kill myself for the first time." Another participant reported, "All the while I was begging God to not let me be the way I was and to the point of leaving on my lunch hour at work and running to 12 o'clock mass to go to confession. Go to mass and go to confession and ask for God's forgiveness for me attracted to other women." Additionally, another participant stated, "I prayed that God would take it away from me- that the sinfulness would go away."

This participant reported their experience after coming out to a family member and how the coming out process was disseminated without permission of the participant, "And they told my aunt, uncle, and my aunt told her whole prayer group. And so, they're all praying for me, which is great, like thank you for the prayers, but you can't pray the gay away, like they're trying." Another participant paralleled this by adding, "The entire experience of me coming out was not necessarily a positive one, particularly in relation to

my mother, and then certainly added this additional layer of forced Christianity. You know, in the hopes of praying the gay away, which is ludicrous.”

Table 9 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme of messaging: Praying the gay away

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
LGBTQ+	7	50.0%	10	1.4

Sin. The messaging-based trauma theme of sin and love the sinner and hate the sin appeared in 6 out of the 14 interviews with LGBTQ+ participants. This sub-theme emerged and was important to differentiate from the umbrella homophobic messaging theme. Focusing on sin embodies an additional layer of homophobia cloaked in a false message of support while simultaneously asserting that one doesn’t hate LGBTQ+ people just the sin that is innately a piece of the LGBTQ+ individual.

One participant who identified as non-binary within the transgender community shared that the person who trained them at the hospital where they work who they also considered a close friend inflicted trauma, “I had no idea that she was like this extremist religious person, and one day she was talking to somebody else about me and saying that she believes in, love the sinner hate the sin, which is why our friendship works out so well, and I had no idea she even felt that way about me.” An additional layer to this experience was explained, “It really made me mad that she never once told me these things but was preaching that to other people as an example of why her beliefs were so valid, even though I never had the chance to express my beliefs.” Another participant who grew up in the Baptist church and shifted to a Church of Christ denomination in college stated, “That there was inherent racism and homophobia ingrained into the

Church, and into the way that folks, you know had the, love the sinner the hate the sin mentality. That eventually just wore on me, reminded me too much of my Baptist roots, and eventually also left a bad taste of mouth and eventually led to me departing that church.”

A participant who was Catholic identifying during the time their trauma took place shared, “I dreaded having to go to confession, I didn't like any part of it. It was shameful. And so those formative years was just a lot of fear and unable to understand” She went on to share that if she didn’t attend confession she would encounter such experiences as, “You know violent things, an ever present, always watching God, who's ready to zap me for my sins, and I’ll go to hell which was also such gory imagery as well.”

One participant stated, “I remember it being mentioned from the pulpit, this sense of shame around homosexuality, and was very clear that homosexuality, according to what they believe, was the sin.” Another participant shared, “I would hear things about you know gay people are going to hell. And it's not a godly way to really live, and it's a sin, and all this stuff. And so, I knew I was gay when I was probably 9 or 10” This participant continued to share how this aided in his suppression of his sexual identity, “But I just pushed it down because of these conversations I had always heard had been so negative from growing up in the church.”

Table 10 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme of messaging:
Sin, love the sinner and hate the sin

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
LGBTQ+	6	42.9%	11	1.8

Mixed Messaging

The mixed messaging theme occurred in 80% of Ally interviews and 50% of the LGBTQ+ interviews. There are two mixed messaging sub-themes that emerged that encompassed all 42 of the trauma points including misalignment or lack of agreement (25) and confusion (17). Mixed messaging is defined as messaging where actions/words are misaligned with the teachings that occur, messaging that contradicts other messaging, lack of continuity, and ultimately confusion.

Table 11 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme mixed messaging

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	8	80.0%	19	2.8
LGBTQ+	7	50.0%	23	3.3
Total	15	62.5%	42	2.8

Mixed messaging: misalignment, lack of agreement. Twice as many Ally participants reported trauma from mixed messaging focused on misalignment and lack of agreement than the LGBTQ+ participants. Misalignments are complex and were often evident in various portions of the interviews when participants shared their trauma around mixed messaging. This section will be mostly narrative in nature.

One LGBTQ+ participant shared:

So, my stepfather was an elder in the church, and he began having sex with me when I was 11, coming into my room at night and having sex with me, and simultaneously doing Bible study and book study with me as an elder of the church, and then at 12 he took started selling me to men on his sales route. He was a wine and liquor salesman, and so he started selling me to men on the on his

sales route. All while also teaching me through the church that pre-marital sex was a sin and means for being banned from the church or disfellowshipped. So, I was already learning early on the duality that existed from the things that we were learning through the religion and the things that were being done to me by someone who was an authority within the church, and a lot of the Bible and teachings were used against me to make me comply even more with abuse that was happening, and even taking it even further, I already felt different as a girl and a lot of the Bible and the religious teachings were used as tools to say, I'm trying to help you learn how to be an appropriate woman when you grow up.

Another LGBTQ+ member shared their story of sexual abuse as a young child and that his parents had called in their priest when he told them what had happened to him and the priest came to their home around midnight that evening and said, "Oh, you didn't do anything wrong but we're going to say this to prayer, so you can confess, you know the idea is you're confessing your mortal sin."

An Ally shared her experience with mixed messaging:

It's interesting to see how it seemed to me that there's this culture of secrecy and hidden lives and weird stuff that goes on at or through the church. And everybody thinks the person that you're with is a saint, and at home they're like a monster. It was a horrible thing to kind of witness that. From the time I was little, would get so angry with the eye for eye stuff, and I and I just hated it, so at the age of 6 we stopped to going to church. My dad who was a deacon in the church had a huge, very traumatizing event that happened where he tried to kill us and kill himself.

So, my mom said she refused to ever go to church again because he was a hypocrite.

An Ally participant stated, “Going to church as a kid I felt like hypocrite walking in there because of my parents would say one thing, but then, for example I got spanked with the Spatula as a kid, and they'd be telling me one thing and that I need to act this way, and then we'd go to church and put on this face like everything is fine.” Another Ally participant shared the story of her parent’s divorce that was sparked by her mom wanting out of the marriage due to physical abuse from her dad and the church said that divorce was wrong and sided with her dad instead of her abused mother, “It always seemed that the church was on the side of the bullies and you know that that people just weren't reading their Bible, or they weren't really listening to God”.

An Ally participant recalled a story from childhood:

I remember one time I was at a church festival, and I was probably 8 or 9, and I was watching that game where you threw the ball into the glass bowl and try to get a fish, and some old man touched my butt. Oh, my gosh! It just really freaked me out, and my first thought was, we are in a church parking lot how can this man, this old man, touch me and I didn't go tell anybody. I just ran away from the man, and that was traumatic for me especially being in a church parking lot at a church festival and having somebody you know from the church touch a child like that.

A LGBTQ+ participant stated, “I didn't believe that Christianity, modern Christianity, is actually the voice of God, because they're hateful. Obviously not all of them, but where I was, they were, and so I, in order to enable that recovery process, I

literally had to just take piece of my life and unplug it and sit on the shelf and walk away from it.”

Table 12 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme mixed messaging: misalignment, lack of agreement

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	8	80.0%	15	1.9
LGBTQ+	4	28.6%	10	2.5
Total	12	48.0%	25	2.1

Mixed messaging: confusion. Confusion emerged as sub-theme of mixed messaging where 1/3 of total participants experienced these traumas. Sometimes these confusion-based traumas come in conflicting belief systems of family and friends. An Ally participant mirrors this, “My whole life of God was in a church. Or maybe God is everywhere, and one parent telling me it's in the church, and one parent telling me it's in nature, right.”

A transgender male participant shared about his perspective growing up not being allowed to ask questions and being confused about the ritual of communion and other aspects of growing up in the Catholic church:

Some of the younger year trauma was just having lot of questions with no answers, or the answers were, because that's what we believe. So, when things didn't make sense or I didn't understand, such as what do you mean this is Jesus's body in this bread, is this just the symbol for his body? No, this is not a symbol, it is his actual flesh. That's weird for a 7-year-old, and to be really like sternly told, No! It is not symbolic, its actual flesh, it turns into bread. But, we're eating that, and he died for our sins, this is a lot. It was a lot of really vivid imagery gory

imagery to me that didn't make sense, and to try to make sense of. You know what kind of God would do this to their Son? My God is the father, you know, and I looked at my dad, and, like my dad, would never do this to me, and, like I came from a family that hunted every hunting season. And you know we ate whatever they got, but I never feared for the lives of my pets. You don't eat things you love, but yet you know I'm being told I'm eating the body of Christ, who I'm responsible for his death on this cross, so I think just as a young kid who was very visual and very introspective that was a lot to deal with. It built a lot of fear and a lot of fear of this God that could watch and would see everything that I did, and then also having to go to confession.

An Ally participant stated they are having some confusion and difficulty navigating their faith identity after learning more about other religions and belief systems, "I'm trying to make sense of where all these people fit and structure of Christianity I mean, am I even a Christian, I don't even know how to label it. And I feel a little unsure about the how you get into heaven kind of thing too." Another Ally stated that during childhood, "Well, I just found it weird that nobody ever talked about religion or God, and my whole entire family was catholic."

A LGBTQ+ participant acknowledged the confusion and convoluted intricacies in difference among even various denominations of Christianity:

Things as simple as you know, If you are baptized fully submerged or sprinkled, and if you're not baptized or going to hell, and I'm like well in the AME (African Methodist Episcopal) church, they sprinkled me but the Baptists believe that you have to be fully submerged in order to be baptized, and like, am I going to go to

hell because of that, what if they're right? And it just doesn't make sense to me, I felt Jesus was a friend to me, and we would sing songs. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear all in bringing these things, and just Jesus as a friend and a God, and that's the God and the Jesus that I fell in love with, but I really had a hard time with this judging damning God that was sending people to hell, and it didn't make sense.

Table 13 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme mixed messaging: confusion

	N	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	3	30.0%	4	1.3
LGBTQ+	5	35.7%	13	2.6
Total	8	33.3%	17	2.1

Exclusivity

The exclusivity theme of the self-identified trauma includes rejection, inferiority, invisibility, abandonment, alienation, isolation, intolerance, division, seclusion, banishment, and feelings of being dismissed, betrayed, and minimized. Additionally, 75% of total participants identified as having exclusivity as a trauma experienced.

Table 14 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme exclusivity

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	8	80.0%	18	2.3
LGBTQ+	10	71.4%	26	2.6
Total	18	75.0%	44	2.4

This LGBTQ+ participant shares the intersections of familial rejection grounded in spiritual and religious abuse and overall mental health:

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My mom left my house and sent an email letter where she said she just couldn't accept my sexuality, and it was better to consider me dead than to consider that she has a gay child. So, at 28 was my last physical attempt on suicide, and this is the peak of my trauma, because, at this time I didn't accept myself, and I didn't think that I deserved to be loved or that I didn't deserve life. My roommate had a gun in the house, and when the metal touched my skin, my brain did this, desperate for survival dance.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared part of his trauma, “By the permanent judicial commission of the Presbytery they voted to annul my ordination. That hasn’t happened in 300 years of Presbyterian history. That was unbelievably devastating, and it was front page news.” The participant went on to explain the guidelines for the national organization, “They had a policy called the definitive guidance of 1978 prohibited the ordination of any, the phrase was, self-avowed, practicing, unrepentant, homosexual, and so obviously discriminatory and that didn’t only apply to ministers, but also other ordained members.” At the time of the occurrence, he was out and happily partnered, and they were both members of the church for years, even listed in the church registry together.

Another Ally shared about a situation where she helped form an LGBTQ+ youth group in her area and friends she had for the past 10-15 years cut her out of their lives, “It hurts terribly. I miss my, I miss my girls, see I helped her raise her kids, and I don't get to see them anymore. She says that the reason why for this is your involvement with the LGBTQ+ community and helping out creating this youth group.” One Ally identifying participant shared, “Don't sin, don't, just send it anyway. Don't say a cuss word don't

smoke a cigarette, and once I was able to kind of decide for myself I moved out of my parents' house when I was 17, and I completely stop going to church because those people I was like I wasn't good enough to go there, because I couldn't live the way that they were living." They continued to share that they, "Started smoking. I started, you know, rebelling in every way that I could started doing drugs. I started drinking a lot. I think it was that need for perfectionism, that impossible bar to reach."

An Ally participant shared about her early life pregnancy:

I was pregnant early, and life at the age of 16, and I was so shamed because my religion would say I was a whore, just like Mary Magdalene, and so it was horrific trauma to carry the shame of being an unwed mother. Being a pregnant teenager, it was horrific, and people said shit to me like this, you know like you're going to hell or you're a terrible person, basically. Besides calling me a whore to my face. They were awful, and so my own family, that had very religious upbringing. Half of them probably disowned me because I had several marriages, and I've been divorced.

A LGBTQ+ participant who grew up in the Hindu faith stated, "There were too many things that I had to do that I didn't agree with. I didn't understand it, it really just contradicted who I was as a person, and just made me feel really isolated." Later they described, "I know like as soon as I start to voice any discomfort with anything that I'm going to be a little bit alienated from my family, and people that actually are sort of ride and die by these traditions." Another LGBTQ+ participant shared their experience of being removed from a church play because he came out, "They said we need to protect the stage and because I was dealing with all of these things, I was sitting out." After this

experience he spent some time in conversion therapy and when he decided to stop going, he was completely banished from the life he knew, “I was ejected from my church. I was ejected from my family, like it was a lot.”

Rigidity

The rigidity theme of the self-identified trauma includes conforming, stifling, and hiding/pretending. Over 70% of total participants experienced some form of rigidity-based trauma. Rigidity is highly involved in the process for many LGBTQ+ coming out journeys, because often prior to coming out or even after there is an urge to hide or pretend from identifying with one’s sexuality due often to multiple traumas and a vast array of messaging (including internalized homophobia).

An Ally participant shared, “Well, my dad was a military guy, so he was very much, do what I say and don't ask questions about it, and was like that with Christianity too. It just is what it is and if you don't do it this way it's wrong.” Another Ally mirrored this when she shared, “I just felt like my whole life when I was growing up, I was told not to really question it. You know what I mean, and just take it for what it was and that was the truth.” A LGBTQ+ participant shared, “In a lot of my conversations and in a lot of the work that I've read there is a strong feeling of disdain towards organized religion in general and particularly Christianity because it's so stifling for any type of like questions.”

An Ally shared an experience from a summer camp when she was 11 years old: My cousin was older than me, and we were starting middle school, and I wanted to really fit in, so I burnt one of my record albums because they had us do this book burning, and anything from the diary of Anne Frank, kid you not, to anything that had sex, anything

that was in their eyes quote unquote wrong. So, I burnt a Queen album that was probably an original. But, you know you had to take something, because you had to belong.

An Ally shared, “I wanted to be accepted by my family, and so I tried really hard to make myself fit into this religion, even though I mean nothing about it aligned for me and so it just became more and more challenging for me.” This LGBTQ+ participant shared a paralleled statement, “My sort of my relationship with religion as a whole, I feel like all the customs that surround it are just so sometimes black and white.”

A LGBTQ+ participant stated, “I just pushed it down because of these conversations I had always heard about it had been so negative growing up in the church.” He continued to share his experience, “I didn't want to live in that sin because that's what I was viewing it as and so I just pushed it down and pushed it down, and really covered it up to where I would be watching gay porn and be like oh, but it's okay, because I'm not, you know, looking for a dude or I can be attracted to women in real life.” One LGBTQ+ participant shared their experience as they were being publicly outed due to their involvement in church leadership, “This literally was my worst nightmare. I remember, as a boy, thinking I was more scared of being publicly attacked for being a homosexual than I was of dying. There was literally my worst fear coming to life.”

A LGBTQ+ participant who is a priest shared part of his coming out process and the hiding and pretending that manifested into mental health challenges:

Honestly, I fought the idea of being called gay. I never would admit to myself that I was gay, though definitely, I liked gay things. And all the while lying to myself, and consequently lying to family and friends, and everybody else, because you know I'm supposed to be good upstanding priest. How could a good upstanding

priest be gay? You see, the pressure and the fear and the anxieties. And so, a lot of suffering going on in the background here, especially on a mental and emotional level, lot of depression going on, a lot of anxiety going on, a lot of social anxiety especially began to creep up. Exasperated by living in the South.

Table 15 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme rigidity

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	8	80.0%	16	2.0
LGBTQ+	9	64.3%	15	1.7
Total	17	70.8%	31	1.8

Control

The control theme includes trauma that was self-identified as disempowerment, hostile, controlling, intimidating, non-consensual, threatening, insincerity, being outed, punishment, and forced rituals/practices. Over 50% of all participants (and nearly 65% of LGBTQ+ participants) shared of trauma points or events that related to the theme of control during their interview. There is some organic overlap with several of the other trauma themes and can mostly be seen in rigidity and exclusivity where these themes convey an inherent or even fabricated sense of control. Within exclusivity many of the traumas shared were surrounding isolation, rejection, abandonment, and alienation and there are aspects of control embedded in these traumas too. For the purpose of analysis, we identified control-based traumas as an organization, group of people, or person that is exerting power, force and ultimately control over the participant.

When this LGBTQ+ participant was only 12 their parents forced him to come out and made him come home from school early that day:

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I was forced out. She found things on a computer and instead asking me or having a sit-down conversation, just the 2 of us, she decided to turn this into a spectacle, and I assume in a way to try to scare the gay away out of me, or shame me into the way she wanted me to be. I had to come immediately home and called my stepfather home, so that they could walk through all of the materials that they had found on the internet that I had left in the browser history. She took it upon herself to print all of those things off and bind them into a binder so that we could walk through them. Then they forced me to say the words that I was gay.

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared how they, too, were outed, “That’s because they are intolerant of anything other than heterosexuality. So, from 8 to 18 I really suffocated from a growth in an emotional perspective.” The participant continued to share, “From 18 to 24 is when a lot of the verbal trauma started because I was prematurely outed by one of the leaders in the congregation, and once people started finding out that I was gay then the hunting season was open.”

Additionally, control is sometimes asserted through silence such as with this LGBTQ+ participant who shared that after her sexual abuse by a church leader her life was threatened, “And, because I was threatened with my life that if I ever spoke about those things, that I would be found and killed, I didn't think I'd ever speak about it.”

Control is sometimes seen as forced rituals or rules placed upon the participant. An Ally participant shared about being forced to go to confession and the punishment that followed in the form of penance in the Catholic church they grew up in, “That was mortifying. That was shameful. I didn't understand why I had to tell a priest who was very scary to me, I had to tell this strange adult bad things that I did, and then try to tell

him for example: Oh, well, I fought with my brother, and what else, and what else, and so on, and after I had to then try to remember my penance.”

An LGBTQ+ participant who grew up as a practicing Hindu shared that during an annual ritual multiple control-based traumas occurred:

It just felt really disempowering, it made me kind of feel like my future partner is completely out of my hands, and I must pray so that he is a strong man. And wasn’t sure why we were doing this from a young age. That no matter what I would always need to be protected by a man, and I would need to marry a man in the future. We were forced to do this every year. And, it’s just so gender-assuming and sexual-assuming, so knowing I was pansexual and that was part of my identity I think that really was disempowering. I can’t really think of a better word, but I think yeah, disempowering was kind of what that felt like to constantly have to be told that, my identity doesn’t matter, my sexual identity, my gender identities, none of that mattered.

Table 16 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme control

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	4	40.0%	7	1.8
LGBTQ+	9	64.3%	15	1.7
Total	13	54.2%	22	1.7

Fear

Fear is a trauma that is discovered in half of the LGBTQ+ participant interviews and only appeared in a little over 20% of the Ally interviews. Fear was typically identified by the participant noting that they felt fearful, scared, terrified, or frightened.

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A LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I remember struggling with two particular issues. The one that is the most important to me was, could I try and live a life with a relationship with another guy without fearing God was going to be displeased and judge me.” Another LGBTQ+ participant who grew up in a rural nondenominational church and had family in leadership within the church had a similar trauma to share, “I was feeling a lot of pressure from people that I should date her, and so I was considering it. And then I just kept on having these flashes of terror, like imagining my life with this woman.” He continued to share that, “Basically I was just so terrified what if people found out and I didn't want to cause a rift in the church.” Later in the interview he shared more about why he didn't come out sooner, “I didn't want my parents to have to deal with people in the church and I didn't want me to have to deal with any kind of, sincere, but misplaced Christian care and so I just ran and kept it a secret as long as I could.”

An Ally participant shared that growing up she was forced to watch a television series at church, “Constantly I remember watching a television series on tribulation and watching everyone watch it, it was like watching a horror movie. It scared the crap out of me.”

This LGBTQ+ identifying participant battled with his sexuality:

It took me many years. I took extra-long in seminary for a diocese area, in fact, 10 years in seminary, and there was a lot of struggles because I was at an all-boys school, and you know, expected to live a certain cookie cutter type lifestyle, where we all lived up to these standards. This was a tangible fear. This tangible fear was a lot of the driving force behind some real trauma that was occurring within me, that trauma was this kind where I was afraid people would find out who I was. I really was scared, they might find out my deep, darkest secrets.

Later in the interview this LGBTQ+ priest shared more about his newfound clarity around the fear he had formally faced daily, “This was an imposition of control. And ultimately it really was the imposition of fear being imposed from outside, and I was no longer just being afraid, being that scared little boy.”

Table 17 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme fear

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	3	30.0%	6	2.0
LGBTQ+	7	50.0%	17	2.4
Total	10	41.7%	23	2.3

Emotional

The emotional abuse and trauma theme includes feelings of disconnection, distrust, unworthiness, self-hate, devastation, suffering, guilt, recklessness, gossiping, mental health challenges/breakdowns, memory oppression, and suicidal ideations/attempts. A third of the participants experienced emotional-based traumas. Originally, the emotional-based theme was included in the abuse-based trauma theme, and later was aggregated out to highlight mental health related traumas that might possibly be over-simplified if grouped with abuse-based traumas. Suicide and suicidal ideation are prominent in not only this theme but throughout various themes, therefore leading to some natural intersecting.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared part of his experience with drug and alcohol abuse and its intersection with his emotional health and overall wellbeing:

At 18 years old my doctor stopped giving my medication to my parents, and they gave it to me in my hand. At that point I started obviously abusing them, because

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I was in such an emotional and spiritual turmoil that I didn't know which way was up. Sideways and backwards. Up to that point there was literally nothing there, and the only way for me to protect myself was to shut down. I wasn't open to new problems, new friends, I wasn't open to new people, wasn't growing emotionally. I wasn't growing mentally, and I wasn't sleeping. I was relying on the opioids more and more and the alcohol I couldn't buy it fast enough.

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared her intersectional relationship with drugs and suicide attempts:

I attempted to take my own life a few times. First, I attempted to do it when I was still using drugs and alcohol and trying to speak about my abuse for the first time, and then, when I walked into that spiritual center at 30 years old, I had planned to leave that day and kill myself. I was just a had reached a point of desperation and I didn't feel like I had a purpose, and so my plan was I'll go to this spiritual center that everyone had been recommending and see if I felt something. I had it all planned out. I had a gun. I had everything.

One LGBTQ+ participant shared their intersection in mental health, suicide, and memory repression, "I actually do not remember almost anything from 6 to 16 years of going to that church every Sunday. It's almost like my brain has blacked out and repressed every sermon, every song that was sung. I just have very, very few memories involving the Church that I can remember." The participant continues to share part of their struggle with mental health challenges, "I was struggling with my own identity and sexuality. And spirituality, while hearing, apparently these fire and brimstone, eternal damnation threats constantly. And, so I suffered from depression and suicidal thoughts."

Later this participant also tied in an additional intersection of self-hate, “I experienced mental health issues relating to that, but we continued to be sent to church. I would say the seeds of destruction just kept producing within me even more hatred towards myself.”

Once again, we hear from the LGBTQ+ identifying priest who shares his journey of mental health struggles and self-hate:

I was my own worst enemy throughout most of my trauma always from a mental perspective because I would beat myself up, kick myself while I was down. But the fear is driving force behind everything in my experience. In Seminary I experienced this kind of anxiety. And it led me to lead a sort of double life in which I internalized that I was gay. That I'm a gay man, and that was hard because I didn't want to be a gay man, being a gay man, I hated myself. It was reinforced oftentimes by the structure of the church that said they hated gay people, hated anybody LGBTQ+.

This LGBTQ+ identifying priest later went on to explain how being in the priesthood was a constant weight of heaviness due to his sexual orientation where he often thought, “I'm not choosing God, I'm not choosing him, so that schism, or that division within myself was still extremely large. It was being fortified over and over again, but I couldn't do it anymore, as a priest, I just had a breakdown of sorts, not of sorts. I had a breakdown, and the anxiety was just high.”

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared how he battled mental health struggle and was even hospitalized, “It's so hard to explain. It left this deeper connection with how I see God, because it was so rough for so long, you know you go through these really hard patches where, like you know, I had depression and anxiety and suicidal ideations, and

got hospitalized once.” A transgender identifying participant was also eventually hospitalized as well after a suicide attempt and shared, “It did all kind of eventually come down to a suicide attempt. That was still kind of just before I was getting the idea that maybe I was Trans. And the one time I actually went through with it and took the overdose I was hopeless. He went on to share, “I felt like it was hopeless, and I couldn't do anything, it was going to cost me my soul, so and it nearly cost me my life.”

Table 18 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme emotional abuse

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	2	20.0%	2	1.0
LGBTQ+	6	42.9%	15	2.5
Total	8	33.3%	17	2.1

Fundamentalism

The fundamentalism theme of trauma includes homophobia (and internalized homophobia), violent imagery, hate, conversion therapy, and general fundamentalism views and beliefs. There was some significant overlap within messaging in this theme including conversion therapy and homophobia. A third of all participants interviewed had some form of trauma from fundamentalism-based events.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared an experience at a church lock-in event when he was a teenager and was shortly after sent to conversion therapy:

Well, my friend had blood smeared all over him with this sheet and this cone and this flashing light. They were recreating what an accident would have been like, or whatever. It was just a little nuts and then they brought us up into a sanctuary, on one side of the sanctuary. But it had gone to this weird cult space at that point,

it was just bizarre. We were separated around the left side of the sanctuary, and not allowed to sit with anybody, and then people's moms would come up and just ask us if we knew the person who died, and you know, talk about how amazing they were and everything else, like we're at a real funeral. The last mom said, "come with me and let's go look at the casket, even if you didn't want to." You had to go up and look at a casket and they had taken a mirror and wrapped it in a white sheet, and we had to like look over into the mirror and see yourself. It was just bizarre and then we had to go to the other side of the sanctuary and sit for 15 minutes to reflect at what had happened. And then we went out into the smaller sanctuary space like in smaller groups, for quote unquote, final judgment. And I go out into this space and at this point like all I can hear are these 2 or 3 girls that had been to church for the first time, sobbing because they literally didn't understand anything, like they thought that they had been killed. They thought that this is like what happens at church. They were so freaked out and they went into this space into the Judge, the courtroom trial, and you then were either sent to heaven or hell. By this point I was just fucking done, like I'm all about theater, and I could see kind of the message that they were going for, it was just the way that they were doing it. I just started to fucking scream, and saying fuck you for doing this, especially to these girls out here, and I just went in. But, at the end they were like well, if you if you say this, then you're going to be damned to hell, and I was like, 'good, fucking send me.' Then I just kind of left the space.

An Ally participant shared an experience where she finally told her family that she had been molested:

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I was molested by the neighbor. I began to talk about this with my mom and because there was such a condemnation from the Church, she completely denied all of it and dismissed me. Oh, there's no way that happened. Her warped connection was so deep and twisted within, it feels almost like a cult. A cult where everybody's trying to come to the place to get the good feelings and the good juice to get them through the week, there's too much of a mix of this repetitive guilt, shame, secrets, and then the denial of something like my sexual abuse. It was too much.

Table 19 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme fundamentalism

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	2	20.0%	3	1.5
LGBTQ+	6	42.9%	7	1.2
Total	8	33.3%	10	1.3

A LGBTQ+ participants who grew up as a traditional Hindu shared, “I haven't been exposed to any sort of Christianity. Though to even know that there are people that use the words of the Bible to cause harm, and like use the words that were written so long ago. And try to sort of twist the meaning to basically spread hate to people today.” She then went on to explain an experience at a LGBTQ+ Pride festival, “Like that's still hurtful and I mean I think there's no way to really get away from that which with sucks, even when I came to pride this year there was somebody over there preaching about some things that were super hateful.” One LGBTQ+ participant shared that the Jehovah's Witness religion they grew up in didn't believe in extended education or college outside of the religious based schooling the Witnesses offered, “I was the oldest child of 4 kids

and in a fully indoctrinated family that was socially reserved, conservative, uneducated. The rhetoric was if we couldn't survive on the grace of God then we didn't deserve to survive.”

Abuse

Abuse is identified as physical, verbal, sexual, and substance categories of abuse. Note that, emotional abuse and trauma is a separate theme (see table 27). A quarter of total interview participants identified having experienced some form of abuse in a spiritual or religious context. There is substantial overlap between abuse discussed here and the emotional abuse theme, especially as it relates to drug abuse.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared that when they came out so did multiple layers of abuse, “When my mom found out she behaved and reacted very negatively, violently. Verbally violent and physically violent, and he threw things at me, including lamps, a table, and the chair, throwing all kinds of things at me.” Then she continued to yell and scream at the participant, “And then told me I had 10 min to pack a bag and had to get in the car. She was taking me to my father where he would quote unquote, take care of me.” Another LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I was never physically hurt, but verbally abused. Name-calling by these good Christians, which should be able to recognize when they cross that line between what a good Christian should be doing and what you should never have to experience. It brought up all kinds of anxiety. I was just a mess.”

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared about an assault from the conversion therapist they were forced to have sessions with:

I started having to meet with a youth conversation therapy counselor, one on one who had never really dealt with this before. It was absolutely ridiculous, and he

had a huge slew of issues, but he was a very toxic, masculine man. I remember him trying to get me to fight him, like hit him because it's what men do, and I refused to do that, and he literally pushed me up against a wall trying to get me to like fight him. It was just ridiculous.

An Ally participant shared her story of sexual abuse and assault that occurred on church grounds that was then perpetuated by the church that then ultimately compelled this Ally to never formally return to church:

My major trauma occurred in between seventh and eighth grade. I was at the Methodist church that I went to and there was a boy who was about my age. We had a sleepover at the church, and he took advantage of the situation, and did some very inappropriate sexual things. And because his father was a big donor to the church it was completely and totally swept under the rug, and I was made to feel and told by several adults that this is something that I had brought on myself, that clearly it was something that I was wearing, or something that I had said to him because he is a good upstanding boy, and he would never do anything like that.

This LGBTQ+ participant was raped by her stepfather who was a deacon at the church she attended, and furthermore she was then sex trafficked by her stepfather starting at the age of 12. This abuse led to extensive drug and alcohol abuse and disconnection from her relationship with God:

What I wanted was to be accepted by my family, and so I tried really hard to make myself fit into this religion, even though I mean nothing about it aligned for me and so it just became more and more challenging for me, as is the abuse went

on. And then I got into addicted behaviors to deal with, to cope with all that was happening, and that just amplified everything that I was experiencing, and so I reached a point where I just stopped believing in God altogether, and almost built a hate towards God. But, then I also thought that God hated me, because all this stuff was happening, so that those things were just twisted up inside of me and then add in severe addiction.

Table 20 Percentage and frequency of the trauma theme abuse

	N	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	2	20.0%	2	1.0
LGBTQ+	4	28.6%	11	2.8
Total	6	25%	13	2.2

Pivot Points

All 24 participants interviewed identified multiple pivot point events and these events were then categorized into 5 themes of spiritual/religious-based pivot points: realization, connection, exploration, therapy, and acceptance. The theme of acceptance only emerged in LGBTQ+ participants, though was significant enough to warrant adding an additional theme. A pivot point is identified as a shift in thought, behavior, belief, action, or emotion that leads to subsequent posttraumatic growth. The frequency average of pivot point markers mentioned per LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying interview participant is nearly the same (around 6 markers/meaning bits per participant).

Table 21 Frequency of self-identified pivot point markers by LGBTQ+ and Ally interviewees

	N	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	10	57	5.7

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LGBTQ+	14	84	6
Total	24	141	5.9

Note, a pivot point event may possibly contain multiple pivot markers embedded within. Analysis of each pivot theme is presented below.

Realization

The realization pivot point theme is a combination of the two broader themes of realization and awareness. Realization and awareness are defined as moments of clarity, insight, or epiphany where the participant recognized and identified these moments as an initial pathway to eventual growth. 75% of participants identified a pivot point theme of realization.

A LGBTQ+ Atheist/Humanist identifying participant shared, “I also think that it's so important that we don't demonize certain people who do hold faith very, very closely to themselves, because that is a part of their truth that is a part of them.” He later shared that his change in perception was unexpected, “I might not agree with that but that doesn't mean that that's not a part of them and that it's not beautiful, and deserves to be protected as well and that is not necessarily anything that I would have thought I would have been saying, even like 10 years ago.”

One LGBTQ+ identifying participant shared, “Now, I was never running away from God. I was always running away from the church. And, so, I never placed the blame on God.” Another LGBTQ+ participant expanded on this prior pivot point moment by describing their own, “I realized that the laws set in these churches were placed against people like me, because they didn't want us to exist, it was never that God didn't want us to exist, it was the Church or the government of the Church that didn't want us to gain

control.” They went on to pose the question, “If you can control populations and you can control people, they’ll follow you. But, when you have radical people out there, that kind of shakes up the system, then how can you really feed people your agenda?”

A third LGBTQ+ participant explained:

I entered a period of, maybe you call it, the dark night of the soul, where I just felt like I threw out man's version of God and I didn't realize until later that what I was really trying to reject was the God that man created. I realized this for me and my truth and my spiritual growth. After this experience I felt so close to God, but I was also coming to terms with my own sexuality, and realizing that it also allowed me to recognize that I’m not going to burn in hell for loving someone, with the same genitalia as I have, and I realized that seemed very unjust that I should burn in hell for loving someone with the same body parts as I have, and so I think that will also play a role into it as well.

A LGBTQ+ participant who is a survivor of sex-trafficking by her stepfather who was deacon in the church described their main pivot points:

There was a moment in my recovery where one of the steps says believe in a power greater than yourself, and I really struggled with the word God, or anything that felt religious, and I was told that I could make that higher power be the earth, or whatever I wanted it to be, and that felt like something that I was able to do. And it was my first time of being able to connect to something that didn't feel like it was going to continue to traumatize me. Then years went by and I walked into a spiritual center I went to the minister and said, I feel like I need forgiveness from God and the minister said, well, here we don't believe that God needs to forgive

anything, because the God of our understanding doesn't hold anything but love for everyone, and it was very very pivotal for me in my own spiritual growth in my own healing from that point to now like I wouldn't be sitting here giving this interview, or talking about any of it had it not been for that experience that so started me on my path to like real, deep, and profound healing with myself.

An Ally participant shared a similar situation but from a different perspective, “When I first came into a twelve-step program I struggled with even calling God, higher power, like the words higher power, felt like a disrespect, because the way that I was raised that there is one true God and that's all it is, and it's black and white in the bible.” She went on to explain, “There's no gray area, but I’ve realized there are parts of the Bible that are to be taken literally and some of them are to be interpreted with your heart.”

Another Ally participant, who lives in a rural city in Northern Ohio and started a LGBTQ+ youth-based support group, shared this realization and pivot point that parallels:

It's about Jesus, it's about reaching out, and started to really research and investigate it and feel into it, talk to people, and just realized, that there's so much more to God and to Jesus's love than what the Bible has to say about it. Then I started to ask is there an LGBT community here? Like, that's how ridiculously stupid I was to not know the LGBT community is everywhere, and then I started talking about it, and the more I researched on the LGBT community and the teens and the suicide rates, I'm like churches, these churches who believe that being LGBT is bad, is killing our teens. These kids are being raised to believe this

horrible thing and it's not true, but they have that shame and that guilt, and I just couldn't deal with that. I just wanted to love on them and show them, especially the ones in my community, how much they're loved and valued and they are needed in this world to make a big difference. So, from that point on I just kind of started being more open, open to what God has for me, open to what I was supposed to be doing with my life.

This Ally participant described how they came back to a new version of their faith after turning away from their church because their son was removed from the Church choir after coming out as gay-identifying, “The thing that broke it down was also the thing that I believe knitted it back together, or knit it back together, and that is my fascination and contemplation and discernment in really understanding it, it started off to being bothered by the incongruencies between different denominations of Christianity. But, where I began to knit it back together was in the areas.”

A LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I had his realization that, you just have to live and let live, in a way. And I remember one day, just saying, you know what- I don't care what people do anymore. I started looking at the world in a different lens.” An Ally participant shared an experience where she witnessed a LGBTQ+ friend getting mistreated, “He was constantly told that he was going to hell, and that he should not be there, and he was sent away to Jesus camp and that was incredibly damaging to him, of course. And so even hearing his story, really had a huge impact on me, and the way that he was treated by people that I had known my whole life.” They continued to share, “I think that not just the experiences that I had but observing what my friends went through both at the church and in school, definitely had a huge impact. I think their stories, in

addition to my own journey, probably were the things that were the most pivotal moments in terms of realizing.” This Ally identifying mom shared a similar pivot point about her son who came out his last year in high school and she pushed back with Bible verses and didn’t accept him, eventually leading her to disconnect with her son and God, “God came back into my life when I was ready to let him come back into my life and when I was ready to let go of telling my son who he should love and how his relationship with God was supposed to be.”

Table 22 Percentage and frequency of the pivot theme realization

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	8	80.0%	24	3.0
LGBTQ+	10	71.4%	24	2.4
Total	18	75%	48	2.7

Connection

The connection pivot point theme emerged in over 70% of total participants and included the sub-themes of: compassion, communication, authenticity, messaging/messages from God, and wholeness. Connection to oneself, a higher power, or others are all included in this pivot point theme.

A LGBTQ+ priest shared about his connection to other LGBTQ+ people, “I did meet some friends. I've met some friends who are openly gay whom I love so much, and to this very day. But, they inspired me to make better choices to choose that side of me, and to choose to unify the real me.” He continued to share, “They didn't even know that they were doing it just by being themselves.” Another LGBTQ+ gay-identifying participant shared how a message from God allowed him to open more up to the

authentic version of himself, “I was in this relationship with a girl. I felt God say, this is not right. This is not for you. So, I broke up with her, and it was not a fun experience. As soon as I broke up with her, I felt very light and like I could breathe again because I wasn't trying to force myself into something that wasn't for me.”

A LGBTQ+ participant shared an experience around a forced-ritual that her father made her partake in and how the connection with her mother through communication was able to help ease some of the trauma inflicted through the experience, “I talked to my mom about it and why it bothers me so much and she's helped changed the meaning to essentially using it to pray for my partner's health.” She went on to share, “This is still sort of a tradition, and it's something that in order for me to continue to participate in it, especially as an adult, I have had to really look at the meaning behind it and ultimately how to make something meaningful out of it.”

Connection to a higher power is sometimes experienced through music as this LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I am a huge Dolly Parton fan, and she would always record a gospel or spiritual song every second or third album she did and playing and singing along with those was basically my personal worship service.” They went on to share their connection was beyond the music, but also to the artist and her belief system, “Embracing the LGBTQ+ community and becoming an LGBTQ+ ally and advocate, even as far back as the late 80's and encouraging marriage equality by the early 90's showed someone who was accepting and loving.” They expanded to explain why this had a lasting impact on them, “And she considered herself a Christian and a very spiritual person, and this helped show me that you could reconcile those beliefs with Christianity and still have a faith.” An Ally participant reflected on her journey connected to music as well, “When I

was 16 and 17, I was singing in one of the downtown church choirs with my grandmother until I was like 30 years old, and I had a really beautiful experience there, because I connect through the music.”

One LGBTQ+ participant shared her coming out process to a nun, “I only told one other person about my sexual attraction, and I admitted that to her and said, I’m just really scared. Luckily, she cut that off immediately, and said, no, no, no, that’s not how God works.” She continued to share with the nun that she thought that God took her baby prematurely because she was sexually attracted to other women and the nun shared with the participant that lifetime lengths don’t work that way, “It can be 5 months, like your daughter, everybody’s lifetime span is different, and your daughter served her purpose. She was a valued soul that was here for the work she was supposed to be here, for that was not a punishment.” The connection to others including acquaintances, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and family all act at times as catalysts or pivot points to subsequent growth. This LGBTQ+ identifying priest as he came out to his father offered such a connection, “I got to come out to him before he passed away and this is the part that really led to the greatest amounts of healing, all I got from him was compassion. He listened to my story. He understood what I said. He understood what I was going through to some degree.”

The connection with a higher power is pronounced in this story shared by an Ally participant, “So, I was going down the book aisle, and literally a book fell into my cart, and I picked it up, and the name of it was, *Friendship with God*. And I thought, how weird is this like I don’t even know God, how are you going to have a friendship with God?” She went on to purchase the book and didn’t put it down until she completed

reading it. She noted a significant shift in herself after reading the book. Another Ally participant shared a story about their sobriety, “At this point I’m sleeping in a car, and I was praying for God to save me because I couldn’t stop doing heroin, I didn’t realize that I was praying for jail. I spent one night in jail over something really stupid and I knew if I didn’t quit it was going to be a lot longer than one night, and he just stopped me in my tracks.” She continued to share, “I ended up going to a nine-day inpatient rehab, and then I did an IOP (Intensive Outpatient Program), and I was able to identify that when I was praying for help that God answered that in the form of going to jail for a night.”

This Ally participant was the mother of a teenage son who went to Bible football camp one summer and shared her story, “He looked different. He was at peace and so happy, which he always was. But, there was just a difference of about him so we get in the car and I’m driving, he goes, you know, Mom, if you would if you were to die today do you think that you would go to heaven?” She continued to share that she wasn’t connected to God anymore until this exchange she had with her teenage son, “He was on fire for God! It was like something took a hold of him, and he just was absolutely on fire, and which made me on fire. My son’s passion brought me back to God.”

Another Ally participant shared her pivot moment connected to her higher power through meditation, she explained that she wasn’t connected to religion, but was also connected to her version of God:

When I had my spiritual awakening, I was having really bad anxiety. Now, to note that I’ve been a therapist for most all of my career, though early on I was a computer programmer, I went back to school to be a master’s level therapist and I thought I had done my work, right? Though, I was having these horrible anxiety

attacks and I couldn't make them go away no matter how much work I did, and they just kept getting worse, and I started doing meditations, and one of the meditations was a guided meditation called, *Meet your Spirit Guides*, and I thought it was so silly because I didn't believe there was such a thing. But, in that process there was a point where you're supposed to go into a cabin in the woods, and you were going to meet 3 or 4 people, and they were going to be your spirit guides and you were going to ask them their name. When I went into this cabin I sat down, and there was a little Native American girl beside me. I'm part Native American so that's really interesting that I had this spirit, and the little Native American spirit person stayed with me in the entire time, and she just kept smiling at me, like it's okay, but be comfortable, and then it's as if all these beings came into the room to greet me. Jesus, angels, extraterrestrial beings, Buddha, they all came in.

Table 23 Percentage and frequency of the pivot theme connection

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	6	60.0%	15	2.5
LGBTQ+	11	71.4%	18	1.6
Total	17	70.8%	33	1.9

Exploration

The exploration pivot point theme emerged in nearly 60% of total participants and included the pivot point markers of: learning, curiosity, purpose, searching, contemplation, questioning, and agnosticism. Exploration included a notable sub-theme

of exploring by letting go of some thought, idea, person, situation including death, separation, removal, and purging.

An Ally shared her experience of exploration:

Crazily enough, it all started with my ex, because the Lord had spoken to me to start a youth and teen group here in Northern Ohio and that's very much not with the belief system of our Church. Therefore, my ex decided to have me research God and Jesus. I mean, isn't Jesus simply love? And then he insisted that I research the LGBT community and what the Bible has to say about God's love for the LGBT community? His purpose was to for me to realize that it was bad or whatever because that's what the church teaches. I happened to actually get into the research and found out that, no, the Bible doesn't really say that at all.

Table 24 Percentage and frequency of the pivot theme exploration

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	7	70.0%	11	1.6
LGBTQ+	7	50.0%	13	1.9
Total	14	58.3%	24	1.7

Additionally, another Ally participant started to conduct research and shared, “So, in preparation for a conference in Atlanta, Georgia I had studied for 3 months, lots of reading, lots of answering essay questions, to be prepared for a three-day event, and that was really my first foray into the clobber verses.” They went on to share, “I had a lot of learning to do because I didn't know anything about any of that.” The clobber verses refer to the several verses in the Bible that supposedly condemn homosexuality or homosexual acts. A LGBTQ+ participant had a similar experience, “Doing all the studying, thinking,

listening, and considering that I could possibly stand to do, concluding that what I believed was wrong and I don't believe it anymore, to change your belief about something so important. It's very difficult for people to change their values and their beliefs.” He went on to share that after he had this pivot moment, he was able to seek a partnership with a man, “Now, I could have a relationship with another guy, and it could be fulfilling to me. I could do it with a clean conscience and that was the important thing.”

This LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I just I’m naturally curious. I have always been that way ever since I’ve been a little kid, and I feel like I just learned to trust that. I’ve always been very grateful for that because I feel like that’s just allowed me to stay truthful to my authentic self.” An Ally participant shared a paralleled experience, “Then I started questioning everything that I had been fed my whole life. Even around things like purity, basically, that is my worth as a woman was that I haven’t had sex yet, which didn’t sit right with me at all.” She went on to share how these types of misalignments led her to explore, “It just caused me to think more critically about life and to evaluate what I felt that my value was and where I felt that it came from, and not just where the church had told me to gain my value. I learned how to think for myself.”

An LGBTQ+ participant shared their journey in surrendering, “Then there became this point in time, when I just threw my hands up, I literally had no more options. I literally had no more control. I literally had nothing. I surrendered. Then there was a shift within my heart that all of a sudden, I began to actually feel that everything was going to work out.” Another LGBTQ+ participant shared her exploration into the beginning of her healing and growth through her connection to her purpose, “And beyond

that I was told that I had a purpose in the world, and I had never in my entire life heard that I had a purpose, or felt, that I had any purpose.”

This LGBTQ+ participant shared his major pivot point, “I got out of my mother's house when I left for college. That was a very intentional move for me, I could not be in that house any longer. It felt stifling and oftentimes I was suffocating from her homophobia.” An Ally college professor shared an exodus of a different nature, “Being around other professors who are agnostic and atheist gave me permission to fully walk away from religion. I got to the point where I felt good walking away and have not gone back since.” This exodus is not uncommon, and this LGBTQ+ participant shared his experience leaving religion as well, “I revisited my Episcopalian roots and found a church at grad school that I really enjoyed when I was in Louisiana for 2 years, and really kind of dove into my spiritual journey into Episcopalianism. Which I think I jokingly referred to as like diet, Catholic. And it was a nice place to exist.” He went on to share, “I still carry some of this religious trauma through my experiences in the church as a child and as a college student as well. Over the last 3 or 4 years I would say I've really removed myself completely from the Abrahamic practices.”

An Ally participant shared, “The Baptist religion and Christianity in general felt like a scam and was not something that I really wanted to be a part of.” A LGBTQ+ participant shared similarly, “Except for a wedding or a funeral I avoid churches purposely, because honestly, I feel like it is all kind of just a sham.”

This LGBTQ+ participant grew up in the Jehovah's Witness religion:

Mentally, emotionally, everything that was Witness, or a part of my Witness identity I detached, and I left it there. I honestly didn't know that if there was a

God anymore and was in such mental and emotional turmoil that I didn't have room for it. I purged all my books. I got rid of everything, anything that reminded me of being a Witness, or even a Christian. I got rid of all my Bibles and everything. I was fully agnostic. I had to completely disconnect the Christianity within me to survive.

Therapy

The therapy pivot point theme emerged in nearly 40% of total participants and included the pivot point markers of therapy, formal support, and self-expression. AA (Alcoholics Anonymous) and 12-step programs emerged frequently with both LGBTQ+ and Ally participants.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared, “It was really my therapist that walking through the process. In addition, I built a cycle of teaching myself new ways to express myself through art, because I couldn't teach myself to express myself any other way. I was painting. I was playing piano. I was writing.” Years later on this participant’s journey he shared, “she said, you need to get out of your comfort zone, and you need to find ways to help other people in ways that are not associated with what Witnesses say. I needed to find something that can challenge me to learn about life, about God, other people, about how I can interact with people, simply do something.”

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared their journey in therapy as a pivot point of their experiences, “I would say about 20 years ago I went into therapy. I was just having a rough time in my life, and I've been in therapy 3 times, and for maybe 6 months to a year each time, I found it very helpful.” Yet again, another LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I reached out to psychologists. I reach out to friends who were spiritually strong and not

super judgmental.” This Ally shared her journey after being sexually assaulted at a church lock-in style event at the age of 13, “I have had several pivotal points, I think that counseling was probably the catalyst for it all. My family noticed the changes, especially after I did a total of 2 years of counseling.”

An LGBTQ+ participant shared that 12-step and AA were her big pivot moments, “My large pivot points were getting sober, of course, the first one, and I was attending 12-step meetings that had a spiritual basis.” An Ally who had drifted away from their belief in God shared, “Eventually I did find my way back spiritually because in the twelve-step program that I’m in they teach you that I can take what I want and leave the rest, and my higher power can be what I want it to be.” Another Ally shared their experience in AA, “I literally knew nothing, and so I went to my first meeting, I wasn’t convinced I was an alcoholic. I was convinced I wanted to get out of trouble, and I kept on showing up and I started to hear things, and I started to hear about God, and I was like holy crap, they pray.” She continued to share, “This serenity prayer, I can say that, and then it’s started. I started to understand what the steps were, and I was in my relationship with God again.” Another Ally reconnected to their higher power through AA as well, “I fully surrendered and had to because of the 12 steps, create a concept and get to continue to create a concept of what I feel my God is. My God, my goddess, my creator is in my life every single day now.”

This Ally participant shared how their relationship to AA is significant on their journey as a pivotal shift point:

Luckily, through AA is where I found the most feeling, that’s where I found real connection with spirituality, with Source, with a God. And through AA, I got a lot

of healing, and a lot of what I needed to be able to move forward, and then brought those precepts into my life. Which are ways to live, they're just good things to live by, taking care of your own shit, finding your own part in things. You're unhappy in your life and harbor resentments? Dive into the steps and it's a simple and powerful formula for living a good life.

Table 25 Percentage and frequency of the pivot theme therapy

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	4	40.0%	7	1.8
LGBTQ+	5	35.7%	8	1.6
Total	9	37.5%	15	1.7

Acceptance

The pivot point acceptance emerged in only LGBTQ+ participant interviews (nearly 60%) and includes: acceptance, self-acceptance, self-love, inclusivity, non-judgement, and visibility. Feeling accepted by organizations, others, family/friends, and oneself are all avenues that were shared within the interviews pertaining to acceptance.

Self-acceptance as a pivot point is seen in the journey of this LGBTQ+ participant, “I am not going to allow people or religion to interfere with my mental health and my ability to love myself, and my life is going to have value.” Volunteering for years in a program for children this same participant had an experience with a 5-year-old girl, “She just adopted me and she said they didn't care, when a kid tells you that it doesn't matter you're gay and then you're just able to go have snacks, and play, and do art after was something I never thought I'd have. The unconditional love and support set the tone and that was nothing I'd ever experienced before.” Another LGBTQ+ participant shared

how being a mom was the ultimate pivot point to self-love, “I had the baby, all I felt was love for this child, it was the first of joy that I really had in my life and the first really the first expression of love towards myself that I’d ever experienced.” A LGBTQ+ identifying participant had a tough discussion with their priest and shared their story, “I had a conversation with him, putting it all out there, telling him exactly what I was experiencing, what I was going through, how I felt. It was an amazingly healing experience, just to have the person that I feared the most. I felt afraid of hell. I felt afraid of him. And he accepted me as I am.”

A LGBTQ+ participant that was removed from his leadership roles within the church because of his LGBTQ+ identity shared several situations where people accepted him and his partner, “People I never dreamed would support us, even elderly members of the Church, who I thought for sure, would not be happy about this, and of being amazingly supportive. Even a member of the Church who was a major health care official under the Reagan and the first Bush administrations, steely, right-wing, conservative, ended up being very supportive.” Another member of the church showed up on the evening that the removal took place, “And she turns to me and said, as far as I’m concerned, you will always be an elder, and I always want it to be you who serves me bread. And I burst into tears. She burst into tears. We’re standing all over a living room, sobbing, hugging each other.” Lastly a member in her 90’s, “Gave me maybe the softest kiss I’ve ever had on my cheek, and whispered in my ear, ‘Don’t ever give up, don’t ever forget how many people here love you so much’” He remembered talking to his partner after church that day and said, “Even the little old church lady members are on our side.”

Another LGBTQ+ participant shared about their first time attending a church that

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was welcoming, “I started going there, and then got recruited by one of my voice teachers was the music director at the Episcopal Church to sing in their church choir as one of their paid choir members my junior year of college and really appreciated the even more LGBTQ+ inclusive doctrine of the Episcopal Church.”

Table 26 Percentage and frequency of the pivot theme acceptance

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
LGBTQ+	8	57.1%	19	2.4

Growth

Multiple growth points or posttraumatic growth markers were captured in all 24 interviews. There were 290 meaning bits captured and 6 themes emerged: exploration, acceptance, connection, teaching/advocacy, realization, and positive emotional. There is some organic progression from the pivot point themes (exploration, acceptance, connection, and realization) to the corresponding growth themes. Growth is identified as a long-term permanent aspect of one’s journey where the participant self-identified development, progress, improvement, and/or advancement beyond the trauma endured and pivot points experienced. Analysis of each growth theme is presented below.

Table 27 Frequency of self-identified growth point markers by LGBTQ+ and Ally interviewees

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	10	100%	123	12.3
LGBTQ+	14	100%	167	11.9
Total	24	100%	290	12.1

Exploration

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The exploration growth point theme emerged in three quarters of the total participants and includes the growth point markers of exploring, learning, discovering, and knowledge. Exploration is defined as a desire to gain access to information, knowledge, and one's understanding of truth. Explorers could also be seen as the seekers. There is natural bridge between these seekers and those that later in their growth choose to teach/advocate, mirroring the classic adage, the student becomes the teacher.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared, "For God's sakes it's all the same, you know. I did find there's great spiritual truth that resides in so many of the spiritual masters, the avatars, and in the different traditions. It's all about the metaphor of getting to the top of the mountain and going up the mountain or navigating different highways. He continued to share, "And those highways represent different religions so you can go up one highway. You'll get there. You can go up one highway crossover to another one and you'll still get there. You can also get out your machete knife and just cut your own path, and you'll get there." An Ally participant had a similar share, "I learned a little bit about quite a few religions. I gathered in that most of them, God is love. And however, you choose to see your God that it is all love. It's amazing to me that people think that there is only one God, and one way, and I think that there are 420,000,000 ways to God."

Another Ally shared their journey from an Evangelical Church to the exploration of different ways to view others:

It opened my world up just exponentially, just to take in a bunch of perspectives and learn a bunch of different things and meet a bunch of you people without any hidden agenda of converting them and adding them to the kingdom. That was always a big thing as an Evangelical Christian growing up, so just meeting people

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where they were at was huge for me. I feel like I can do that more authentically now that I don't have that lens of, where is this person on their journey to salvation. Now, I can just see people for who they are.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared a similar message they received, “It's just a process, it's a process of discovery, it's a process of rediscovering, and in adjusting your own attitude about things. I don't always have to be right; people don't always have to agree with me.” This Ally agnostic-identifying participant shared how her, and her husband raised their kids to be exposed to various belief systems and religions, “My husband is also agnostic. We do not make our children attend church. I think that religion is something that is very, very, very personal, and I think it should be their choice. She went on to share, “If they want to be Catholic, I'll be in the front row, and if they want to be Buddhist, I'll do the same. That's just kind of how we have viewed religion, we expose them to lots of different religions.”

This Ally shared her catalyst for growth through discovery, learning, and educating herself in areas she didn't know much or anything about:

I didn't know anything about the biblical references that were problematic at these non-affirming churches. So, I decided that I needed to learn more, so I went on the internet, and I found an organization that teaches more about the topic. I would say is that when I when I went to the that training part of it was a discussion of the intersectionality between sexuality and race, and I didn't get that at all in 2016. I didn't understand it. It didn't click with me until the Black Lives Matter movement really took off, under horrible circumstances, then I was ready, I was ready to learn and read, and try harder, and to learn more, and to find out all

the history that was left out of my schooling. There were so many things that I never understood because my worldview didn't include them. So, I think again, the trauma of the church discriminating against my son sent me on this path that has just grown and grown and is still growing, and it has been a launching pad for me to learn so much more about the world in general, not just the LGBTQ+ community.

This LGBTQ+ participant shared her learning and exploration within her traditional Hindu religion that was forced upon her during childhood and still as an adult is forced to be partake in, “Being able to learn about different Gods that basically were gender fluid. And showing that there were male and female counterparts to the Gods that we talked about, and that was sort of like the beauty that came about with a polytheistic religion. She continued to share, “There were really beautiful stories that were actually quite empowering and normalized the strength of women.”

This LGBTQ+ participant shared a story that expanded his worldview in college: I took a yearlong multi-semester class on contemporary Christian and Jewish responses to the Holocaust taught by a Rabbi whose parents were both holocaust survivors, where we examined the theology, responding to how such a horrific event could occur if there is an omniscient omnipotence God! And how different theologians have dealt with that! That was a very soul-searching experience to have those discussions with the other students and several pastors who are part of that class, and to examine my own experiences through that lens. We had to write a reflection paper at the end, and I wrote one comparing the anti-gay rhetoric of the American religious right with the anti-gay policies of Nazi Germany and

actually had that published in a peer reviewed National Honors Journal afterwards.

Several participants noted that reading was integral in their exploring process, this LGBTQ+ participant shared, “There are a lot of books that I read that have helped me in my healing journey, and one of the books, *The 4 Agreements*, I read right around the time that I went into that spiritual center.” This is the spiritual center that saved her life she later expressed and continued to share, “I have since led more than a dozen book studies on that book alone, and I lead book studies in community on many other books that that have helped me, and that continue to help me.” An Ally participant shared, “Then I started reading and that just opened up a whole new world for me. So many books. I wish that I could retain all of the information that I have read in the thousands of books that I have read, because they were all good, and they all gave me insight.” They went on to expand more, “I literally had to find myself, and I think through all of the reading and through trying to figure out what my soul’s purpose was I achieved exactly that.”

This LGBTQ+ participant shared his in-depth experiences of his awakening through exploration:

I listened to this podcast that Oprah has called, *Super Soul Conversations*, and she interviewed Maya Angelou, who reminded me so much of my grandmother, who passed away, and she was talking about this aspect of pure love, and it just showed me that this aspect of my love for my grandmother, and I was hearing Maya Angelou speak to the same language that I felt from my grandmother about this aspect of love and I said, okay, love is something that I can believe in. I found another spiritual teacher, Ram Dass. He was very instrumental, even probably

more so than the Marianne Williamson book, *Return to Love*, which was life changing at the time I first read it. He really brought it to an even bigger place for me, and he talks a lot about Bible verses, and he talks about Buddhism, and obviously he comes from the Hindu tradition, a lot of the Eastern religions or philosophies. It led me to then find even more congruency in all those teachings as well. Then I went even further. Next, seeing how much similarity there are between prayer beads or meditation beads and the rosary, and so many things about we call meditations or prayers. Then all a sudden, it made sense that people all across the globe, and different philosophies and different religions are all coming to some very similar truths. Next, I really began to become a student of Gaia, and understanding what those properties were like. And through that study I realized in understanding these truths that people who are having these mystical experiences coming from the plant medicine, which is coming from the earth, and it was interesting that people who are non-religious have this aspect of love and being connected to everyone else, and in that gave me another piece of my understanding. These experiences are ultimately how I attained my true spiritual awakening.

This LGBTQ+ participant shared they studied various, “Religions, faiths, all together, and have really been dabbling in Paganism, Wiccanism, meditation, and spirituality versus religion to find the spiritual path that works for me.” They later shared that they identify now as, “A little bit more Earth-centric, nature-centric, individual-centric versus, congregation based dualistic, moral codes, and societal codes.”

An Ally participant shared:

It's the woo-woo and the esoteric stuff I always have been really drawn to, because I feel like it's something I can study. It gives me answers. It gives me a relationship to nature and the planet. I think that those are sorely lacking in organized religion and my experience of Christianity in particular. I shouldn't say organized religion because I do dabble in Buddhism. Having a set of behaviors, the whole notion, that these few people in power in churches can define what is right, what is wrong never felt good to me. Who is right? Who is wrong? And that there always has to be a group that's wrong or lesser than. It's taken me a year solid of doing love and kindness things, such as, meditation, Astrology and Buddhism practices to bounce out of those right and wrong mindsets and paradigms.

Table 28 Percentage and frequency of the growth theme exploration

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	7	70.0%	23	3.3
LGBTQ+	11	78.6%	26	2.4
Total	18	75.0%	49	2.7

Another Ally participant shared their experience in exploring and learning from channeling spirit after their self- identified spiritual awakening, “All those psychic gifts and abilities came back from childhood that I had lost. I was able to channel spirit and really get deep down into my heart and meditate and connect to more learning and knowing that I've ever experienced in my life.” She went on to share that these were, “things that are not written in books or textbooks, I had a master's degree and had done

everything for a doctoral degree, except the dissertation, and my learning there wasn't even close to being as significantly profound as the knowledge I know had access to.”

Acceptance

The acceptance growth point theme emerged in 75% of total participants and includes the growth point markers of: acceptance, forgiveness non-judgement, freedom, confidence, empowerment, and authenticity. Acceptance from self, others, and churches/religious organizations are examined in this theme. The magnitude of acceptance appears to have expanded from the acceptance pivot point markers to include freedom, confidence, and empowerment.

This LGBTQ+ participant shared after he experienced trauma from the church, he was eventually able to build back a relationship with Christianity, “I got married in a school church to my husband. I had found a congregation that was accepting, that was open, that was led by a woman, which is also mind-boggling to me and yet fabulous, and those in attendance were gay people, queer people, trans people, and people of color.” He continued to share, “We're all accepted as part of god's family and as a part of this congregation, where I am accepted holistically because of who I am.” Another LGBTQ+ participant shared his experience as he joined the spiritual team of a church that historically didn't allow LGBTQ+ identifying people to have leadership roles and they said to him, “We're done hurting people in the LGBTQ+ community. So, we want to go on this journey with you.” He shared, “And that was a really affirming moment because it was okay to be me. I felt like God was calling me back here, and this is why? Which, honestly, really affirmed my faith, and really solidified my belief in Christianity! Where for a while I was really questioning it, just because I was like, how can I fit in?”

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

An Ally identifying participant explained that their exodus from the church allowed them to be a better conduit for God's work, "In fact, I feel like in certain ways not being with a religious organization or religious church opens more doors for me to be an ally and show Christian love to the community than if I walked in wearing a cross around my neck, because I think that folks can be more open to a relationship with me." They went on to share an authentic self-acceptance moment, "It's not that I'm not representing so to speak, but I'm just showing who I am because of God."

Another account of authenticity was shared by an additional Ally participant: I don't care what anybody else thinks, I don't care. I know that being myself is right. I know that I'm able to be myself and I'm able to have a relationship with God. So, that way I can care for others and accept them for exactly for who they are no matter who they are. It provides you with the empathy, compassion, and acceptance for everybody. But, more importantly, I'm witnessing and seeing the love and the gratitude. I'm walking in a good way, and I'm absolutely honored to be who I am.

A LGBTQ+ participant seconded this sentiment by having stated, "You know we exist for a reason and it's okay that we exist, and we shouldn't be like cast aside because of it." Another LGBTQ+ shared, "Just understanding myself and telling myself it was okay to be who I was vital to my growth."

This LGBTQ+ identifying priest shared about when he left priesthood and was able to start dating:

To me, the biggest growth moment, again, in retrospect, it seems weird to say when you're 30 some years old, and you see it as growth that you're dating somebody, but when you're taught to believe that you don't have that option, that's

a big thing. Not only getting to date normally but to have a relationship with a guy. I'm just growing personally in terms of being comfortable with myself. Not being afraid, or feeling that something bad is going to happen, or you know God's going to judge me for dating another man.

This LGBTQ+ participants stated that once she started attending a spiritual center and the connection to the pastor and her new found chosen family was one her largest growth moments, "Through this immense amount of nurturing, and acceptance and compassion for who I am, without having to change anything, without having to pretend to be different type of woman, or different sexual orientation, I was able to know I was truly accepted and loved just as I am."

A transgender-identifying participant shared:

Being Trans and accepting myself as a Trans person has also filled me spiritually and expanded my spiritual practice, because now I look at being transgender as amazing gift from the universe. I have an opportunity to live very high level of integrity and authenticity that a lot of people don't. Well, anybody has the opportunity to do that. But, for most people it's not pushed on them in this way. Like, this who I am, and this is how I'm going to identify myself to the world. That does put you in a place of really being truly authentic, and having a level of integrity that's not typical, which is a blessing, that's a huge blessing, and I say that I'm so blessed, and that I get to live 2 lives in one lifetime. So, it's like, if you can be really honest with yourself and really tune in, follow that instinct and guidance, that's what I did, and that's actually even Biblical.

An Ally participant shared their journey into self-acceptance and the acceptance

of others in her growth experiences:

I was very impulsive once before and now I know I can slow down, and sometimes me slowing down is just going to bed and knowing that tomorrow is a new day and being okay with the fact that I don't have to fix everything right now and being more accepting of myself. I don't really carry around that shame I once had, and that happened for me through the 12 steps, In AA I learned how to give myself grace. Understanding my need for impulsivity and how to not jump the gun so much, and just letting people be where they are, and accepting that everybody is different, are my two largest growths. It's freeing to know that I don't have to be a certain way. I can just be me, and I can let you be you, and we can all live together in harmony.

Table 29 Percentage and frequency of the growth theme acceptance

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	6	60.0%	13	2.2
LGBTQ+	12	85.7%	26	2.2
Total	18	75%	39	2.2

Connection

The connection growth point theme emerged in nearly 70% of total participants and includes the growth point markers: healing, connecting, solo-practices, messages from God, coexisting, communication, openness, and prayer. Connection to others, self, and a higher power/God are major avenues to self-identified growth within the participants.

A connection with a young girl at the place this LGBTQ+ participant was

volunteering aided in their growth, “I recognized that she started teaching me from the moment that she gave me a hug and that it's okay to be a kid. It's okay to love people and it's okay to love yourself.” This LGBTQ+ participant shared that they foster connection with others that led to growth by listening more, “I just try to listen and hear a lot, and I think that's become more important to me, because I think it's allowed me to see so much in so many ways.” A LGBTQ+ participant shared, “The idea of like more than a couple of people getting together to form anything just leaves a bad taste in the mouth, and that's kind of how I that's how I'm currently approaching my spiritual work is I'm not seeking out congregations, I'm not seeking out an organization. I'm not seeking out large groups of people.” Though, this participant went on to share he finds this connection to others on a smaller scale, “It's a joy to find other individuals or other small folks who are practicing or disclosed that they're practicing some of their work and to share notes.”

This LGBTQ+ participant shared about connection to others and their higher power:

I received even more healing when my spirituality just broadened, and things just expanded and kept expanding in my understanding, and my connection to source. Energy is what I call it now, the universe, or source. Energy really expanded my life, and I found immense blessings and just love at every turn. You know it is just produced happy, happy happy things the more that I can be connected to that source energy! And I released all of the man-made rules and religious doctrine. I just, I don't need that, I have found peace in just focusing on this energy and being filled with that it. I know the right things to do, I know how to take responsibility for my actions, and it just always keeps me on a on a good path. Ultimately, it

keeps me connected with people and it's just it's just easy, and it feels good.

An Ally participant shared, “My heart was captured by Christ, and I became a Born-Again Christian, and then also was baptized in the Straits of Sobo. I did it under the guise of having a personal relationship with Christ.” They continue to share, “Not anything biblically related necessarily. Not anything church related. But, you know, took it down to that smaller level of just an intimate relationship, which helped me create one with myself.”

Another Ally participant shared her solo practice:

I spend more time just in worship stuff on my own. I haven't found any teachings by people that I know are affirming, and that I can respect, but I still consider myself Christian. I'm just not your typical Christian. I have a whole playlist on Spotify that's all worship music that it's just the typical Christian Contemporary music, like Hillsong, Lauren Daigle, Toby Mac... and just a mix of worship music. I will just sit, and it's a lot like meditation, but instead of just breathing I'll just sit with it and worship, and sing with it, and sometimes I dance and just spend time between me and me and the Lord.

A LGBTQ+ participant who grew up at a Jehovah's Witness shared why he keeps his spiritual life and practices solo in nature, “My spirituality is so private to me because so much of my life my spirituality and my I actions were all public, and it was on display.” He expanded, “When I was younger, I would tell people that if my dad ran for President our family would already be ready because we were trained for public eye, with whether it was how we were conducting ourselves, who we were allowed to talk to and spend time with, our reputations at church were everything.”

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

This LGBTQ+ participant shared their experience of fading away from traditional Christian settings as they moved into more one-on-one and solo-practices:

It felt more like a chore on to do it than it did anything else, and so a lot of the energy, the passion, the spark had kind of dimmed, but I started seeking out more individualistic practices around faith and spirituality. Then being able to share that with my husband and a few close friends has been beautiful. Now we're able to create more theological conversations and holistic spiritual conversations together. Also, I'm able to do a lot of these practice solo and find the meaning and find affirmation in that solo-practice.

And so far, less is it people getting together for a ritual, or for faith, or for religion. Far more of the far more of it these days is theological discussions, conversations, and occasional ritual practice. You know when the time is right, when we're feeling doing that together for the vast majority of my practice these days is solo, or just something between my partner and myself that we will do some of our some of our spiritual practices together. So, and I would say that is growth.

This LGBTQ+ participant hadn't come out fully yet and through his connection with God was able to come out fully to his church family, "I still felt this pull to where God was like, you have to be yourself. You must tell them who you are. You have to open up about being gay." A LGBTQ+ participant shared that they were taught that God was a harsh and judgmental presence and once they connected to their own version of God their understanding of God shifted, "I'm a lot more just connected with who I am,

and I feel like my idea of God is just much more compassionate than what I was taught to believe it be, essentially unconditional love.”

A LGBTQ+ participant who survived sex-trafficking shared their connection to spirituality:

Spirituality to me is really a deep connection within, and I call it a connection to the divine or source, and others may call it God or whatever term they call it, it's the forest or the trees for me. Spirituality is about a connection to something that has no judgment. 100% love, compassion, and enables me to be right where I am so that I can unpack all of who I am. The light, the dark, the heavy, all of it, and know that I'm safe and secure, and that I can grow from that place.

A LGBTQ+ transgender-identifying participant shared, “If you can hang in there and have some faith and learn to love yourself then you will immediately see so many doors open, and so many beautiful connections in your life. They went on to share more connections, “I make connections with people I don't even know, they talk to me and share with me, and we cry together, and I and I'm able to share my love with people.”

An Ally-identifying therapist shared her connection to source/God/divine during a meditation:

All I could do is have these amazing tears that streamed from my eyes, and I could feel, Wow, this is what it's all about. This is not anything like what earth tells us it's about and so it completely shifted my life. After that meditation, being a therapist, I thought Oh, I've had this psychotic experience, right? But, spirit knew exactly what to give me, because with that experience I had this profound, amazing, emotional, similar to what would happen if you had a near-death

experience kind of experience, and I couldn't dismiss it. There was nothing I could do to dismiss it, right? I started getting messages and downloads of information, and God and Spirit talking to me. Wow! My church became my inner being, it became my heart, it became my meditation, it became my direct contact with the source God divine and it became so fulfilling that I didn't need any external validation from another human that I was worthy. The realization that we were all born worthy, and we are in a society of really wounded people, and we get wounded, so we all have this sense of unworthiness.

Table 30 Percentage and frequency of the growth theme connection

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	8	80.0%	25	3.1
LGBTQ+	9	64.3%	32	3.5
Total	17	66.7%	57	3.4

Teaching/Advocacy

The teaching/advocacy growth point theme emerged in nearly 70% of total participants and includes the growth point markers of: teaching, advocating, helping, volunteering, storytelling, and service-work. These meaning bits/markers all possess a common theme of sharing one's talents, skills, education, experience, story, time, or posttraumatic growth with others to help disseminate their growth beyond their personal sphere. Service-based leaders in community, workplace, household, and academic settings emerged in this theme.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared their experience of brainstorming the initial startup of an LGBTQ+-based nonprofit organization that helps LGBTQ+ children obtain

scholarships for college, “And so we just we started the conversation. How do we help others? How do we help educate the world? And help them understand that we're just people?” Another LGBTQ+ participant shared how they hold sacred spaces for healing as they teach others the lessons they've learned, “There's a Native American practice of holding sacred circles with people in the community to do a burn ceremony, which is, releasing things that are held within such as trauma, and shame, and I hold these safe and sacred spaces for people to be able to come and release those things.” They went on to share, “Simply, to acknowledge them, and let them know that they are loved.”

This LGBTQ+ nurse shared that they were inspired to take action after the Black Lives Matter movement became more visible in 2020, “During 2020, I said I'm going to be activist, I'm going to be an ally for black communities, and I'm not going to just let people say whatever. I'm going to really stand up for these patients that have been just put aside and judged for a long time.” She continued to share later, “I think just doing that kind of work just really brought me back to what is actually really meaningful to me about my religious and spiritual experiences.” An Ally shared their experience joining a nonprofit board of directors, “The nonprofit does work to reconcile the LGBTQ+ community with religion and churches and tries to walk beside the LGBTQ+ community in their trauma and experiences, to work to reconcile their journey of faith with them.” Another Ally shared her experience volunteering with a national human rights organization, “Understanding social justice does matter to me. I've never really been very political, and sort of trusted the direction we were going, and 2016 proved that not to be true, so I knew I had to help and step up and attempt to make change.” This Ally formed a branch of a nonprofit that serves rural youth LGBTQ+ children and teens, “I've had

several different students that I've had to talk down. They were suicidal and I've had to talk them out of completing suicide. Those are hard."

This LGBTQ+ participant shared how volunteering created growth in them, "I was teaching STI's and STD's classes, classes on how to talk to people that are positive with HIV, helping them understand that it's important for them to care for themselves and their bodies like getting tested." They continued to share, "It was a noticeable shift in my mental and emotional state, because I had to teach people take care of themselves. Prior, I was so destructive my entire life. I didn't even know what self-care meant."

A LGBTQ+ participant who grew up in the Catholic religion left only to return to be of service to others despite the trauma he endured from the church, "The journey of life really is about serving others, especially the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. I reconciled that hurt and pain from childhood to the point that in the last 2 years I have been in a formation to become a Third Order Franciscan Monk."

This Ally identifying therapist and spiritual teacher shared:

My whole life now is dedicated to my spiritual pursuits and helping heal other people. Now, my life is dedicated to doing spiritual healings and making the world a better place, really helping people awaken and really empower themselves to do what they're here to do. So, it is a crazy shift from a very left-brain person to the so-called crazy things I do now is for a living.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared that they currently teach workshops on forgiveness and encourage workshop attendees to truly share their stories and actively listen, "We need to forgive and engage in the healing of memories by sharing our stories just not storytelling. Rather, it is story sharing where other people actively listen to our story."

Another LGBTQ+ participant who shared of writing a book about his experience being removed from a church position due to his sexual identity, “I don't know if it'll ever be published, I don't know if I want to publish it. Though, the act of writing it was especially the first time was enormously therapeutic.” This LGBTQ+ participant shared their experience volunteering in a sexual and domestic violence prevention and education organization, “I think giving people the platform to not only share their stories, but for allies, to also be able to learn how to support people that have experienced these types of traumas has been some of the most fulfilling work I’ve ever done.” They continued to share, “I just absolutely love giving people the platform to share their stories. No matter how small or how big or how we perceive our trauma, our incidence, our stories, they all have a place, and we all have things that we can learn from each other's stories.”

Table 31 Percentage and frequency of the growth theme
teaching/advocacy

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	7	70.0%	16	2.3
LGBTQ+	9	64.2%	32	3.6
Total	16	66.7%	48	2.9

This LGBTQ+ participant shared of giving a national talk and sharing her story: I feel like the person I was before 30 years old, and the person I am now are two different people. And that's really amazing to me and it just continues to open up doors for me that I never dreamed possible such as speaking on public stages and giving national talks. And talking about all of it openly when I thought I would just take it all to my grave. That I would be this kind of wounded animal for the rest of my life. I can’t believe I was

selected to give a nationally known platform talk in 2021 about my experience as a victim of child sex trafficking, and just bringing awareness to that in itself, and connecting it to being in a cult religion, and all of that has been profoundly empowering and healing.

Realization

The realization growth point theme emerged in nearly 70% of total participants and includes the growth point markers of: realization, awareness, breakthroughs, understanding, intentionality, transparency, and separation. This theme has a naturally introspective property and often this growth isn't something that can be known, seen, witnessed, or experienced by outsiders unless shared directly via the participant.

A LGBTQ+ participant shared his experience of understanding from his guru and his first shift or awakening in life at the age of 22, "When I found Meher Baba that was the time that I really understood the essence of God's love, that's what life is about, is loving God simply by loving others." Another LGBTQ+ participant shared one of their largest realization growth skills as they started to notice the way the LGBTQ+ and religious communities interacted together, "It's almost like being able to see in infrared, whereas before I wasn't able to see the light spectrum in that way." A LGBTQ+ church leader shared that after enduring his trauma from being publicly outed around his church position on a national level, "It takes a lot more to scare me now and that was a very apt way of describing my own feelings. I have my worst fear realized, and I was standing on the other side of it with a lot of pain and a lot of scars." He added after, "The biggest change is the fact that I don't know people until I know them, and that's the biggest growth I would say."

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This LGBTQ+ identifying priest shared a realization experience that was followed by growth in priesthood:

You have such a variation from priests to priest as to whether they're compassionate and merciful when they preach on the LGBTQ+ community.

When I was given that first homily where I had to preach on the Church's teachings and verses on homosexuality and on the LGBTQ+ community, to be honest, the maturity of my understanding, not just of faith, but understanding of the Church teaching itself had grown. It had grown into a much more compassionate and loving approach, as opposed to living up to what I had heard before, and reiterating the homophobia that I have heard spouted, spouted out from pulpit to pulpit. And from that perspective I had grown also.

This LGBTQ+ participant shared, “The most important thing that I’ve realized from any kind of trauma is that growth looks different for everybody, and while for somebody growth might mean reconciling those differences within their religious practices and still essentially practicing that religion to an extent, which could look like growth for one person.” She continued to expand, “But, that doesn't mean that somebody who decides to distance themselves from religion and has a different type of spiritual growth is any less valid.”

A LGBTQ+ participant described their experience of realization:

That it is and was meant for me, and it is for me, a religion, a philosophy of spiritual practice based on love. And that's what I move towards, not a religion and philosophy based on fear. And as long as I continue in my life to move towards love and away from fear, I feel that's really the culmination of my

spiritual awakening, and really and truly the future of the unfolding of my spiritual awakening enlightenment. Getting closer to God is by getting closer and being an instrument of love and moving away from fear.

An Ally participant shared, “It was interesting to find that shift in me which looked more like meditating, connecting to the God or divine, and calling even God something different. I never had a problem with the word God. I always had a problem with church, so that, I think, was my pivotal growth.” Another Ally shared, “I’m all for it, it’s all about the love, you just have to let everybody find their own and as long as it brings peace and love then it’s perfect. This LGBTQ+ participant shared a thought that was parallel in belief, “My spiritual and religious beliefs have matured and progressed in that way of understanding love differently and reevaluating how my relationship with God is based upon my new understanding of love.”

Table 32 Percentage and frequency of the growth theme realization

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	6	60.0%	18	3.0
LGBTQ+	10	71.4%	22	2.2
Total	16	66.7%	40	2.5

Emotional

The positive emotional growth point theme emerged in nearly 60% of total participants and includes the growth point markers of: love, peace, self-love, gratitude, independence, passion, hope, beauty, safety, trust, and positivity. These markers identify a growth in the participant’s emotional health that at times was directly associated with an emotional trauma they experienced prior. Shifting from the traumas experienced to

growth in areas of self-hate to self-love, distrust to trust, suffering to hope, and guilt to peace.

This Ally participant shared how her growth most be visible to someone else, “People that have known me for years see the obvious changes, such as, changes my career. It's also changed who I am as a person, it's changed what I do, what I believe in, and what I hold dear.” She went on to share, “I’ve given up all my monetary possessions to live this life, which so many people would think is horribly crazy and awful and at the same time I totally trust spirit.” Another Ally participant shared around trust too, “It’s a pretty big deal to get to trust myself again, and or maybe for the first time, it just feels so foreign because I am being so divinely held constantly in those moments of fear or doubts.”

A LGBTQ+ participant shared as he volunteered at a children’s-based program, he had a growth moment from the experience that he described as unsurpassable, “And along comes this 4-year, old little girl. She forced me to recognize the beauty in life. Now, I can go outside, and I can see the world. I can see people, and I accept people for whoever they are. All because of her.”

A LGBTQ+ participant shared, “When I have that connection to other people I'm filled with love. I think you can recall those little moments in time where you did feel something real. You felt a source of love, or a source of some people call it, grace.” Another LGBTQ+ participant shared, “I'm now at a point in my servitude and my discovery of self, and the full knowing of oneness, that ultimately, it's all love.”

This Ally participant shared, “The way I understood love, the way my parents raised me, my parents are very disciplinary and never said, I love you. It was, we show

you we love you by, punishing you and it's straightening you out.” She continued to share that after her growth, “I can't understand love in that way anymore. I definitely prefer my understanding of love.” This Ally shared her experience of navigating through trauma to finally reach a place they had longed for an entire lifetime, “I am beyond grateful to have had all the trials and tribulations to be able to learn what it actually feels like to feel loved to feel supported, to feel looked out for in ways that I almost can't express verbally.” She continued to share where the growth broke free into her experience, “There is just this ultimate resonance in my heart and soul of divine timing and divine alignment, when those both occur, I’m grateful for what happens next. Often, magic happens, and that magic is always love. So, love wins always.”

Table 33 Percentage and frequency of the growth theme emotional

	n	%	Total Frequency	Frequency Average (n)
Ally	7	70.0%	16	2.2
LGBTQ+	7	50.0%	19	2.7
Total	14	58.3%	35	2.5

Quantitative Results

Quantitative data analysis included descriptive statistics, chi-square, Wilcoxon signed rank test, and single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA). All quantitatively statistical analyses were conducted by the co-investigator (dissertation advisor).

Sample Descriptive Statistics

Phase II produced 407 complete responses out of 743 who started the survey. Completed responses were tallied by sexual orientation in Table 34. The two largest response categories were gay (28.99%) and heterosexual/straight (Ally) (25.31%). Other response categories range from 1.23% (demisexual) to 14.74% (bisexual). Only 4

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respondents (0.98%) indicated their sexual orientation is not listed. Since some LGBTQ+ members identify with multiple sexual orientations, respondents were asked to select the identity they identify with most. When self-identifying as a member in the LGBTQ+ community the term gay is sometimes used interchangeably with queer or other identities and does not strictly apply to just male identifying members of the community. Those who identify as queer at times use this identifier because they have multiple sexual orientations (or gender identities) within the community and use this term as an umbrella identifier to mean member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Table 34 Percent breakdown of respondents by Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	n	%
Heterosexual/Straight (Ally)	103	25.31%
Gay	118	28.99%
Bisexual	60	14.74%
Lesbian	43	10.57%
Asexual	11	2.70%
Pansexual	28	6.88%
Demisexual	5	1.23%
Queer	35	8.60%
A Sexual Orientation Not Listed	4	0.98%
Total	407	100.00%

For the purposes of analysis, gender identity data were aggregated into two broad categories reflecting responses from members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities (see Table 35). A quarter of respondents were Ally identifying (25.31%) and three-quarters were LGBTQ+ (74.69%).

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Table 35 Percent breakdown of respondents by Ally and LGBTQ+ Orientation

Sexual Orientation	N	%
Heterosexual/Straight (Ally)	103	25.31%
LGBTQ+	304	74.69%
Total	407	100.00%

Table 36 displays the gender identity of the 407 complete survey responses.

Cisgender male (130) or cisgender female (168) respondents accounted for 73.21% of total survey respondents. The term cisgender refers to the gender identity in which the gender that was assigned at birth is currently the gender the respondent identifies with.

Table 36 Percent breakdown of respondents by Gender Identity

Gender Identity	n	%
Cisgender Male	130	31.94%
Cisgender Female	168	41.27%
Transgender Male	13	3.19%
Transgender Female	12	2.95%
Non-Binary	29	7.13%
Genderqueer	24	5.90%
Gender Fluid	14	3.44%
A Gender Not Listed Here	17	4.18%
Total	407	100%
Total Cisgender participants	298	73.21%
Total Transgender-identifying participants	109	26.79%

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Transgender male (13) and transgender female (12) respondents accounted for 6.14% of total survey respondents. Non-binary (7.13%), genderqueer (5.90%), and gender fluid (3.44%) are all identities within the transgender community, therefore total transgender-identifying respondents account for 22.61% of total survey respondents. 17 respondents (4.18%) selected that their gender identity was not listed. Of these 17 respondents, 5 said they identify as simply “male” or “female” (though not cisgender). Additional identities included: n/a, two-spirit, she/they, gay masculine, and gender nonconforming. These additional 17 participants have been clustered with the transgender-identifying participants because they presumably fall somewhere within the transgender community umbrella.

Parametric Statistical Analysis

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity. Table 37 reports the incidence of self-identified general traumas reported by LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants. Responses categories for types of trauma experienced were not discreet, as participants were asked to select all that apply.

Table 37 Percentage breakdown by sexual orientation and trauma

Type of self-identified trauma	Allies		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	n	%
Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological)	73	70.9%	227	74.7%
Mental Health (PTSD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	82	79.6%	268	88.2%
Addiction (drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, social media, shoplifting, gambling, etc.)	32	31.1%	126	41.4%

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Relationship Oriented (such as divorce, addiction within family, familial mental health issues or death/suicide, etc.)	67	65.0%	200	65.8%
Poverty/Food or Housing Insecurities (orphaned, fostered, homelessness, etc.)	22	21.4%	79	26.0%
Serious Injury/Illness or Accident (cancer, burns, dog attack, bike wreck, car accident, fire, etc.)	29	28.2%	66	21.7%
Disastrous Event/Situation (war, political violence, natural disasters, community violence, mass shooting, mugging, assault, prison/incarceration, terrorism, etc.)	13	12.6%	56	18.4%
Discrimination/Bullying (workplace harassment, childhood bullying, or discrimination within race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.)	49	47.6%	232	76.3%
Physical Safety Impediment (kidnapped/trafficked, physically attacked, death threats, robbery, home invasion, etc.)	16	15.5%	50	16.4%
Other (not listed)	10	9.7%	14	4.6%
Total*	393	381.6%	1318	433.5%

*Multiple responses permitted

Chi-Square (X^2) tests of independence for all forms of trauma assessed are presented in Table 38. Two significant results emerged, for mental health-based trauma, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 4.67, p < 0.05$ and discrimination/bullying-related trauma $X^2(1, N = 407) = 29.7, p < 0.001$. Results revealed fewer LGBTQ+ and more Ally respondents than predicted by chance reported experiencing mental health-based trauma (PTSD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.). Similarly, fewer LGBTQ+ and more Allies than statistically expected reported experiencing discrimination/bullying-

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related trauma (i.e., workplace harassment, childhood bullying, or discrimination within race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.).

No other statistically significant chi-square results were found. All other types of trauma assessed were reported at statistically similar rates by LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents.

Table 38 Trauma Chi-square and *p*-value (Sexual orientation)

Type of self-identified trauma	Ally		LGBTQ+		X ²	<i>p</i> =
	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %		
Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological)	28.0%	24.4%	72.0%	75.7%	0.572	0.449
Mental Health (PTSD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	<u>36.8%</u>	23.4%	<u>63.2%</u>	76.6%	4.67	0.031*
Addiction (drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, social media, shoplifting, gambling, etc.)	28.5%	20.3%	71.5%	79.7%	3.49	0.062
Relationship Oriented (such as divorce, addiction within family, familial mental health issues or death/suicide, etc.)	25.7%	25.1%	74.3%	74.9%	0.0187	0.891
Poverty/Food or Housing Insecurities (orphaned, fostered, homelessness, etc.)	26.5%	21.8%	73.5%	26.5%	0.883	0.347
Serious Injury/Illness or Accident (cancer, burns, dog attack, bike wreck, car accident, fire, etc.)	23.7%	30.5%	76.3%	69.5%	1.79	0.181
Disastrous Event/Situation (war, political violence, natural disasters, community violence, mass	26.6%	18.8%	73.4%	81.2%	1.84	0.175

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shooting, mugging, assault,
prison/incarceration,
terrorism, etc.)

Discrimination/Bullying (workplace harassment, childhood bullying, or discrimination within race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.)	42.9%	17.4%	57.1%	82.6%	29.7	0.001**
Physical Safety Impediment (kidnapped/trafficked, physically attacked, death threats, robbery, home invasion, etc.)	25.5%	24.2%	74.5%	75.8%	0.0472	0.828
Other (not listed)	24.3%	41.7%	75.7%	58.3%	3.61	0.057

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Table 39 presents the self-identified spiritual/religious traumas reported by LGBTQ+ and Ally participants. Table 39 presents results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence used to assess whether the number of incidents reported by LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents differed from the predicted value based on the percentage of respondents in each group. Chi-Square (X^2) revealed 4 significant differences related to messaging, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 11.1, p < 0.001$; abuse by a church leader, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 4.73, p < 0.05$; forced/coerced to pretend or hide, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 52.6, p < 0.001$; and other (not listed), $X^2(1, N = 407) = 9.24, p < 0.01$.

Table 39 Percentage breakdown by sexual orientation and spiritual/religious trauma

Allies LGBTQ+

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Type of self-identified spiritual/religious trauma	n	%	N	%
Messaging (Biblical/other holy book condemnation, "You're going to hell", hate speech, harassment, discrimination, humiliation, etc.)	66	64.1%	244	80.3%
Abuse by Church Leader (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, etc.)	18	17.5%	86	28.3%
Threatening (rigid conformity, to act or believe a certain way, use of hell or condemnation, etc.)	52	50.5%	186	61.2%
Cult or Fanatical Affiliation (by force, by choice, or by proximity)	13	12.6%	61	20.1%
Forced or Coerced to Pretend or Hide (sexual orientation, gender identity, going against core beliefs/own heart, questions aren't allowed to be asked, blackmailing, gaslighting, etc.)	32	31.1%	217	71.4%
Other (not listed)	24	23.3%	34	11.2%
Total*	205	199.1%	828	272.5%

*Multiple responses permitted

Table 40
Religious/Spiritual
Trauma Chi-square and *p*-
value (Sexual orientation)

Type of self-identified trauma	Ally		LGBTQ+		X ²	<i>p</i> =
	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %		
Messaging (Biblical/other holy book condemnation, "You're going to hell",	38.1%	21.3%	61.9%	78.7%	11.1	0.001

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hate speech, harassment,
discrimination,
humiliation, etc.)

Abuse by Church Leader (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, etc.)	28.1%	17.3%	71.9%	82.7%	4.73	0.030
Threatening (rigid conformity, to act or believe a certain way, use of hell or condemnation, etc.)	30.2%	21.8%	69.8%	78.2%	3.63	0.057
Cult or Fanatical Affiliation (by force, by choice, or by proximity)	27.0%	17.6%	73.0%	82.4%	2.87	0.091
Forced or Coerced to Pretend or Hide (sexual orientation, gender identity, going against core beliefs/own heart, questions aren't allowed to be asked, blackmailing, gaslighting, etc.)	44.9%	12.9%	55.1%	87.1%	52.6	0.001
Other (not listed)	22.6%	41.4%	77.4%	58.6%	9.24	0.002

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$

Examination of these results revealed fewer LGBTQ+ than predicted reported not experiencing messaging-based spiritual/religious trauma (Biblical/other holy book condemnation, "You're going to hell", hate speech, harassment, discrimination, humiliation, etc.), Similarly, more LGBTQ+ and fewer Ally respondents than predicted reported experiencing abuse by church leader-based trauma (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, etc.). Additionally, fewer Ally participants than expected reported experiencing messaging-based spiritual/religious trauma. more LGBTQ+ identifying

participants and fewer Ally respondents than predicted reported being forced or coerced to pretend or hide-based trauma (sexual orientation, gender identity, going against core beliefs/own heart, questions aren't allowed to be asked, blackmailing, gaslighting, etc.). Conversely, with respect to other types of trauma (not listed), Ally identifying participants were more likely and LGBTQ+ less likely to have reported experiencing these types of religious/spiritual traumas. Based on frequency, LGBTQ+ identifying participants reported significantly higher rates of messaging (16,2%), abuse by a church leader (10.8%), and forced/coerced-type traumas (40.3%) than Ally-identifying participants, while Ally respondents reported significantly more unspecified spiritual/religious-based traumas that were not listed (12%). No other statistically significant chi-square results were found. All other types of religious/spiritual trauma assessed were reported at statistically similar rates by LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents.

Table 41 presents the percentage of cisgender and transgender (i.e., gender identity) identifying participants who responded by selecting (yes) or not selecting (no) to the (10) various trauma prompts. Additionally, Chi-Square (X^2) and p -value ($p =$) are displayed. There were 7 significant relationships that emerged: abuse, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 8.78, p < 0.01$; mental health, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 8.93, p < 0.01$; addiction, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 13, p < 0.001$; relationship-oriented trauma, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 4.01, p < 0.05$; poverty, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 0.231, p < 0.001$; discrimination, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 16.4, p < 0.001$; and physical safety, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 21.7, p < 0.001$.

With respect to abuse, mental health, relationship-oriented trauma, and discriminations, fewer transgender and more cis-gender identifying respondents than

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predicted reported they had not experienced each type of trauma assessed. With respect to addiction, poverty and physical safety, more transgender and fewer cisgender respondents than predicted reported experiencing each type of trauma. No other statistically significant chi-square results were found. All other types of trauma assessed were reported at statistically similar rates by transgender and cisgender identifying respondents.

Table 41 Trauma Chi-square and *p*-value (Gender identity)

Type of self-identified trauma	Cisgender		Transgender		χ^2	<i>p</i> =
	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %		
Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological)	84.1%	69.3%	15.9%	30.7%	8.78	0.003**
Mental Health (PTSD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	89.5%	70.6%	10.5%	29.4%	8.93	0.003**
Addiction (drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, social media, shoplifting, gambling, etc.)	79.5%	63.3%	20.5%	36.7%	13.0	0.001***
Relationship Oriented (such as divorce, addiction within family, familial mental health issues or death/suicide, etc.)	79.3%	70.0%	20.7%	30.0%	4.01	0.045*
Poverty/Food or Housing Insecurities (orphaned, fostered, homelessness, etc.)	79.1%	55.4%	20.9%	44.6%	0.231	0.001***
Serious Injury/Illness or Accident (cancer, burns, dog attack, bike wreck, car accident, fire, etc.)	75.3%	66.3%	34.7%	33.7%	3.01	0.083

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Disastrous Event/Situation (war, political violence, natural disasters, community violence, mass shooting, mugging, assault, prison/incarceration, terrorism, etc.)	75.1%	63.8%	24.9%	36.2%	3.78	0.052
Discrimination/Bullying (workplace harassment, childhood bullying, or discrimination within race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.)	86.5%	67.3%	57.1%	13.5%	16.4	0.001***
Physical Safety Impediment (kidnapped/trafficked, physically attacked, death threats, robbery, home invasion, etc.)	77.7%	50.0%	22.3%	50.0%	21.7	0.001***
Other (not listed)	73.9%	62.5%	26.1%	37.5%	1.49	0.222

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 42 presents the percentage cisgender and transgender identifying participants (i.e., gender identity) who reported experiencing each of 6 different types of religious/spiritual trauma. Chi-Square (X^2) analysis revealed 4 types of trauma for which the response patterns differed significantly for the prediction of no difference: messaging, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 6.87, p < 0.01$; abuse by a church leader, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 5.51, p < 0.05$; threatening, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 7.76, p < 0.01$; and forced/coerced to pretend or hide, $X^2(1, N = 407) = 17.7, p < 0.001$. The results revealed fewer transgender and more cisgender participants than expected reported not experiencing messaging-based spiritual/religious trauma (Biblical/other holy book condemnation, "You're going to hell",

hate speech, harassment, discrimination, humiliation, etc.) than cis-gender identifying participants. On the other hand, more transgender and fewer cisgender respondents than expected reported having experience abuse by a church leader (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, etc.), threatening-based trauma (rigid conformity, to act or believe a certain way, use of hell or condemnation, etc.), and forced or coerced to pretend or hide-based trauma (sexual orientation, gender identity, going against core beliefs/own heart, questions aren't allowed to be asked, blackmailing, gaslighting, etc.). No other statistically significant chi-square results were found. All other types of spiritual/religious trauma assessed were reported at statistically similar rates by transgender and cisgender identifying respondents.

Table 42 Religious/Spiritual Trauma Chi-square and *p*-value (Gender identity)

Type of self-identified trauma	Cisgender		Transgender		X^2	$p=$
	No %	Yes %	No %	Yes %		
Messaging (Biblical/other holy book condemnation, "You're going to hell", hate speech, harassment, discrimination, humiliation, etc.)	83.5%	70.3%	16.5%	30.0%	6.87	0.009**
Abuse by Church Leader (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, etc.)	76.2%	64.4%	23.8%	35.6%	5.51	0.019*
Threatening (rigid conformity, to act or believe a certain way, use of hell or condemnation, etc.)	80.5%	61.8%	19.5%	39.1%	7.76	0.005**

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Cult or Fanatical Affiliation (by force, by choice, or by proximity)	74.2%	68.9%	25.8%	31.1%	0.853	0.356
Forced or Coerced to Pretend or Hide (sexual orientation, gender identity, going against core beliefs/own heart, questions aren't allowed to be asked, blackmailing, gaslighting, etc.)	84.8%	65.9%	15.2%	34.1%	17.7	0.001***
Other (not listed)	72.2%	79.3%	27.8%	20.7%	1.28	0.258

Spiritual/Religious Affiliation and Identity.

Gender Identity. Table 43 presents the percentage of cisgender and transgender respondents who were affiliated with a spiritual or religious organization at the time they experienced spiritual/religious trauma and after experiencing posttraumatic growth. Chi-Square analysis revealed no significant differences between cisgender and transgender participants' religious/spiritual affiliations either before experiencing religious trauma, $\chi^2 = 4.25$, $p = 0.119$ or after posttraumatic growth, $\chi^2 = 2.12$, $p = .346$.

Table 43 Organization Affiliation Chi-square and p -value (Gender identity)	Cisgender %	Transgender %	χ^2	$p =$
Formal religious organization affiliation when initial trauma occurred	71.1%	28.9%	4.25	0.119
Formal spiritual organization affiliation when initial trauma occurred	25.0%	75.0%	4.25	0.119

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

No affiliation when initial growth occurred	79.5%	20.5%	4.25	0.119
Formal religious organization affiliation at present time	66.0%	34.0%	2.12	0.346
Formal spiritual organization affiliation at present time	77.0%	23.0%	2.12	0.346
No affiliation at present time	73.2%	26.8%	2.12	0.346

Table 44 presents the percentage of total cisgender and transgender respondents who identified as spiritual, religious, agnostic, atheist, or other/no affiliation at the time trauma first occurred and after experiencing posttraumatic growth. Chi-Square analysis revealed no significant differences between cisgender and transgender participants' spiritual/religious identity either before experiencing religious trauma, $\chi^2 = 8.62$, $p = 0.031$ or after posttraumatic growth, $\chi^2 = 2.90$, $p = .407$.

Table 44 Spiritual/Religious/Agnostic/Atheist Affiliation Chi-square and p -value (Gender identity)	Cisgender %	Transgender %	χ^2	$p =$
Spiritual affiliation when initial trauma occurred	83.6%	16.4%	8.62	0.031
Religious affiliation when initial trauma occurred	73.6%	26.4%	8.62	0.031
Agnostic affiliation when initial trauma occurred	64.7%	35.3%	8.62	0.031
Atheist affiliation when initial trauma occurred	54.5%	54.5%	8.62	0.031

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Spiritual affiliation when at present time	75.0%	25.0%	2.90	0.407
Religious affiliation at present time	77.4%	22.6%	2.90	0.407
Agnostic affiliation at present time	69.8%	30.2%	2.90	0.407
Atheist affiliation at present time	65.5%	34.5%	2.90	0.407

Table 45 presents the organization affiliation reported by LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents at the time they first experienced spiritual and/or religious trauma. The majority of both participant groups (71.81% Ally; 81.6% LGBTQ+) were affiliated with a formal religious organization when they first experienced the religious/spiritual trauma. Chi square revealed no significant differences in the distribution of affiliations among LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents prior to experiencing religious/spiritual trauma, $X^2 = 5.03$, $p = 0.081$ (see Table 46).

Table 45 Organization affiliation prior to first experiencing spiritual/religious trauma

Prior Organizational affiliation	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	n	%
Formal religious organization affiliation	74	71.8%	248	81.6%
Formal spiritual organization affiliation	3	2.9%	9	3.0%
No affiliation	26	25.2%	47	15.5%

Table 46 Organizational Affiliation Prior to Religious/Spiritual Trauma

Organizational Affiliation	Ally	LGBTQ+	X^2	$p =$
	%	%		

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Formal religious organization affiliation when initial trauma occurred	23.0%	77.0%	5.03	0.0810
Formal spiritual organization affiliation when initial trauma occurred	25.0%	75.0%	5.03	0.0810
No affiliation when initial growth occurred	35.6%	64.4%	5.03	0.0810

Table 47 presents the current organizational affiliation of LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents after experiencing posttraumatic growth. The majority of both LGBTQ+ (64.1%) and Ally (57.3%) respondents reported no organizational affiliation (a general inversion of organizational affiliation prior to experiencing trauma. Chi square revealed no significant differences in the distribution of affiliations among LGBTQ+ and Ally participants following posttraumatic growth, $X^2 = 2.71$, $p = 0.258$ (see Table 48).

Table 47 Religious/Spiritual Organizational Affiliation following posttraumatic growth

Current Organizational Affiliation	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	n	%	n	%
Formal religious organization affiliation	26	25.2%	74	24.3%
Formal spiritual organization affiliation	18	17.5%	35	11.5%
No affiliation	59	57.3%	195	64.1%

Table 48 Organizational Affiliation after Posttraumatic Growth

Ally LGBTQ+

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Organizational Affiliation	%	%	X ²	p =
Formal religious organization affiliation at present time	26.0%	74%	2.71	0.258
Formal spiritual organization affiliation at present time	34.0%	66.0%	2.71	0.258
No affiliation at present time	23.2%	76.8%	2.71	0.258

Table 49 presents the spiritual identification of LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents as spiritual, religious, agnostic, atheist, or other at the time spiritual and/or religious trauma occurred. The majority of both LGBTQ+ (66.5%) and Ally (65%) respondents identified as religious at the time they experienced religious/spiritual trauma. Chi square revealed no significant differences in the distribution of religious/spiritual identity among LGBTQ+ and Ally participants prior to experiencing religious/spiritual trauma, $X^2 = 8.62$, $p = 0.071$ (see Table 50).

Table 49 Spiritual identity at time the participant experienced trauma

	Ally		LGBTQ+	
	N	%	N	%
<u>Spiritual Identification at time of trauma</u>				
Spiritual	23	22.3%	50	16.4%
Religious	67	65.0%	202	66.5%

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Agnostic	4	3.9%	30	9.9%
Atheist	1	1.0%	10	3.3%
None listed	8	7.8%	12	3.9%

Table 50 Spiritual/Religious/Agnostic/Atheist Identity Chi-square Prior to Trauma

	Ally	LGBTQ+		
Spiritual/Religious Affiliation	%	%	X ²	p =
Spiritual affiliation at time of trauma	31.5%	68.5%	8.62	0.071
Religious affiliation at time of trauma	24.9%	75.1%	8.62	0.071
Agnostic affiliation at time of trauma	11.8%	88.2%	8.62	0.071
Atheist affiliation at time of trauma	9.1%	90.9%	8.62	0.071
No affiliation/other at time of trauma	40.0%	60.0%	8.62	0.071

Table 51 presents the spiritual identification of LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents as spiritual, religious, agnostic, atheist, or other following posttraumatic growth. The majority of both LGBTQ+ (55.9%) and Ally (64.1%) respondents identified as spiritual after experiencing posttraumatic growth. Chi square revealed no significant differences in the distribution of religious/spiritual identity among LGBTQ+ and Ally participants following posttraumatic growth, $X^2 = 5.18$, $p = 0.159$ (see Table 50).

Table 51 Spiritual/Religious Identity following participants' posttraumatic growth

Ally LGBTQ+

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Current Spiritual identification	N	%	N	%
Spiritual	66	64.1%	170	55.9%
Religious	16	15.5%	37	12.2%
Agnostic	12	11.7%	51	16.8%
Atheist	9	8.7%	46	15.1%

Table 52 Spiritual/Religious/Agnostic/Atheist Identity Chi-square Following Growth

	Ally	LGBTQ+		
Current Spiritual/Religious Identity	%	%	X ²	p =
Spiritual identity at present time	28.3%	71.7%	5.18	0.159
Religious identity at present time	30.2%	69.8%	5.18	0.159
Agnostic identity at present time	19.0%	81.0%	5.18	0.159
Atheist identity at present time	16.4%	83.6%	5.18	0.159

For comparative purposes, respondents' combined religious/spiritual affiliations and identities before and after posttraumatic growth were compared using Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. Results revealed a significant difference in affiliations after ($W = 5645.5$, $p < .001$), away from religious affiliation toward primarily no affiliation, and to a lesser degree spiritual organizations. Similar analysis was run to compare religious/spiritual identity before and after posttraumatic growth. Results revealed a significant difference in identify after ($W = 28603$, $p < .001$), away from religious identity toward primarily spiritual identification, and to a lesser degree agnostic and

atheist identities. These findings point to a significant pattern of change in both participants' religious/spiritual organizational affiliations and their religious/spiritual identities from the time when they initially experienced religious/spiritual trauma to the time after they subsequently experienced posttraumatic growth.

Inferential Statistical Analysis

PTGI-X Scores. Table 53 presents the average PTGI-X (Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Index) scores for participants based on the nature of trauma experienced. The N represents the total number of participants who reported each trauma listed; the mean PTGI-X score (0 to 5) and the standard deviation (SD) are provided. No significant differences were found among the PTGI-X scores for these groups.

Table 53 Average and standard deviation of the PTGI-X and the nature of trauma

Type of self-identified trauma	N	Mean	SD
Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological)	300	2.98	1.05
Mental Health (PTSD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)	350	3.04	1.01
Addiction (drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, social media, shoplifting, gambling, etc.)	158	3.16	1.02
Relationship Oriented (such as divorce, addiction within family, familial mental health issues or death/suicide, etc.)	267	3.05	1.04
Poverty/Food or Housing Insecurities (orphaned, fostered, homelessness, etc.)	101	3.08	1.02
Serious Injury/Illness or Accident (cancer, burns, dog attack, bike wreck, car accident, fire, etc.)	95	2.99	1.12

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Disastrous Event/Situation (war, political violence, natural disasters, community violence, mass shooting, mugging, assault, prison/incarceration, terrorism, etc.)	69	2.96	1.13
Discrimination/Bullying (workplace harassment, childhood bullying, or discrimination within race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.)	281	3.04	1.00
Physical Safety Impediment (kidnapped/trafficked, physically attacked, death threats, robbery, home invasion, etc.)	66	3.04	1.10
Other (not listed)	24	3.11	0.73

A single factor ANOVA test was conducted to compare the PTGI-X (Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Index) scores among participants who reported experiencing different types of (abuse, mental health, addiction, relationships, poverty, injury/illness, event, discrimination, physical, and/or other). No significant differences were found, $F(9, 1701) = 0.44$, $p = 0.915$. These results indicate there were no significant differences in PTIG-X scores based on the nature of the trauma experienced.

Table 54 presents the average PTGI-X (Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Index) scores of participants based on their spiritual/religious organization affiliation (religious, spiritual, or no affiliation) prior to experiencing spiritual/religious trauma. The N represents the total number of participants who reported each type of affiliation; the mean PTGI-X score (1 to 5) and standard deviation (SD) are provided for each group. A single factor ANOVA test was conducted to compare the PTGI-X scores of respondents based on religious or spiritual organization affiliation prior to trauma. No significant differences were found, $F(2, 404) = 2.08$, $p = 0.127$. These results indicate participants with different

religious/spiritual affiliations prior to trauma did not differ with respect to their PTGI-X scores.

Table 54 PTGI-X Scores by organization affiliation prior to spiritual/religious trauma

Spiritual/Religious Affiliation	N	Mean	SD
Formal religious organization affiliation	322	3.05	1.03
Formal spiritual organization affiliation	12	3.03	1.16
No affiliation	73	2.78	1.07

Table 55 presents the PTGI-X (Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Index) scores of participants based on their spiritual/religious organizational affiliation (religious, spiritual, or no affiliation) after experiencing posttraumatic growth. A single factor ANOVA test conducted to compare the PTGI-X scores of respondents affiliated with different religious or spiritual organizations after posttraumatic growth was significant at the $p < .01$ level, $F(2, 404) = 6.52$, $p = 0.002$. Post hoc T-tests with Bonferroni correction (critical p value = .017) revealed participants who reported spiritual affiliations differed significantly from those who affiliated with religious organizations ($p < .01$) or had no affiliation ($p < .001$).

Table 55 PTGI-X scores based on organizational affiliation after posttraumatic growth

Organizational Affiliation	N	Mean	SD
Formal religious organization affiliation	100	3.03	1.01

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Formal spiritual organization affiliation	53	3.46	1.06
No affiliation	254	2.90	1.03

Table 56 presents the PTGI-X (Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Index) scores (mean and standard deviation) for participants based on their spiritual/religious identity (religious, spiritual, agnostic, atheist, or none) prior to experiencing spiritual/religious trauma. A single factor ANOVA test was conducted to compare PTGI-X scores of respondents with different spiritual/religious identities prior to experiencing spiritual/religious trauma. No significant differences were found, $F(4, 402) = 0.98$, $p = 0.419$. Results reveal there were no significant differences in PTGI-X scores among participants based on religious/spiritual identity prior to experiencing spiritual/religious trauma.

Table 56 PTGI-X by participant spiritual/religious identity prior to trauma

Spiritual/Religious Identity	N	Mean	SD
Spiritual	73	3.06	1.11
Religious	269	3.03	0.99
Agnostic	34	2.67	1.02
Atheist	11	3.00	1.46
None listed	20	3.00	1.30

Table 57 presents the PTGI-X (Spiritual Posttraumatic Growth Index) scores (mean and standard deviation) for participants based on their spiritual/religious identity (religious, spiritual, agnostic, atheist, or none) after experiencing posttraumatic growth. A single factor ANOVA test was conducted to compare PTGI-X scores of respondents with

different spiritual/religious identities after experiencing posttraumatic growth. Results revealed a significant effect of the spiritual identity on PTGI-X following posttraumatic growth, $F(3, 403) = 6.39, p = 0.001$. Post hoc t-tests with Bonferroni correction (critical p value = .0125) indicated the PTGI-X for participants who identified as spiritual differed significantly from the PTGI-X scores of participants who identified as agnostic $p < .01$ and atheist $p < .001$. This finding indicates that after experiencing posttraumatic growth participants who identified as spiritual had a higher average posttraumatic growth (PTGI-X) score than those who identified as either agnostic or atheist. There were no significant differences among the PTGI-X scores of participants who reported other spiritual/religious identities.

Table 57 PTGI-X by participant	N	Mean	SD
spiritual/religious identity after growth			
Spiritual/Religious Identity			
Spiritual	236	3.17	1.02
Religious	53	3.01	0.97
Agnostic	63	2.75	0.94
Atheist	55	2.58	1.18

Chapter 5. Discussion

Interpretation of Data

When interpreting the results of this study, it is important to keep in mind that the methodology was specifically designed to select only participants who self-identified as having experienced religious/spiritual trauma. Thus, neither the relative response rates, nor the saturation of trauma experiences reported in this study, can be interpreted as reflecting the frequency of religious/spiritual trauma among either the LGBTQ+ or Ally communities. Rather, this study was designed to provide insight into the experiences of individuals who have experienced religious/spiritual trauma as well as subsequent posttraumatic growth. While the participant recruitment strategy was biased toward attracting members of the LGBTQ+ community, a sufficient number of Ally respondents affiliated with these organizations did respond to make possible the comparative analyses called for in the design.

Overall, the results of this study revealed the experiences of individuals in the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities who self-identify as having experienced religious/spiritual trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth were more similar than different. The study also sheds light on those few areas where the experience of religious/spiritual trauma among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities may differ, although no differences were found between the posttraumatic growth reported by members of these two communities. The primary differences observed among both LGBTQ+ and Ally participants were with respect to the religious/spiritual affiliation and identity reported by both groups before experiencing trauma, compared with after posttraumatic growth.

Summary of Qualitative Analysis (Phase I)

In the qualitative phase (I) 24 interviews were conducted with 14 participants who self-identified as LGBTQ+ and 10 participants who self-identified as allies of the LGBTQ+ community. The interviews consisted of 7 questions eliciting responses and anecdotal stories providing insights into participant's experiences with religious/spiritual trauma and the subsequent growth that followed. Open-coding was used to identify 946 meaning bits in all the interviews, 780 related to the three broad themes of trauma (trauma event/aspect), pivot (shift or pivot moment), and growth points (where prolonged permanent growth occurred), and 168 related to 7 additional themes present in all interviews: 1) whether participants experienced single or multiple traumas, 2) organization affiliation when trauma first occurred and 3) after posttraumatic growth occurred, 4) if applicable the organization affiliation denomination when trauma first occurred and 5) following posttraumatic growth, and 6) spiritual, agnostic, or atheist affiliation when trauma first occurred and 7) following posttraumatic growth (see Figure 4).

Results of the open coding were reported as frequencies in Chapter 4, in order to demonstrate a sufficient level of saturation for each theme in the interviews conducted. However, given the non-representative nature of the interview sample, these frequencies do not accurately reflect the proportion of LGBTQ+ and Ally communities experiencing each theme, but rather serve as an indicator of whether there was sufficient representation in the sample to capture similarities and differences in how these participants described their experience of spiritual trauma and posttraumatic growth.

Almost all interview participants reported being members of a religious or

spiritual organization (90% of Ally; 100% of LGBTQ+) and identifying as spiritual (80% of Ally; 100% of LGBTQ+) at the time they experienced spiritual trauma. Following posttraumatic growth, a lower percentage of both groups reported being affiliated with a religious organization (20% of Ally; 57% of LGBTQ+, but the vast majority still considered themselves spiritual (90% of Ally; 85.8% of LGBTQ+). Thus in the discussing of qualitative results below, it is important to remember that individuals not affiliated with religious organizations at the time of their spiritual trauma, or who do not consider themselves spiritual after post traumatic growth are not reflected in this study. Further research would be need to characterize the qualitative experiences of those individuals.

Four qualitative research questions were informed by analysis of these interview results. In general, LGBTQ+ participants provided more detailed accounts of their experiences of religious trauma, as reflected in the higher percentage of trauma markers per interview extracted from the narrative responses (11.9% for Ally; 16.4% for LGBTQ+). Note, each trauma event may contain multiple trauma markers embedded within it. Thus, this bias in the data does not necessarily reflect more numerous, severe or extensive trauma, but does skew results and may reflect greater motivation on the part of LGBTQ+ participants to share their stories.

Research Question 1. How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to their lived experience of spiritual or religious trauma?

There were many similarities in the types of trauma experienced by LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants. Exclusivity, rigidity, control, fundamentalism, abuse, and emotional abuse types of trauma all emerged in the interviews for both LGBTQ+ and

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Ally participants. Overall, the themes extracted from interviews were reflected in roughly the same form and frequency among both the LGBTQ+ and Ally participants as summarized in Table 58. The frequency with which each theme was mentioned was at least 9 percentage points higher among Allies for 3 of the themes, and at least 9 percentage points higher for LGBTQ+ for 6 of the themes. In terms of saturation, the frequencies fell below 50% for both Ally and LGBTQ+ on four of the nine themes and three of the sub-themes.

Table 58. Summary frequency data for emergent themes reflected in qualitative data

Emergent Themes & Sub-themes	Ally (% reporting)	LGBTQ+ (% reporting)
Messaging	90%	92.9%
Hell, fire, brimstone and eternal damnation	20%	64.3%
Homophobia	40%	35.7%
Pray the gay away	0%	50%
Sin, etc.	0%	42.9%
Mixed messages	80%	50%
Misalignment	80%	28.6%
Confusion	0%	42.9%
Exclusivity	80%	71.4%
Rigidity	80%	64.3%
Control	40%	64.3%
Fear	30%	50%
Emotional abuse	20%	42.9%

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Fundamentalism	20%	42.9%
Abuse	20%	28.6%

No notable qualitative differences were observed with respect to the overarching themes. Only with respect to the sub-themes related to messaging and mixed messaging, were notable qualitative differences identified. Two messaging sub-themes, sin (42.9%) and pray the gay away (50%), were reflected only in the LGBTQ+ interviews; while, a third messaging sub-theme (hell, brimstone, fire, and eternal damnation) was reflected predominantly among LGBTQ+ participants (64.3% LGBTQ+; 20% Ally). Similarly, the praying the gay away sub-theme mentioned by 50% of LGBTQ+ participants can be oversimply defined as the want, desire, or longing to repent, pray, or ask one's higher power in the form of prayer to take away one's LGBTQ+ identity. This messaging-based trauma was often mentioned in situations where the participant shared experiences of wanting to change their sexual orientation/gender identity to fit the messaging they heard in church (then often additionally perpetuated and instilled into them by society and familial relationships).

The messaging-based trauma sub-theme of 'sin and love the sinner and hate the sin' mentioned by 6 (42.9%) of the 14 LGBTQ+ participants embodies a layer of homophobia cloaked in a false message of support while simultaneously asserting that one doesn't hate LGBTQ+ people just the sin that is innately a piece of the LGBTQ+ individual. An inverse difference was observed with respect to a single sub-theme related to mixed-messaging, alignment, which was reported by 80% of Ally participants, but only 28.6% of LGBTQ+ participants. The alignment sub-theme refers to mixed messaging that appeared to the participant as multiple messages that weren't in

agreement or alignment.

Collectively, these data reveal that the lived experience of spiritual or religious trauma of LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants in this study were not that different, and was limited to a small number of specific sub-themes related to messaging.

Research Question 2. How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to their lived experience of post-traumatic growth following spiritual or religious trauma?

The qualitative data analyzed revealed only one difference in the themes related to pivot points experienced by LGBTQ+ and Ally participants during posttraumatic growth. The pivot point theme of acceptance emerged in only LGBTQ+ participant interviews (nearly 60%) and includes: acceptance, self-acceptance, self-love, inclusivity, non-judgement, and visibility. Feeling accepted by organizations, others, family/friends, and oneself are all avenues that were shared within the interviews pertaining to acceptance. Therefore, the qualitative data collected for this study revealed only LGBTQ+ participants experienced acceptance-based pivot points during their posttraumatic growth, compared to Ally-identifying participants. All other pivot points present in the qualitative data related to realization, connection, exploration, therapy, teaching/advocacy, and positive emotional growth were experienced in roughly equal proportion by both LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying interviewees. Overall, the qualitative data in this study revealed substantial similarities among the LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants in the avenues through which they pivot to achieve posttraumatic growth.

Research Question 3. How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect how they describe their affiliation with spiritual or religious

organizations over the course of their posttraumatic growth experience?

The interview data reported in Chapter 4 reveal a mass exodus from religious/spiritual organizations among both LGBTQ+ and Ally-identifying participants, where during trauma 23 out of 24 (table 1) participants were affiliated with a religious/spiritual organization, and following growth only 10 out of 24 total participants (table 2) were affiliated with a religious/spiritual organization. Most notably 13 (7 ally and 6 LGBTQ+) participants left their religious organizations following their self-identified posttraumatic growth. Thus, twice as many Ally-identifying participants (80%) as LGBTQ+ participants in this study (40%) left religious/spiritual organizations altogether after experiencing religious/spiritual trauma. Therefore, with respect to research question 3, LGBTQ+ identifying participants in this study experienced lower amounts of exodus from religious/spiritual organizations following self-reported posttraumatic growth from religious or spiritual trauma than did the Ally identifying participants.

Research Question 4. How do the members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect how they describe their spiritual or agnostic identification over the course of their posttraumatic growth experience?

Of the 24 participants interviewed, 22 identified (80% of Allies and 100% of LGBTQ+) as religious or spiritual when the trauma first occurred, while 2 participants, both ally identifying, reported their spiritual affiliation as agnostic (1) or atheist (1). Following posttraumatic growth, 21 participants (90% of Ally and 85.8% of LGBTQ+) identified as spiritual/religious. Both the Ally who identified as atheist and the Ally who identified as agnostic at the time their trauma first occurred now identify as spiritual

following posttraumatic growth. The ally who now identifies as agnostic following posttraumatic growth was spiritual when their trauma first occurred. Among the LGBTQ+ participants, 2 who identified as spiritual at the time their trauma occurred, now identify as either agnostic or atheist following their posttraumatic growth. Thus with respect to Research questions 4, the qualitative results of this study do not reveal any substantial differences between LGBTQ+ and Ally-identifying participants with regard to their spiritual identities prior to trauma or after posttraumatic growth.

Summary of Quantitative Analysis (Phase II)

Phase II analysis reported results of 407 complete survey responses. The breakdown of respondents' sexual orientation was 75% LGBTQ+ and 25% Ally. The breakdown of respondents' gender identity was 73% cisgender and 27% transgender. The following research questions were addressed by the analysis of these quantitative data.

Research Question 5. How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to the nature of trauma experienced?

Based on chi-square analysis, there was a significant difference on two (2) of the nine (9) categories of trauma assessed: mental health and discrimination. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference between the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities is partially rejected. Data revealed LGBTQ+ participants reported experiencing higher amounts of mental health and discrimination-based trauma than Ally participants, while there were no differences in the amount of trauma related to abuse, addiction, relationship-oriented, poverty/food or housing insecurities, serious injury/illness, disastrous events, and physical safety impediment-based traumas reported by LGBTQ+ and Ally participants (see Table 38). Referring the frequency data on the two forms of trauma for which a

significant difference was found, 8.6% more LGBTQ+ participants identified as having mental health-related traumas compared to Ally-identifying participants, and 28.7% more LGBTQ+ participants identified discrimination than Ally participants (see Table 37).

Research Question 6. How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies differ with respect to the spiritual or religious aspects of trauma experienced?

Based on chi-square analysis, there was a significant difference on 5 of 6 types of spiritual/religious trauma assessed. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference between the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities is partially rejected. Data reveals LGBTQ+ participants reported experiencing higher amounts of messaging, abuse, threatening, and coerced/forced-based traumas, and Ally-identifying participants reported experiencing higher amounts of other-types of traumas (not listed) (See Table 40). There were no differences in the amount of spiritual or religious trauma related to fanatical-based traumas reported by LGBTQ+ and Ally participants.

Referring to the frequency data for self-identified spiritual/religious traumas aggregated by LGBTQ+ and Ally identity in Table 39, messaging, abuse, threatening, coerced/forced-based traumas were all reported at least 10% more for the LGBTQ+ identifying participants. Forced/coerced-based traumas were reported 40.3% higher among the LGBTQ+ participants. 12.1% more Ally-identifying participants identified spiritual/religious-based traumas that were not listed, therefore it appears that additional trauma-theme categories might be beneficial in capturing traumas that weren't presented in the original themes created. Additionally, the cumulative values in Table 39 show that Ally-identifying participants reported experiencing on average 1.99 different types of traumas per person, whereas, the LGBTQ+ participants reported on average 2.72

different types of trauma. However, these numbers do not represent differences in the average number of trauma-events experienced by LGBTQ+ and Ally participants.

Research Question 7. How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma differ with respect to the antecedents of posttraumatic growth relative to: a) organizational affiliation and b) religious/spiritual identity?

Based on chi-square analysis, there were no significant differences between members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally community with respect to either their a) organizational affiliation, or b) religious/spiritual identity, prior to experiencing spiritual/religious trauma. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference between the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities is accepted.

Research Question 8. How do members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma differ with respect to the outcomes of posttraumatic growth relative to: a) organizational affiliation and b) religious/spiritual orientation?

Based on chi-square analysis, there were no significant differences between members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally community with respect to either their a) organizational affiliation, or b) religious/spiritual identity after experiencing post-traumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference between the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities is accepted.

Research Question 9. With respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma does affiliation with a spiritual or religious organization following posttraumatic growth differ

significantly from affiliation prior to trauma?

Based on Wilcoxon signed rank analysis, the religious/spiritual organizational affiliations of members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities were found to differ significantly from their spiritual/religious affiliations after posttraumatic growth. The LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents in this study reported significantly higher frequency of no religious or spiritual organizational affiliation following posttraumatic growth than at the time they initially experience religious/spiritual trauma. The frequency of spiritual organizational affiliation also increased slightly, while affiliation with religious organizations decreased significantly. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference in religious/spiritual affiliation before and after trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities was rejected.

Research Question 10. With respect to members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious trauma does spiritual or agnostic identity following posttraumatic growth differ significantly from spiritual or agnostic identity prior to trauma?

Based on Wilcoxon signed rank analysis, the religious/spiritual identity of members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities were found to differ significantly from their spiritual/religious identities after posttraumatic growth. The LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents in this study reported a significantly lower frequency of religious identity following posttraumatic growth than at the time they initially experience religious/spiritual trauma, while the frequency of spiritual identity increased significantly. Slightly increases in the frequency of agnostic and atheist identity after posttraumatic growth were also observed. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference in

religious/spiritual identity before and after trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities was rejected.

Research Question 11. Among members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies who self-identify as having experienced spiritual/religious affiliated trauma, how do the dimensions of spiritual posttraumatic growth (SPTG) differ based on the nature of their trauma?

Results of single-factor ANOVA found no significant difference among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities on dimensions of spiritual posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X, based on the nature of their trauma. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference on the PTGI-X based on the nature of trauma experienced is accepted.

Research Question 12. Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, does prior affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization predict dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X?

Results of single-factor ANOVA found no significant difference among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities on spiritual posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X, based on affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization prior to experiencing religious/spiritual trauma. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference on PTGI-X based on prior religious or spiritual organizational affiliation is accepted.

Research Question 13. Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their

allies who self-identify as having experienced post-traumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, does prior spiritual or religious identification predict dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X?

Results of single-factor ANOVA found no significant differences among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities on spiritual posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X, based on spiritual or religious identification prior to experiencing spiritual/religious trauma. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference on PTGI-X based on prior spiritual or religious identification is accepted.

Research Question 14. Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, do dimensions of post-traumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X predict current affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization?

Results of ANOVA found a significant difference among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities on spiritual posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-X, based on current affiliation or non-affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization. Post hoc analysis found that members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities who are currently affiliated with a spiritual organization scored higher on the PTGI-X than those either a) affiliated with a religious organization or b) not affiliated with any religious or spiritual organization. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference in PTGI-X based on current affiliation with a religious or spiritual organization was rejected.

Research Question 15. Among individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies who self-identify as having experienced posttraumatic growth following spiritual/religious trauma, do dimensions of posttraumatic growth assessed by the PTGI-

X predict current spiritual or religious identification?

Results of single-factor ANOVA, found a significant difference among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities with respect to current spiritual or religious identification. Post hoc analysis revealed that members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities who currently identify as spiritual scored higher on the PTGI-X than those who either identified as a) agnostic or b) atheist. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference in PTGI-X based on current spiritual or religious identification was rejected.

Implications & Applications

Non-parametric quantitative analysis (chi-square) provided partial support for two hypotheses pertaining to differences between LGBTQ+ and Ally communities with respect to the nature of trauma and the nature of religious/spiritual trauma experienced. Only with respect to mental health and discrimination did LGBTQ+ respondents report higher rates of trauma than Allies, while no differences were reported with respect to the other 7 types of trauma assessed (abuse, addiction, relationship-oriented, poverty/food or housing insecurities, serious injury/illness, disastrous events, and physical safety impediment-based traumas). Similar partial support was found for 4 of 6 hypothesized differences between LGBTQ+ and Ally respondents with respect to the incidents of religious/spiritual traumas reported. These parametric analyses provide evidence for patterns of responses that suggest some types of trauma (mental health and discrimination), and particular types of religious trauma (messaging, abuse by a church leader, forced/coerced to pretend or hide) are reported more frequently by members of the LGBTQ+ community than by the Ally community, while Allies reported a greater frequency of other types of religious/spiritual traumas not specified on the survey

instrument.

Parametric quantitative analysis (single-factor ANOVA) also provided support for two hypotheses regarding scores on the PTGI-X assessment of spiritual posttraumatic growth. After experiencing posttraumatic growth, scores on the PTGI-X were found to be higher for members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities who were a) affiliated with a spiritual organization (as opposed to a religious organization or no affiliation) or b) identified as spiritual (as opposed to atheist or agnostic). But there were no differences between LGBTQ+ and Ally participants' PTGI-X scores based on their spiritual/religious affiliation or identification prior to experiencing religious/spiritual trauma.

No support was found for hypothesized differences among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities with respect to their posttraumatic growth (assessed by the PTGI-X) based on the nature the trauma experienced. Nor were the hypothesized differences in PTGI-X based on prior spiritual/religious affiliation or identification supported by the results of this study.

Qualitative analysis provided insight into the many similarities and relatively few differences among the stories reported by members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities participating in this study, regarding the nature of their spiritual/religious trauma and paths to posttraumatic growth.

Based on the results of this study it is possible to identify multiple areas of continuing and new research opportunities for the future.

Trauma-based events and markers identified in both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study are paralleled in many areas where participants identified traumas that they experienced. Messaging-based traumas, for instance, were

observed in 92.9% for LGBTQ+ and in 90.0% of Ally identifying participants in the qualitative phase (Table 6) and 64.1% of Ally participants and 80.3% LGBTQ+ identifying participants in the quantitative phase (Table 39). 77.0% of total participants (qualitative and quantitative phases) identified that they had messaging-based trauma.

The qualitative data revealed widespread similarities in the types of trauma (exclusivity, rigidity, control, fundamentalism, abuse, and emotional abuse) and growth/pivot points (realization, connection, exploration, therapy, teaching/advocacy, positive emotional growth) experienced by LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants. This is not something that we initially anticipated, but emerged as a valuable area to analyze.

The relationship between organization affiliation and spiritual/agnostic identity and the trauma and spiritual growth experience was not readily evident in either the qualitative or quantitative portion of the study for LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants, though can be seen in the relationship between cisgender and transgender participants to some degree. Whereas, the data suggests there were robust similar patterns of exodus from religious to spiritual identities in the quantitative analysis from both LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants.

In the quantitative data we observed that transgender participants were more likely to endure certain types of traumas and spiritual/religious-based traumas. The data suggests that transgender participants were more likely to experience the traumas of abuse, mental health, addiction, relationship, poverty, discrimination, and physical safety-based traumas. Additionally, the data collected suggests that transgender participants were more likely to experience messaging, abuse, forced-coerced, and threatening-based

traumas than cisgender-identifying participants.

Posttraumatic growth was revealed in the qualitative interviews in themes within the pivot and growth points that included acceptance, realization, therapy, connection, exploration, teaching/advocacy, and positive emotional growth in the qualitative portion of the study. These emergent themes in the qualitative portion of the study have some conceptual similarity to the 6 spiritual growth categories on the PTGI-X (“I have a better understanding of spiritual matters, I have a stronger religious faith, I have greater clarity about life’s meaning, I feel better able to face questions about life and death, I feel more connected with all of existence, and I have a greater sense of harmony with the world” (Tedeschi, 2017, p.13)) utilized in the quantitative portion of the study to measure growth. Interview participants provided some qualitative details related to their individual experience of these dimensions of posttraumatic growth, while the survey documented the range of trauma and subsequent growth experienced. There was no evidence of significant differences in how LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants experienced growth in either the qualitative or quantitative portions of the study. Both phases suggested that the growth experienced is somewhat universal in the ways in which participants experienced it. The only significant divergence from this generalization is in the qualitative pivot point growth where acceptance emerged more commonly as a marker of growth among LGBTQ+ interviewees but wasn’t experienced in any of the Ally-identifying participants until later in the growth process (where growth points emerged).

Limitations

The most distinct limitation is that we did not have a universal sample, as the data

were collected from only the Midwestern region in the United States. Additionally, the process of soliciting participants for both the qualitative and quantitative phases relied on a network of nonprofit/social service organizations linked to the principal investigator's own regional non-profit work in Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, and Kentucky. These solicitation methods may have introduced bias into the participant sample for both the qualitative and quantitative portions of the study. Different solicitation methods might have attracted a more diverse participant pool that could possibly have yielded different results. Therefore, caution must be exercise in extrapolating findings from this study to other regions of the United States or a global context.

Phase I and II utilized self-identification of LGBTQ+ or Ally status and the participant was screened for having experienced self-identified religious/spiritual trauma and subsequent growth to qualify for the study. As with any self-assessment study or self-identifying technique in data collection there is the potential that the participant provides inaccurate information or identification.

Finally, while the subjective nature of the data collected in this study is a strength of the study, and an intentional delimitation of the methodology, it is also important to not substitute these findings for objective assessments of abuse in religious or spiritual organizations. All metrics employed in this study were self-assessments reported by and from the perspective of other those interpreting their experience of religious or spiritual trauma. The important contribution these subjective accounts contribute to our understanding of posttraumatic growth among members of the LGBTQ+ and Ally communities is just part of the evidence required to construct a comprehensive understanding of religious/spiritual trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth in these

populations.

Future Research

There are several avenues for future research that could expand on and clarify the results of this study. Replicating this study using other solicitation methods in other parts of the country or internationally would help correct for any biases in this study resulting from relying on a single regional non-profit network. It would also be valuable to balance these findings with research using the PTGI-X to assess posttraumatic growth among documented victims of abuse in religious/spiritual organizations. Comparative studies including members of religious/spiritual organizations who do not identify as Ally would help inform the differences between experiences of trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth among LGBTQ+ and heterosexual populations.

Focusing future social science research on the nature of posttraumatic growth among the LGBTQ+ community could provide additional insights into the context and significance of these growth experiences among members of this population. There are potentially numerous variables that contribute to spiritual growth outside of trauma or traumatic experiences, therefore it's important to consider additional avenues and paths of how individuals reach spiritual growth outside of trauma. Some of these avenues might be able to be derived from the pivot points examined in this qualitative study that include therapy, realization, connection, exploration, and acceptance. Is it possible some individuals potentially reach these pivot points leading to growth without having experienced trauma prior to the pivot or growth point.

Continued research could also be conducted around the messaging trauma sub-themes of praying the gay away and sin/love the sinner hate the sin. These two sub-

themes emerged in only LGBTQ+ participants in the qualitative data collected. In addition, over 80% of LGBTQ+ participants in the quantitative study had experienced messaging-based trauma. There is currently nominal religious/spiritual based-trauma research, especially with an LGBTQ+ intersection. This research would assist therapists, counselors, and those in the psychology field in understanding the complex traumas that are specific to LGBTQ+ identifying participants. Additionally, since over 77% of total participants self-identified as having experienced religious/spiritual messaging-based traumas this could be an interesting avenue to explore and continue future research.

The qualitative data revealed a multitude of similarities in the types of trauma and growth/pivot points experienced by LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying participants. Additional research could examine the similarities in trauma and growth for both LGBTQ+ and Ally identifying communities. Furthermore, growth and pivot points tend to appear as mostly universal in the data collected in this study, and could provide an additional area for future researchers to investigate the universalism of how individuals grow from trauma and the major commonalities in experiences during posttraumatic growth following spiritual trauma.

Additional transgender focused religious/spiritual posttraumatic research would aid social scientists and psychological experts in gaining insights and avenues into how this sub-community of the LGBTQ+ community heals, grows, and expands after trauma. The transgender community, though a piece of the LGBTQ+ community, often faces different or more extensive traumas that might need to be examined separate from the collective LGBTQ+ community to fully understand the trauma and subsequent growth that occurs within this community.

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Posttraumatic spiritual growth has not yet been extensively researched among members of the LGBTQ+ community. An increase in future studies would assist in more fully understanding the vast complexity of not only trauma, but the ways individuals, especially those who identify as LGBTQ+, experience growth, as well as how the experiences parallel those of the Ally community. Additional national and international data collection would be beneficial in affirming the universality of spiritual trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth among these communities. Since, the culture and societal norms, and even laws, vary per country or region it could be valuable for these studies to aggregate international data to account for these norms and laws by region.

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Appendix A

Letter of Request (Phase I-Interview)

Dear Community Leader,

As you may know I am currently a doctoral student conducting dissertation research in collaboration with Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D., Professor & Inaugural Program Director of Leadership Studies at Xavier University. We are requesting your assistance with identifying potential participants who are willing to be interviewed for this study. To qualify, participants must be able to answer yes to the following 5 questions:

1. Do you identify as being LGBTQ+ or an ally of the LGBTQ+ community?
2. Have experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma?
3. Have experienced self-identified growth after such trauma?
4. Do you live in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana?
5. Are you 18 years of age or older?

The confidential interview will take roughly 45-60 minutes and will be conducted via Zoom. Questions will focus on the nature of the trauma and the posttraumatic growth journey. Below I've attached a message you can simply copy and paste to send to potential participants or post on social media to streamline this process- thank you! Our hope is that this research will yield understanding and spotlights areas of future research and service to those who have experienced religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community. For more information of questions please contact Ryan Joseph Allen at Allenr11@xavier.edu or 859-835-2764.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Ryan Joseph Allen

Hello,

I'm reaching out to share an invitation to participate in a dissertation research study being conducted by my fellow non-profit friend and colleague Ryan Joseph Allen in collaboration with Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D., Professor & Inaugural Program Director of Leadership Studies at Xavier University. Participation will consist of a 45-60 minute interview conducted by Ryan remotely via Zoom. The confidential interview will focus on experiences of religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community. Please share this information with anyone you know who might be interested in assisting with this research.

Anyone who can answer yes to the following questions, is encouraged to consider volunteering to participate in this study:

1. Do you identify as being LGBTQ+ or an ally?
2. Have experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma?

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3. Have experienced self-identified growth after said trauma?
4. Do you live in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana?
5. Are you 18 years or older?

If you or someone you know can answer yes to all 5 questions they qualify to participate in this important research study. The confidential interview will focus on the nature of the trauma experienced and subsequent posttraumatic growth journey. Interested prospective participants may click the link below to find out more about the study and indicate their willingness to participate:

If interested in participating please click the Qualtrics link provided:
https://xavier.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_dnfw69gRtk5wehw

The researchers hope this study will yield understanding and spotlight areas of future research and service to those who have experienced religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community.

For more information of questions please contact Ryan Joseph Allen at Allenr11@xavier.edu or 859-835-2764.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix B

Letter of Request (Phase II-Survey)

Dear Community Leader,

As you may know I am currently a doctoral student conducting dissertation research in collaboration with Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D., Professor & Inaugural Program Director of Leadership Studies at Xavier University. We are reaching out in hopes you can help us solicit willing participants for the survey portion of this study by sharing the message below with individuals in your communication network.

Please help share information about this anonymous survey with those who can potentially answer yes to the 5 questions below:

- 1. Identify as being LGBTQ+ or an ally**
- 2. Have experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma**
- 3. Have experienced self-identified growth after said trauma**
- 4. Live in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana**
- 5. 18 years or older**

We hope this study will yield understanding and spotlight areas of future research and service to those who have experienced religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community.

The attached flyer has more detailed information. Thank you so much for your help in disseminating the survey to family, friends, participants, volunteers, and colleagues. Please share the flier with the message below to members of your organizations' distribution network through email and social media including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Ryan Joseph Allen

Hello,

I'm reaching out to share an invitation to participate in a dissertation research study being conducted by my fellow non-profit friend and colleague Ryan Joseph Allen in collaboration with Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D., Professor & Inaugural Program Director of Leadership Studies at Xavier University. Participation will consist of an anonymous 15 minute survey completed online. The survey questions focus on experiences of religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community.

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Anyone who can answer Yes to the following questions, is encouraged to consider volunteering to participate in this study:

- 1. Do you identify as being LGBTQ+ or an ally?**
- 2. Have experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma?**
- 3. Have experienced self-identified growth after said trauma?**
- 4. Do you live in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana?**
- 5. Are you 18 years or older?**

The researchers hope this study will yield understanding and spotlight areas of future research and service to those who have experienced religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community.

If you or someone you know can answer yes to all 5 questions they qualify to participate in this study.

To find out more and complete the anonymous survey simple click the link below:

https://xavier.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6QHkIckaCjCQ0tw

For more information of questions please contact Ryan Joseph Allen at Allenr11@xavier.edu or 859-835-2764.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



**LGBTQ + SPIRITUAL
GROWTH SURVEY**



 **PLEASE HELP US WITH THE SURVEY**

Do you identify as a member OR an ally within the LGBTQ+ community? Have you experienced religious or spiritual trauma? Have you grown as a result of this trauma? Are you 18 or older? Do you live in KY, IN, OH, or TN? If you answered yes to all 5 questions PLEASE help us in an important study investigating posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community!

MORE INFORMATION:

- Research study approved by Xavier University's Internal Review Board (Cincinnati, OH)
- No compensation of any sort will be provided to participants.
- Survey will be a one-time anonymous survey taking roughly 15 minutes to complete.
- Survey is completely voluntary and informed consent will be provided to participants prior to survey completion.
- Please access the survey directly via the Qualtrics link
- For further information or questions please contact Ryan Joseph Allen at Allenr11@xavier.edu or 859-835-2764.
- Survey is part of a study conducted by Ryan Joseph Allen pursuing his Ed.D. from Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH.

Appendix C

Survey Flyer (and announcement text)

Announcement text:

Please help share this important anonymous survey with community members who **Live in Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, or Indiana, are 18 years or older, identify as being LGBTQ+ or an ally, have experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma, and have experienced self-identified growth after said trauma.**

Our hope is that this research spotlights areas of future research around religious trauma and posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, this research will hopefully aid in religious/spiritual healing/reconciliation, education opportunities, and more understanding in how LGBTQ+ community members grow from trauma.

The anonymous survey will take roughly 15 minutes and can be accessed directly from this link: https://xavier.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6QHkIckaCjCQ0tw

For further information please contact Ryan Joseph Allen at Allenr11@xavier.edu or 859-835-2764. The attached flyer has more detailed information. Thank you so much for your help in disseminating the survey to family, friends, participants, volunteers, and colleagues.

Optional for leaders of organizations: (Additionally, if you can share this on your organizations' social media including Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram that would be immensely valuable in this endeavor. Feel free to simply copy and paste the above message to streamline the process if you desire- thank you!)



The poster features a rainbow-colored sunburst at the top, with rays in shades of green, yellow, orange, red, and purple. Below the sunburst, the text "LGBTQ + SPIRITUAL GROWTH SURVEY" is written in a bold, purple, sans-serif font. To the right of the text is a large, black-outlined heart. Below the text and heart is a row of six religious and spiritual symbols: a green circle with a white tree, a yellow Star of David, a red wheel with eight spokes, a red Om symbol, a blue cross, and a blue crescent moon with a white star. The background of the poster is a gradient of colors, including green, orange, purple, and blue, with a stylized rainbow flag pattern on the left side.

**LGBTQ + SPIRITUAL
GROWTH SURVEY**

☑ **PLEASE HELP US WITH THE SURVEY**

Do you identify as a member OR an ally within the LGBTQ+ community? Have you experienced religious or spiritual trauma? Have you grown as a result of this trauma? Are you 18 or older? Do you live in KY, IN, OH, or TN? If you answered yes to all 5 questions PLEASE help us in an important study investigating posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ community!

MORE INFORMATION:

- Research study approved by Xavier University's Internal Review Board (Cincinnati, OH)
- No compensation of any sort will be provided to participants.
- Survey will be a one-time anonymous survey taking roughly 15 minutes to complete.
- Survey is completely voluntary and informed consent will be provided to participants prior to survey completion.
- Please access the survey directly via the Qualtrics link
- For further information or questions please contact Ryan Joseph Allen at Allenr11@xavier.edu or 859-835-2764.
- Survey is part of a study conducted by Ryan Joseph Allen pursuing his Ed.D. from Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH.

Appendix D

Interview questions (Phase I)

Thank you so much for taking the time to chat with me today about your experiences around the religious or spiritual trauma that you've been through. My hope is that by the end of this conversation I will have an understanding of those experiences and your subsequent growth. Just to remind you, once we begin the interview, I will be transcribing our conversation to ensure I accurately capture your responses for analysis later on, so you will need to turn off your video for that portion of this session. Before we begin, do you affirm your prior written approval to participate in the study and have your interview transcribed? Ok, great. [If not, then terminate the interview.] Do you have any questions for me before I start the transcription?

1. Context. Before we discuss your experience of religious or spiritual trauma, I want to understand the context in which it occurred. Please tell me about what was going on in your life at the time with respect to religious or spiritual activities?

Possible probes if not volunteered: How would you characterize your spiritual life at the time? Were you participating in any form of organized religious activities? Were you a member of a religious group or organization? How would you characterize your level of involvement? How important were these activities to you?

2. Trauma. Thank-you for providing all that context. Now, if it's alright with you, I'd like to move on to talking more specifically about what you experienced as hurtful or harmful to you in the religious or spiritual context you have described. When did you first begin to notice your experiences as being hurtful or harmful? How did this awareness come about? Do you recall how old you were at the time? Was there a specific event that

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occurred, or a cumulation of experiences that impacted you negatively? Were there particular individuals or organizations involved (I'm not asking for specific names). Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the experiences you felt at the time were hurtful or harmful to you before we move on?

3. Impact. Ok, now I'd like to understand more about the impact these experiences had on you at the time? What stands out to you as the most impactful aspect of the experience? Did the experience affect you mentally? physically? your relationships? your overall well-being? Did you notice any changes in your behavior? Did you experience any change in your belief system or your spiritual life? What about your involvement with religious or spiritual activities? Were there changes in your relationship with those who had a role in causing the hurt or harm? How long did this period last?

4. Growth. Now I am interested in hearing about the growth that eventually occurred following these experiences. Can you tell me how long after the experience you became aware this growth was occurring? Describe what this growth felt like for you? Was there something specific (or some things) that triggered this growth? Tell me about these? Were there particular individuals or organizations that aided you in achieving this growth (again, I am not asking you to name specific individuals or organizations). At the time of this growth, were you connected to a church or spiritual organization? Did that have any role in your growth? Over what period of time did the growth take? Was it gradual or seemingly more instantaneous at one-point in time? What, if any, role did your religious or spiritual beliefs or activities play in your post-traumatic growth?

5. Outcome. Was there a particular point in time when you realized you had achieved a sense of healing or putting the traumatic experiences of the past behind you?

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Tell me about that? What was that realization like for you? Did you notice any changes in yourself as a result of this growth? Mentally? Physically? In your relationships? Overall well-being? Did you change your behavior? Were there any changes in your religious or spiritual beliefs? What about your involvement with religious or spiritual activities after experiencing post-traumatic growth? Did you ever have any follow-up interaction with those who had a role in causing the hurt or harm? If so, is this something you initiated and why?

6. Aftermath. After what you experienced as post-traumatic growth, did others around you notice your growth? What was the effect of your growth on your relationships at home, work or close friends? What long term impact have you experiences in your religious or spiritual beliefs? What about your affiliation with religious or spiritual activities or organizations?

7. Finally, if while you may have touched on these things during this interview, I'd just like to ask you specifically. Before experiencing religious or spiritual trauma, did you identify as religious, spiritual, or agnostic? Were you a member of a religious or spiritual organization? How do you identify today? Are you currently affiliated with any religious or spiritual organization? What, if any role do you feel your experience of post-traumatic growth contributed to this outcome?

Ok, those are all the questions I have for you. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about the experiences we have been discussing today before I stop the interview.

[When done.] Ok, I am stopping the transcription now. You are welcome to turn on your video again if you would like.

I'm so appreciative for you taking the time today to share with me your important story and journey. I am going to conclude the formal interview now, but before we disconnect, I want to check in with you to see if anything we discussed has caused you any distress. How are you feeling now? I know some of the things we talked about today might have been challenging or triggered thoughts you may want to talk with someone about later. That is why we supplied you with a resource list when you filled out your informed consent form. I am posting another copy of that list in the chat for you to download now. Is there anything else that has come up that you would you like to process off the record for a few minutes together before we disconnect now? If not, are you comfortable to conclude the session now? Once again, thank you so much for helping me with this important work that is so close to my heart.

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Appendix E

Survey Questions (Phase II)

Indicate for each of the statements below the degree to which this change occurred in your life as a result the self-identified trauma, using the following scale.

	I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis (0)	I experienced this change to a very small degree as a result of my crisis (1)	I experienced this change to a small degree as a result of my crisis (2)	I experienced this change to a moderate degree as a result of my crisis (3)	I experienced this change to a great degree as a result of my crisis (4)	I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis (5)
1. My priorities about what is important in life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. An appreciation for the value of my own life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I developed new interests	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. A feeling of self-reliance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. A better understanding of spiritual matters	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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6. Knowing that I can count on people in times of trouble

☐☐☐☐☐☐

7. I established a new path for my life

☐☐☐☐☐☐

8. A sense of closeness with others

☐☐☐☐☐☐

9. A willingness to express my emotions

☐☐☐☐☐☐

10. Knowing I can handle difficulties

☐☐☐☐☐☐

11. able to do better things with my life

☐☐☐☐☐☐

12. Being able to accept the way things work out

☐☐☐☐☐☐

13. Appreciating each day

☐☐☐☐☐☐

14. New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise

☐☐☐☐☐☐

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15. Having compassio n for others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16. Putting effort into my relationship s	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17. I'm more likely to try to change things which need changing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. I have a stronger religious faith	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21. I accept needing others	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22. I have a greater sense of harmony with the world	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23. I feel more connected	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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with all of
existence

24. I feel
better able
to face
questions
about life
and death

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

25. I have
greater
clarity
about life's
meaning

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

26. Please identify all types of trauma you personally experienced (check all that apply)

☐ Abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological)

☐ Mental Health (PTSD, eating disorders, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.)

☐ Addiction (drugs, alcohol, sex, porn, social media, shoplifting, gambling, etc.)

☐ Relationship Oriented (such as divorce, addiction within family, familial mental health issues or, death/suicide, etc.)

☐ Poverty/Food or Housing Insecurities (orphaned, fostered, homelessness, etc.)

☐ Serious Injury/Illness or Accident (cancer, burns, dog attack, bike wreck, car accident, fire, etc.)

☐ Disastrous Event/Situation (war, political violence, natural disasters, community violence, mass shooting, mugging, assault, prison/incarceration, terrorism, etc.)

☐ Discrimination/Bullying (workplace harassment, childhood bullying, or discrimination within race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, etc.)

☐ Physical Safety Impediment (kidnapped/trafficked, physically attacked, death threats, robbery, home invasion, etc.)

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27. Please specify any religious or spiritual aspects of the trauma(s) you experienced (check all that apply)

- ☐ Messaging (Biblical/other holy book condemnation, "You're going to hell", hate speech, harassment, discrimination, humiliation, etc.)
- ☐ Abuse by Church Leader (physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, etc.)
- ☐ Threatening (rigid conformity, to act or believe a certain way, use of hell or condemnation, etc.)
- ☐ Cult or Fanatical Affiliation (by force, by choice, or by proximity)
- ☐ Forced or Coerced to Pretend or Hide (sexual orientation, gender identity, going against core beliefs/own heart, questions aren't allowed to be asked, blackmailing, gaslighting, etc.)

28. At the time you first experienced spiritual/religious trauma were you affiliated with a religious or spiritual organization?

- ☐ Yes (formal religious organization)
- ☐ Yes (formal spiritual organization)
- ☐ No affiliation

29. At the present time, having experienced posttraumatic growth, are you affiliated with a religious or spiritual organization?

- ☐ Yes (formal religious organization)
- ☐ Yes (formal spiritual organization)
- ☐ No affiliation

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30. At the time you first experienced spiritual/religious trauma did you self-identify as spiritual, religious, agnostic, or atheist?

- ☐ Spiritual
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ None of the above

31. At the present time, having experienced posttraumatic growth, do you self-identify as spiritual, religious, agnostic, or atheist?

- ☐ Spiritual
- ☐ Religious
- ☐ Agnostic
- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ None of the above

32. Which best describes your gender identity?

- ☐ Cisgender Male
- ☐ Cisgender Female
- ☐ Transgender Male
- ☐ Transgender Female
- ☐ Non-Binary
- ☐ Genderqueer

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- ☐ Gender Fluid
- ☐ A Gender Not Listed Here
-

33. Which of the following best describes your Sexual Orientation?

- ☐ Heterosexual/Straight (Ally)
- ☐ Gay
- ☐ Bisexual
- ☐ Lesbian
- ☐ Asexual
- ☐ Pansexual
- ☐ Demisexual
- ☐ Queer
- ☐ A Sexual Orientation Not Listed
-

Thank you so much for your participation in this study. Please refer to the list below for additional resources.

Resource List

IN CASE OF EMERGENCY PLEASE CALL 911

Suicidal thoughts/actions:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline Toll free 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Trans Lifeline Translifeline.org Toll free 877-565-8860

Hope Line Hopeline.org Toll free 800-442-HOPE (4673)

Drug/alcohol addiction & recovery:

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National Help Line for Substance Abuse 800-262-2463
Drug Recovery Recovery.org Toll free 888-554-0054
SAMHSA SAMHSA.gov 800-662-HELP (4357)

LGBTQ+ Resources:

It Gets Better Itgetsbetter.org
Born This Way Bornthisway.foundation
Stomp Out Bullying Stompoutbullying.org
Kind Campaign Kindcampaign.com
Love is Louder Toll free 1-866-488-7386 Or text START to 741-741

Abuse (physical/sexual/emotional):

Domestic Violence National Domestic Violence Hotline 800-799-SAFE (7233)
Domestic Violence Hotline 800-829-1122
SafeQuest Crisis Line 866-4UR-SAFE (487-7233)
STAND Against Domestic Violence Crisis Hotline 888-215-5555
National Mental Health Association 800-969-6642
Kentucky Abuse Hotline 877-KYSAFE1 (597-2331)
National Child Abuse Hotline 800-25-ABUSE (22873)
Child Abuse Hotline 800-342-3720
ChildHelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline 800-2-A-CHILD (800-422-4453)
A Voice for the Innocent avoicefortheinnocent.org
National Teen Dating Helpline loveisrespect.org 866-331-9474
National Sexual Assault Hotline rainn.org 800-656-4673

Other areas of help:

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders (ANAD) 847-831-3438 (Long Distance)
National AIDS Hotline 800-342-AIDS (2437)
Shoplifters Anonymous 800-848-9595
National Safe Haven Alliance Crisis Hotline for surrendering infants 888-510-BABY (2229)

Appendix F

Informed Consent (Phase I)

My name is Ryan Joseph Allen, a doctoral student conducting dissertation research in collaboration with Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D., Professor & Inaugural Program Director of Leadership Studies at Xavier University. We are contacting you to invite your participation in a study of LGBTQ+ or ally identifying individuals who have experienced growth following religious or spiritual trauma. The purpose of this study is to explore growth after spiritual or religious trauma within the LGBTQ+ and ally communities. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete a confidential interview of 45-60 minutes conducted remotely via Zoom, in which you will be asked to discuss your experience of religious or spiritual trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth. The interview will consist of 7 questions with follow up probes for each question. With your permission, the interview will be transcribed. While the interviewer will know who you are during the interview, all personally identifying information will be removed from the transcripts prior to analyzing the data. There are no significant risks associated with participation in this study, although some participants may find the questions trigger some emotional discomfort. Participants will be provided a list of support organizations they may contact in the event they experience any residual distress following the interview. There will be no direct benefits or compensation for participating. If you are interested in learning more about the study, please continue reading.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study is to explore posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ and ally communities following self-identified religious or spiritual trauma. A semi-structured interview will be conducted remotely via Zoom with individuals from the LGBTQ+ and/ally communities who self-identify as having overcome and experienced growth from religious or spiritual trauma. Your decision whether to participate in this study is entirely your own, and will be known only to you. Interview participants will complete the interview once; no follow-up of any sort will be required.

Why You Were Invited to Take Part

You are being contacted because of your prior association with one or more LGBTQ+ and ally networking communities in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee. If you self-identify as a member of either the LGBTQ+ or ally communities, and have previously experience growth following either religious or spiritual trauma, your perspective is relevant to this study, and you are eligible to participate.

Study Requirements

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to schedule a remote interview to be conducted via Zoom. The interview consists of 7 questions, with probes, focused on your experience of religious or spiritual trauma and subsequent posttraumatic growth. The interview is expected to take about 45 to 60 minutes to complete. No demographic or personally identifying information will be collected during the interview, and responses will be transcribed and de-identified prior to analysis. Results will be analyzed and reported only in the aggregate. Individual participant confidentiality will be

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maintained in all published and professional presentations of study results. All participants must be 18 years old or older to participate.

Anticipated discomforts/risks

There are no significant risks associated with participation in this study. There is a slight possibility that some participants may experience mild discomfort in responding to interview questions about their personal experiences in this study. Participants are only asked to provide information they are comfortable including in their responses.

Participants who are uncomfortable responding to any of the questions about previous trauma or posttraumatic growth may stop the interview at any time. The interviewer, who is experienced in working with members of the LGBTQ+ community who have experienced trauma and growth, will monitor your level of comfort throughout the interview and ask if you wish to continue. A list of community resources for seeking comfort, support or guidance will be provided at the end of the interview, or upon request at any time prior.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you for your participation in the study. However, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community or ally to the community who has experienced growth following religious or spiritual trauma you may gain satisfaction from helping researchers understand these experiences by participating in this study.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

To protect your confidentiality the interviewer will conduct interviews from a private home office, and you may also feel most comfortable being in a private setting where your responses won't be overheard by others. Interviews will be conducted online using a passworded institutional Zoom account to ensure there is minimal risk any information transmitted online will be breached. An individual, passworded Zoom link will be generated for your interview session to ensure no unauthorized intrusions into the interview session. The confidentiality of your interview responses will be maintained by immediately transcribing the audio recording in Zoom and removing all personally identifying information prior to analysis. Only the written transcript of your interview will be saved (no audio recording or video recording will be saved). This will provide the highest level of security and confidentiality for participants. All interviews will be conducted, and data stored, on the principal investigator's personal password-protected computer located in his home office, that only he has access to. Participants' responses will be coded and aggregated in all presentations of study results. Only the co-investigators will have access to the transcripts during data analysis. All email messages sent for purposes of scheduling your interview will be deleted at the conclusion of your interview. After analysis, the deidentified transcripts will be stored in digital form on an external stick drive in a locked cabinet in the principal investigator's home office for 3 years and then destroyed.

Compensation

There will be no compensation awarded for your participation in this study.

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Refusal to participate in this study will have NO EFFECT ON ANY FUTURE SERVICES you may be entitled to from the University. You are FREE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PENALTY.

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the co-investigators, Ryan Joseph Allen at (859) 835-2764 or allenr11@xavier.edu and Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D. at (513) 745-2986 or via lattag@xavier.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Xavier University's Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870 or irb@xavier.edu.

You may print a copy of this form for your records or contact Ryan Joseph Allen at (859) 835-2764 or via email at allenr11@xavier.edu to request a copy be sent to you. Please remember or write down the date that you have signed this Informed Consent form as you will be asked to provide it prior to the start of your interview.

I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and have had the opportunity to contact the researchers with any questions, and to have those questions answered to my satisfaction. By completing the elements of the study as previously described to me, I understand that I am giving my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Choose one:

- ☐ I consent to participate
- ☐ I do not consent to participate

Please indicate whether you grant permission to create a written transcription of your interview:

Choose one:

- ☐ I grant permission to transcribe my interview
- ☐ I do not grant permission to transcribe my interview

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Age Verification

- ☐ I certify that I am at least 18 years of age
- ☐ I am not at least 18 years of age

Appendix G

Informed Consent (Phase II)

My name is Ryan Joseph Allen, a doctoral student conducting dissertation research under the supervision of Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D., Inaugural Program Director & Professor of Leadership Studies at Xavier University. We are contacting you to invite your participation in a study of LGBTQ+ or ally identifying participants that self-identify as having overcome and experienced growth from religious trauma. The purpose of this study is to determine/explore growth after spiritual or religious trauma within the LGBTQ+ community. As a participant in this study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey rating posttraumatic spiritual growth following self-identified religious or spiritual trauma. Screening questions include 2 questions regarding age (18 years old or over) and location (do you currently reside in Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, or Indian). The survey includes 25 questions on a 6-point-scale (plus 6 nature of trauma questions and 2 sexual orientation/gender identity questions). No personal information will be collected that would permit researchers to know the identity of any individual respondents. The survey should take about 15 minutes to complete. There are multiple potential risks associated with participation in this study including emotional and psychological risks. The researchers will supply a resource list at the end of the survey to help support participants that are triggered during the process. There will be no direct benefits or compensation for participating. If you are interested in learning more about the study, please continue reading.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study is to explore posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ and ally community following self-identified religious or spiritual trauma. Survey research methods will be used to solicit confidential responses to an anonymous online survey from LGBTQ+ or ally identifying participants that self-identify as having overcome and experienced growth from religious trauma. Solicitation for your participation may have been disseminated by a nonprofit organization, various leaders of nonprofit organizations, or through the nonprofits' or leaders' social media accounts including (but not limited to) Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram. Your decision whether to participate is entirely your own, and will be known only to you. The study involves examining posttraumatic spiritual growth within the LGBTQ+ and ally community. Survey participants who participate will complete the survey once; no follow-up of any sort will be required.

Why You Were Invited to Take Part

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community or ally to the community who has experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma, you are eligible to participate in this study because you self-identify as to have overcome prior trauma. As a LGBTQ+ or ally member of the community who has experienced religious or spiritual trauma and growth after said trauma, your perspective is relevant to this study.

Study Requirements

If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey consisting of Likert-type ratings scales and multiple-choice questions. Survey questions will ask participants to rate posttraumatic spiritual growth, demographic questions, and nature of trauma questions. The survey is anticipated to take about 15 minutes to complete. No demographic or personally identifying information will be collected that would permit researchers to identify individual survey respondents. Results will be analyzed and reported only in the aggregate. Individual participant anonymity and institutional confidentiality will be maintained in all published and professional presentations of study results. All participants must be 18 years old or older to participate.

Anticipated discomforts/risks

There are no significant risks associated with participation in this study. There is a slight possibility that some participants may experience mild discomfort in responding to survey questions about their personal experiences in this study. Participants are only asked to provide information they are comfortable including in their responses. Participants who are uncomfortable responding to any of the questions about previous trauma or posttraumatic growth may withdraw from the study at any time by simply closing the browser window. A list of community resources for seeking comfort, support or guidance may be accessed at any time while responding to or after completing the survey.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you for your participation in the study. However, as a member of the LGBTQ+ community or ally to the community who has experienced self-identified religious or spiritual trauma and self-identify as having experienced growth following said trauma, your perspective is important to this study and will inform future research on the topic.

Confidentiality/Anonymity

All of your responses will be collected anonymously through the secure Qualtrics website to ensure there is minimal risk any information transmitted online will be breached. The Qualtrics survey will be set to the highest level of security/anonymization, which means that no IP addresses or other Internet-based tracking information or potential identifiers such as geo-location, will be collected. Responses you submit will not be linked to the email address used to contact you about this study, nor will any personally identifying information will be collected that would permit researchers to know the identity of individual respondents. The anonymous data collected this study in digital form will be stored on an external stick drive in a locked cabinet accessible only by the principal investigator in his home office for 3 years and then destroyed.

Compensation

There will be no compensation awarded for your participation in this study.

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Refusal to participate in this study will have NO EFFECT ON ANY FUTURE SERVICES you may be entitled to from the University. You are FREE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY AT ANY TIME WITHOUT PENALTY.

If you have any questions at any time during the study, you may contact the co-investigators, Ryan Joseph Allen at (859) 835-2764 or allenr11@xavier.edu and Dr. Gail F. Latta, Ph.D. at (513) 745-2986 or via lattag@xavier.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to Xavier University's Institutional Review Board at (513) 745-2870 or irb@xavier.edu.

You may print a copy of this form for your records, or contact Ryan Joseph Allen at (859) 835-2764 or via email at allenr11@xavier.edu to request a copy be sent to you.

I have been given information about this research study and its risks and benefits and have had the opportunity to contact the researchers with any questions, and to have those questions answered to my satisfaction. By completing the elements of the study as previously described to me, I understand that I am giving my informed consent to participate in this research study.

Choose one:

- ☐ I consent to participate
- ☐ I do not consent to participate

Choose one:

- ☐ I certify that I am at least 18 years of age
- ☐ I am not at least 18 years of age

Appendix H

Resource List

In case of EMERGENCY please dial 911

Suicidal thoughts/actions:

National Suicide Prevention Hotline
Toll free 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Trans Lifeline
Translifeline.org
Toll free 877-565-8860

Hope Line
Hopeline.org
Toll free 800-442-HOPE (4673)

Drug/alcohol addiction & recovery:

National Help Line for Substance Abuse
800-262-2463

Drug Recovery
Recovery.org
Toll free 888-554-0054

SAMHSA
SAMHSA.gov
800-662-HELP (4357)

LGBTQ+ Resources

The Trevor Project
Thetrevorproject.org

It Gets Better
Itgetsbetter.org

Born This Way
Bornthisway.foundation

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

Stomp Out Bullying
Stompoutbullying.org

Kind Campaign
Kindcampaign.com

Love is Louder
Toll free 1-866-488-7386
Or text START to 741-741

Abuse (physical/sexual/emotional):

Domestic Violence
National Domestic Violence Hotline
800-799-SAFE (7233)

Domestic Violence Hotline
800-829-1122

SafeQuest Crisis Line
866-4UR-SAFE (487-7233)

STAND Against Domestic Violence Crisis Hotline
888-215-5555

National Mental Health Association
800-969-6642

Kentucky Abuse Hotline
877-KYSAFE1 (597-2331)

National Child Abuse Hotline
800-25-ABUSE (22873)

Child Abuse Hotline
800-342-3720

ChildHelp USA National Child Abuse Hotline
800-2-A-CHILD (800-422-4453)

A Voice for the Innocent
avoicefortheinnocent.org

National Teen Dating Helpline
loveisrespect.org

POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

866-331-9474

National Sexual Assault Hotline

rainn.org

800-656-4673

Other areas of help:

National Association of Anorexia Nervosa & Associated Disorders (ANAD)

847-831-3438 (Long Distance)

National AIDS Hotline

800-342-AIDS (2437)

Shoplifters Anonymous

800-848-9595

National Safe Haven Alliance Crisis Hotline for surrendering infants

888-510-BABY (2229)