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CONTENTS

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CONTENTS

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NEW ASSOCIATE EDITOR INTRODUCTION

As the Editor for the *Journal of Psychology and Christianity (JPC)*, I'd like to enthusiastically introduce you to the fourth and final Associate Editor, a highly talented professor, researcher, and practitioner who is new to the *JPC* editorial community. Starting Fall 2021, Dr. Christin J. Fort will lead the way in publishing a "Justice in Teaching, Research, and Practice" column, joining Drs. Siang-Yang Tan ("Intervention in Research and Practice"), Kenneth T. Wang ("Assessment in Research and Practice"), and M. Todd Bates ("Theology in Research and Practice"). At least twice per year, each Associate Editor will publish a column that addresses salient, emerging issues in their respective areas of expertise.

With this fourth and final column, my hope is that clinicians, researchers, students, and other *JPC* readers interested in the intersection between Christianity, psychology, and justice will find engaging, thought-provoking articles that elucidate the foundational importance of this key ethical principle and virtue in 21st century society. What follows, therefore, is an introduction to the column, written by Dr. Fort herself, followed by a brief biography to get to know her professional background.

I've also included the three other Associate Editors' biographies so the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) community can continue to familiarize themselves with the *JPC* editorial team. As we steadily press on in this uncertain season of life, our aim is to serve the CAPS community and beyond with leading articles on the fascinating, crucial dialogue between the discipline of psychology and Christianity.

As a reminder, please now send manuscripts to https://jpc.scholasticahq.com/. In doing so, I will strive to offer a professional and timely experience with the manuscript review process.

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"Justice in Teaching, Research, and Practice"

The *Journal of Psychology and Christianity (JPC)* column on "Justice in Teaching, Research, and Practice" invites integrative scholars, practitioners, educators, and students to gain a deeper understanding of the inextricable link between the life of faith and the pursuit of justice, equity, and inclusion within the Christian tradition. Historically, the connections between faith and social engagement have been very strong in some strands of the Christian tradition, but inconsistent or non-existent in others. The aim of this column is to inform, equip, and empower readers to think carefully and critically about the Divine call towards a life of justice for the people of God (Amos 5:24; Matthew 23:23; Micah 6:8) and to work consistently and creatively to translate this call into action in their professional and personal lives. This column is also intended to expose colleagues outside of the integrative guild to the philosophical and theological frameworks that compel those within the Christian community towards proactive engagement with the local and global matters of justice that surround us.

Christin J. Fort, PhD, MA, is an Assistant Professor of Psychology and the Director of Integrative Dialogue at Wheaton College (IL). She maintains a deep and long-standing investment in the theoretical, pedagogical, empirical, and clinical integration of the disciplines of psychology and theology. Among other things, Dr. Fort's scholarship focuses on the implications of Church teachings (or doctrines) for mental health and organizational flourishing. Dr. Fort's research lays the foundation for her service as a practitioner. As a practicing psychologist, she enjoys working with ethnically diverse populations representing a wide range of presenting concerns—many of whom are very interested in the connections between their faith and their psychological and relational well-being. She is especially drawn to work with clients who struggle to find meaning and purpose in the midst of pain and suffering. This experiential knowledge of the ways that people search for, and create, meaning is a catalyst for her research and offers practical application points for use in academic settings.

"Intervention in Research and Practice"

Rev. Dr. Siang-Yang Tan, PhD (McGill University), is Professor of Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and Senior Pastor of First Evangelical Church Glendale. He is a licensed psychologist and Fellow of the American Psychological Association. He has published numerous articles and books, including three major texts, *Counseling and Psychotherapy: A Christian Perspective* (Baker Academic, 2011), *Lay Counseling* (2nd ed., with Eric Scalise, Zondervan, 2016), and *Shepherding God's People: A Guide to Faithful and Fruitful Pastoral Ministry* (Baker Academic, 2019), Full Service (Baker, 2006), *Coping with Depression* (2nd ed., with John Ortberg, Baker, 2004), Rest (Regent College Publishing, 2003), and *Disciplines of the Holy Spirit* (with Douglas Gregg, Zondervan, 1997). He is married to Angela, and they live in Pasadena, California. They have two grown children, Carolyn and Andrew, who is married to Jenn. He is originally from Singapore.

"Assessment in Research and Practice"

Kenneth T. Wang is Professor in Clinical Psychology at Fuller Theological Seminary. After receiving his PhD in Counseling Psychology from Penn State University, Dr. Wang taught at the University of Missouri and worked as a staff psychologist at the University of Illinois. His research focuses on psychological measurement, perfectionism, and cross-cultural psychological adjustment. Of the 12 psychological measures Dr. Wang has been involved in developing, six are related to religiousness and spirituality: *Religious Perfectionism Scale, Attitudes Toward Religion Scale, Religious Discrimination Scale, Communion with God Scale, Perceived Perfectionism from God Scale, and Chinese Spiritual Coping Scale*. He has provided training and consultation on scale development for researchers in the United States and China. Additionally, he coauthored the textbook *Research Design in Counseling* (4th ed.).

"Theology in Research and Practice"

M. Todd Bates has served as a pastor, professor, and administrator, most recently as the Dean of the School of Christian Thought at Houston Baptist University. Dr. Bates is passionate about the integration of faith and the disciplines and discovering the variety of ways and contexts integration occurs. He has published broadly in the areas of theology, philosophy, classics, and education.

Biracial Asian Americans' Mental Health on a Christian College Campus: A Preliminary Report on the Role of Racial–Ethnic Identities and Racial Invalidation

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Biracial individuals have unique experiences that shape their identity and, subsequently, their mental health. We examined biracial Asian Americans at a Christian university, studying the relationship between racial-ethnic identity, racial invalidations, and mental health. Our sample consisted of undergraduate students that identified as biracial Asian American (*N* = 57). We predicted that racial-ethnic identity would be correlated with positive mental health (Hypothesis 1) and that experiencing racial invalidations would be correlated with negative mental health (Hypothesis 2). Participants completed an online survey containing demographic questions and measures related to the study variables. Hypothesis 1 was partially supported, as a stronger Asian identity was associated with higher life satisfaction. Experiencing racial invalidations was associated with depression and anxiety, largely supporting Hypothesis 2. These findings indicate the importance of studying biracial Asian Americans' experiences, especially on Christian campuses that intend to promote an inclusive environment for all students. Further research should continue to consider other identities within the biracial and multiracial category and their related experiences.

In 2018, almost 11 million Americans identified as biracial, or 3.40% of the United States population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Of these individuals, around three million identified as biracial Asian Americans, with Asian-White Americans as the 2nd largest group of biracial individuals behind Black–White Americans (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Hence, biracial individuals, including biracial individuals who are Asian American, comprise a significant proportion of the American population. As the population of biracial and multiracial individuals in the U.S continues to grow, it is important to consider the distinct racial-ethnic identity development these individuals experience, within the umbrella terms of "biracial" or "multiracial." One aim of the present study is to examine the biracial identity of Asian American college students and how this identity might relate to well-being and mental health.

Biracial Asian Americans might experience unique racialized experiences that influence their mental health. Moreover, these culture-specific experiences and associations with mental health do not occur in a vacuum, as systems or institutions that individuals are embedded in can influence the frequency and impact of these experiences. Because of this, it is important that psychological research with biracial Asian Americans is intentional about the backdrop against which racialized experiences might be happening. Our study seeks to highlight the experiences of biracial individuals enrolled in a Christian university. In doing so, we hope to highlight the racialized experiences of biracial Asian American college students that can be generalized to other similar Christian higher education settings.

Christian Higher Education and Biracial Asian Americans

Christian colleges and universities make up a noteworthy percentage of the higher education landscape in the United States. According to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), which is the largest network for

Christian higher education institutions around the world, there are 144 CCCU institutions (members and affiliates) in the United States (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, n.d.). This is a significant percentage of the private schools in the United States, and certainly religiously affiliated universities. In the 2016-2017 school year, CCCU estimated that over 445,000 students were enrolled in CCCU institutions in the United States, and that roughly 37.8 percent of these students were students of color (Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, 2017; Smith, 2018). In addition, 2016 data suggest that 3.88 percent are Asian American students (Smith, 2018). Although we were not able to find reliable statistics on biracial or multiracial individuals enrolled in Christian institutions, given the sizeable percentage of students of color and Asian American students in particular, combined with the national trends highlighted earlier, it is reasonable to conclude that this is an important and growing population on Christian college campuses. Therefore, with the increase in the racial and ethnic diversity of Christian institutions around the United States, it is important for multicultural researchers to continue to highlight the experiences of racially diverse individuals on these campuses. College students, particularly students of color, are at an important stage of exploring their racial-ethnic identity, making their college or university experience especially formative (Phinney & Alipuria, 1990). In the present study, we explored two questions with a biracial Asian American sample: (a) Does identification with Asian and non-Asian culture influence mental health and well-being? and (b) Does the experience of being invalidated by other people due to their biracial identity influence mental health and well-being?

Racial-Ethnic Identity

Over the years, scholars in multicultural psychology have highlighted the importance and complexity of ethnic and racial identity for people of color (e.g., Quintana, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Given the conceptual and empirical similarity between racial and ethnic identity (e.g., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), in the current study we capture the experiences of biracial Asian Americans as racial-ethnic identity [1]. We define racial-ethnic identity as "the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their eth-

nic–racial group memberships" (Umana-Taylor et al., 2014, p. 23). Applied to our study, racial-ethnic identity for the participants includes components described by Phinney (1990), such as identification with culture, feelings of belongingness, attitudes toward culture, sharing of common cultural values, and knowledge about cultural beliefs and practices—for both Asian and non-Asian cultures, respectively.

For people of color in the United States, racial-ethnic identity can be especially vital to their self-concept. Ethnic identity is an intricate construct for monoracial individuals, but can become even more complex for biracial individuals (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Multiracial individuals are tasked with harmonizing multiple group identities and cultures (Stepney et al., 2015) and they might choose to do so using various strategies that, for example, emphasize choosing one culture over others, integrating all of the identities, or not meaningfully identifying with any ethnicity (Choi-Misailidis, 2010). Given the unique complexities that multiracial individuals face in the development of their racial-ethnic identity, it is reasonable that the experiences of multiracial individuals around race and ethnicity are different compared to monoracial individuals (Brittian et al., 2013). As a result, more research is needed to unpack the racial-ethnic identity of biracial individuals, and our study does this with an Asian American biracial sample.

Past research suggests that mental health is associated with racial-ethnic identities. For example, across racial-ethnic groups, racial-ethnic identity is shown to be associated with self-esteem (Phinney et al., 1997). In Asian American samples, adherence to Asian identity has been shown to be related to positive mental health (Mossakowski, 2003), self-esteem (Tsai et al., 2001), and well-being (Yip & Fuligni, 2002). In biracial samples specifically, the conceptualization and assessment of the strength of racial-ethnic identity becomes nuanced, as they are managing multiple identities. There is some evidence that the endorsement of racial-ethnic identity as a biracial person is associated with better mental health compared to those who do not engage in exploration of their biracial

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[1] In this paper, we use the terms "racial-ethnic identity," "ethnic identity," and "racial identity" interchangeably, unless otherwise noted.

identities (Chong & Kuo, 2015; Lusk et al., 2010). Synthesizing the research from racial-ethnic minority, Asian American, and biracial samples, an assessment of racial-ethnic identity that taps into both the Asian and non-Asian identity as a correlate of mental health might be a promising research endeavor. Because of this, we assessed the strength of both Asian identity and non-Asian identity, and their associations with mental health.

Racial Invalidations

We also investigated racial invalidation as a correlate of well-being and mental health. Invalidation of one's identity, especially if the identity is critical to one's self-concept, can adversely impact the individual. As biracial or multiracial individuals may already struggle to integrate their cultural identities and feel validated in their sense of self, further questioning or rejection of one's identity from another person may exacerbate the stressors induced by the invalidation (Cheng & Lee, 2009; Franco & Franco, 2016). Racial identity invalidation, or an occurrence in which a multiracial individual's racial identity is denied, misperceived, or otherwise invalidated by another person, is a unique challenge that biracial and multiracial individuals face (Lou et al., 2011). When others express doubt towards one's racial authenticity, biracial and multiracial individuals may experience a sense of removal and alienation from their racial or ethnic group, where they do not feel accepted, even if it is the ethnic group they identify with (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999). Furthermore, if an invalidation comes from a member within the racial group an individual identifies with, it may deepen the sense of isolation or lack of belonging to the racial group (Franco & Franco, 2016).

Unlike monoracial individuals, biracial and multiracial individuals also face unique stressors related to identity validation that can lead to adverse mental health effects. Multiracial individuals with a validated racial identity experience less negative treatment (e.g., discrimination) from members of their non-White racial group (Rockquemore & Brunsma, 2002), while those who experience invalidation of their racial identity experience more anxiety and depressive symptoms and less motivation and self-esteem (Coleman & Carter, 2007; Townsend et al., 2009). Additionally, compared to monoracial individu-

als, multiracial individuals experience greater depressive symptoms when they feel that their multiracial identity is devalued by society (Sanchez, 2010). Therefore, one goal of the present study was to replicate these findings by demonstrating a link between racial identity invalidation and mental health in a sample of Asian biracial individuals enrolled in a Christian university. The dimensions of racial invalidation we examined were behavior invalidation, phenotype invalidation, and identity incongruent discrimination (Franco & O'Brien, 2018). Behavior invalidation occurs when multiracial individuals behave in a manner that differentiates them from the stereotypical behaviors of their racial identity and are subsequently invalidated for not meeting the expectations of a particular racial script (Franco & O'Brien, 2018). Phenotype invalidation occurs on the level of appearance, where multiracial individuals are denied one or more of their racial identities due to their physical characteristics, such as skin tone or hair texture, as their physicality may not align with the expected traits of a certain racial identity (Franco & O'Brien, 2018). Finally, identity incongruent discrimination describes the experience of race-specific discrimination for a race the individual does not identify with, as they are misperceived by another person (Franco & O'Brien, 2018). We predicted that racial invalidation would be associated with more mental health distress and lower life satisfaction.

Hypotheses

Based on the aforementioned theory and research that suggests racial-ethnic identity contributes favorably to mental health, we hypothesized that the strength of racial–ethnic identity will be related to better mental health (Hypothesis 1). Moreover, based on the theorizing and research describing the detrimental association of racial invalidation and mental health, we hypothesized that the experiences of racial invalidation will be relate to worse mental health (Hypothesis 2)

Method

Participants

Participants were biracial Asian Americans recruited from a small, private, four-year religious liberal arts institution located in the Pacific Northwest region of the United States. The total number of participants was 57 (M_{age} =

20.67, *SD* = 2.54). A summary of the demographic breakdown is included in Table 1. Three of the largest Asian ethnicities represented were Filipino/a, Japanese, and individuals from mainland China; the majority of the non–Asian race tended to be White. As expected given the Christian university context of our study, most of the participants identified as either Protestant or Catholic.

Table 1

Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	*n*
Gender	
Female	38
Male	18
Non-binary	1
Asian ethnicity [a]	
Filipino/a	18
Japanese	18
Individuals from Mainland China	10
Korean	5
Taiwanese	4
Vietnamese	3
Individuals from Hong Kong	2
Okinawan [b]	2
Cambodian	1
Indian	1
Laotian	1
Malaysian	1
Thai	1
Non-Asian race	
Non-Hispanic White	40
African American or Black	6
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	6
Hispanic	2
Other	2
American Indian and Alaska Native	1
Religion	
Christian (Protestant)	38
No religion	8
Christian (Catholic)	5
Other	5
Did not specify	1
Place of birth	
United States	50
Outside of the United States	7

Note. [a] Participants were able to check more than 1 Asian ethnicity. [b] Two participants wrote in this response after checking "other."

Procedure and Data Cleaning

We obtained a list of students who identified as Asian plus another race from the university registrar's office. We sent the students on this list an email announcement with an online survey link. Participants read a consent form online and confirmed their biracial Asian identity before completing the survey. As compensation, participants were entered into a drawing for one of four $25 Amazon gift cards. Our study was approved by the Institutional Review Board at the authors' institution.

Eighty-nine individuals accessed our online survey. Of the 89 individuals who clicked on the survey link, 1 case was removed from our dataset because they did not provide consent on the consent form. Sixteen participants who did not identify as biracial were removed. Finally, 15 more participants who left one or more subscales entirely blank were removed. This left us with a final *N* of 57.

Measures

Racial-Ethnic Identity

The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure-Revised (MEIM-R; Phinney & Ong, 2007) is a 6-item measure that is used as an assessment of one's strength of ethnic identity, including identity search and commitment. The MEIM-R is a revised version of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (MEIM; Phinney, 1992). Items are scored on a 5-point Likert sale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). An example item is "I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group" (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Phinney and Ong (2007) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .81 based on a university sample. In our study, participants were prompted to provide two responses on the MEIM-R, once based on their Asian identity, and again based on their non-Asian identity. For example, a biracial Asian–Black participant answered the MEIM-R once based on their Asian identity, and one more time based on their Black identity; the MEIM-R scores based on the Black identity was then labeled and used as a non-Asian identity score for this participant. The mean scores were used, with higher scores indicating stronger racial-ethnic identity. Cronbach's alpha for the present study for Asian identity was .86. Due to how we computed the non-Asian identity (i.e., participants differed in

which non-Asian identity they were basing their responses on), we were not able to compute the Cronbach's alpha for it.

Racial Identity Invalidation

The Racial Identity Invalidation Instrument (Franco & O'Brien, 2018) is a 12-item measure of perceived or experienced invalidation of racial identity by others. Items were scored based on frequency of occurrence on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 (*never*) to 6 (*almost always*). This measure contains three subscales named Behavior Invalidation, Phenotype Invalidation, and Identity Incongruent Discrimination. Example items for the respective subscales are "Because of the way I speak, others deny my racial group membership(s)," "Others would not guess the race(s) that I identify with," and "I am discriminated against based on a race that I do not identify with" (Franco & O'Brien, 2018). The total scale was used in the present study. This measure has demonstrated good concurrent validity, test-retest reliability, and internal consistency (α = .86; Franco & O'Brien, 2018). Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .91. The mean score was used, with higher scores indicating more frequent experience of racial identity invalidation.

Anxiety and Depression

The Mental Health Inventory (MHI; Veit & Ware, 1983) is a 38-item measure of psychological distress and well-being. This measure contains five subscales: Anxiety, Depression, Emotional Ties, General Positive Affect, and Loss of Behavioral Emotional Control. However, only the Anxiety (9 items) and Depression (4 items) subscales were used in the present study. Most of the items on the two subscales are scored on a 6-point Likert scale (1 depression item is on a 5-point scale). Labels for the response options differ depending on the wording of the question, but for all the items, a lower score indicates less endorsement of the item (e.g., "none of the time"), whereas a higher score indicates stronger endorsement of the item (e.g., "all of the time"). An example Anxiety item is "During the past month, how much of the time have you felt tense or high-strung?" and an example Depression item is "During the past month, how much of the time have you been in low or very low spirits?" (Veit & Ware, 1983). This measure has shown good discriminant and predictive validity (Khan, et al., 2015). Veit and Ware (1983) found good internal consistency for both the Anxiety (α = .90) and Depression (α = .86) subscales. Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .94 for Anxiety and .93 for Depression. The mean score was used, with higher scores indicating more anxiety or depression.

Life Satisfaction

The Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener, et al., 1985) is a 5-item measure of global life satisfaction. Items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). An example item is "So far I have gotten the important things I want in life" (Diener et al., 1985). Diener et al. (1985) found good test-retest reliability over two months and good internal consistency (α = .87). Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .92. The mean score was used, with higher scores indicating more satisfaction with life.

Results

Data Preparation and Preliminary Analysis

After the data cleaning procedure described earlier, the majority of participants (*n* = 55) had no missing data. One participant had one racial invalidation measure item missing, and another had two racial invalidation measure items missing. We also examined the distribution of our scale scores, and found the range of skewness was between –0.619 to 0.194, and range of kurtosis was between –1.07 and 0.298.

Table 2 displays the correlations, means, *SD*s, and Cronbach's alphas associated with the study variables. As the table indicates, life satisfaction was significantly correlated with Asian identity (medium effect size by Cohen's [1988] interpretation of small/weak = .10, medium/moderate = .30, and large/strong = .50), non-Asian identity (medium effect), depression (between medium and large effect), and anxiety (medium effect); depression was significantly correlated with racial invalidation (medium effect), life satisfaction (between medium and large effect), and anxiety (large effect); and anxiety was significantly correlated with racial invalidation (medium effect), life satisfaction (medium effect), and depression (large effect).

Racial-Ethnic Identity and Racial Invalidation

To test our hypotheses about the roles of racial invalidation and racial-ethnic identity in mental health, we used hierarchical multiple

Table 2

Bivariate Correlations, Means, and SDs for the Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	*M*	*SD*
1. Asian identity							3.53	0.94
2. Non-Asian identity	.33*						2.99	0.97
3. Racial invalidation	.11	-.07					3.25	1.06
4. Life satisfaction	.37**	.33*	-.18				4.36	1.59
5. Depressive symptoms	-.07	-.18	.33*	-.41**			3.04	1.26
6. Anxiety symptoms	.05	-.05	.35**	-.39**	.70***		3.22	1.17

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

regression. Specifically, we examined three regression models, where racial-ethnic identity (Asian identity and non-Asian identity) and racial invalidation were entered as predictors of the three mental health variables (anxiety, depression, and life satisfaction). Based on the reasoning that identity is an internalized experience, and that racial invalidation is an external or interpersonal one, we decided to enter the identity variables in Step 1 of the regression analysis and racial invalidation in Step 2.

Anxiety as Outcome

Regression results are displayed in Table 3. In Step 1, Asian identity was a non-significant predictor of anxiety $B = .09$, $t = .50$, $p = .62$. Likewise, non-Asian ethnic identity was a non-significant predictor of anxiety $B = -.08$, $t = -.49$, $p = .63$. The variance explained (R^2) in Step 1 was .01. In Step 2, racial invalidation was a significant predictor of anxiety, $B = .38$, $t = 2.63$, $p = .01$. Both Asian and non-Asian identity remained non-significant in Step 2. The variance explained (R^2) in Step 2 was .12, and ΔR^2 was .11. The effect size of racial invalidation in Step 2 was Cohen's $f^2 =$ .13, which is closest to a medium effect size by Cohen's standards (small = .02, medium = .15, and large = .35; Cohen, 1992).

Depression as Outcome

Regression results are displayed in Table 4. In Step 1, Asian identity was a non-significant predictor of depressive symptoms, $B = -.01$, $t = -.08$, $p = .94$. Likewise, non-Asian identity was a non-significant predictor of depressive symptoms, $B = -.22$, $t = -1.22$, $p = .23$. The variance explained (R^2) in Step 1 was .03. In Step 2, racial invalidation was a significant predictor of depressive symptoms, $B = .39$, $t = 2.51$, $p = .02$. Both Asian and non-Asian identity remained non-significant in Step 2. The variance explained (R^2) in Step 2 was .13, and ΔR^2 was .10. The effect size of racial invalidation in Step 2 was $f^2 = .12$, which is closest to a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992).

Life Satisfaction as Outcome

Regression results are displayed in Table 5. In Step 1, Asian identity was predictive of life satisfaction, B = .51, t = 2.29, p = .03. Non-Asian identity was a non-significant predictor, $B = .37$, $t =$

Table 3

Anxiety Regressed on Asian Identity, Non-Asian Identity, and Racial Invalidation

Variable	*B*	S.E.$_B$	*t*	*p*	$R^2 (F_{sig})$
Step 1					.01 (.84)
Constant	3.16	0.69	4.58	< .001	
Asian identity	0.09	0.18	0.50	.62	
Non-Asian identity	-0.08	0.17	-0.49	.63	
Step 2					.12 (.08)
Constant	2.00	0.79	2.54	.01	
Asian identity	0.02	0.17	0.14	.89	
Non-Asian identity	-0.03	0.17	-2.00	.84	
Racial invalidation	0.38	0.15	2.63	.01	

Table 4

Depression Regressed on Asian Identity, Non-Asian Identity, and Racial Invalidation

Variable	B	S.E.$_B$	t	p	$R^2 (F_{sig})$
Step 1					.03 (.42)
Constant	3.75	0.73	5.14	< .001	
Asian identity	-.01	0.19	-0.08	.94	
Non-Asian identity	-.22	0.18	-1.22	.23	
Step 2					.13 (.05)
Constant	2.58	0.84	3.06	.003	
Asian identity	-.08	0.18	-0.44	.66	
Non-Asian identity	-.17	0.18	-0.97	.34	
Racial invalidation	.39	0.15	2.51	.02	

1.73, $p = .09$. The variance explained (R^2) in Step 1 was .19, and the f^2 associated with Step 1 was .23 (between a medium and large effect according to Cohen, 1992). In Step 2, the newly entered variable of racial invalidation was a non-significant predictor, $B = -.30$, $t = -1.64$, $p = .11$. Asian identity and non-Asian identity remained significant and non-significant predictors, respectively, in Step 2. The variance explained (R^2) in Step 2 was .22, and ΔR^2 was .04.

Discussion

The present study was a preliminary investigation on the experiences of biracial Asian American college students enrolled in a Christian university. Specifically, our study highlighted the relationship between biracial Asian American college students' racial-ethnic identity, experience of racial invalidation, and mental health. Racial-ethnic identity, specifically Asian identity, was associated with higher life satisfaction. Experience of racial invalidation was associated with more anxiety and depressive symptoms. Although our results are preliminary due to a small sample size, they nonetheless point to the potential gains in research and practice when researchers include these variables as correlates of well-being and mental health among Asian American college students enrolled in Christian institutions.

Explanation of Findings

Racial-Ethnic Identity

The findings of our study support patterns observed in the literature that racial-ethnic identity formation is associated with more favorable psychological health (e.g., Mossakowski, 2003; Phinney et al., 1997; Tsai et al., 2001; Yip & Fuligni, 2002). Specifically, our finding of the link between Asian identity and life satisfaction might be interpreted in light of cultural socialization as a possible precursor to Asian identity formation. The antecedents of ethnic identity formation commonly include ethnic socialization surrounding cultural expectations and values, as well as perceived discrimination (Gartner

Table 5

Life Satisfaction Regressed on Asian Identity, Non-Asian Identity, and Racial Invalidation

Variable	B	S.E.$_B$	t	p	$R^2 (F_{sig})$
Step 1					.19 (.004)
Constant	1.47	0.85	1.73	.09	
Asian identity	0.51	0.22	2.29	.03	
Non-Asian identity	0.37	0.21	1.73	.09	
Step 2					.22 (.004)
Constant	2.39	1.01	2.37	.02	
Asian identity	0.56	0.22	2.54	.01	
Non-Asian identity	0.33	0.21	1.55	.13	
Racial invalidation	-0.30	0.19	-1.64	.11	

et al., 2014; Rosnati & Ferrari, 2014). Moreover, stronger racial-ethnic identity has been associated with higher self-esteem among Asian Americans and mediates the relationship between positive cultural socialization experiences and high self-esteem (Gartner et al., 2014). As it relates to our study, it is possible that the association between Asian identity and life satisfaction that we observed reflects a larger and more complex mechanism that also involves socialization into Asian culture. This possibility is especially appealing in light of our finding that racial-ethnic identities (Asian and non-Asian) combined explained only 19% of the variance in life satisfaction, which suggests that there might be additional important correlates of life satisfaction, such as cultural socialization.

One of the more recent theories about biracial identification characterizes congruence between internal identity awareness and external expressions of racial identification as an important contributor to mental health (Choi-Misailidis, 2010). This outcome may have been observed in the recruitment strategy for our study participants, as we sought out participation from those who identified as biracial Asian Americans, rather than recruiting biracial individuals. Our finding on the correlation between Asian identity and higher life satisfaction could be attributed to biracial congruence as participants may have self-selected in choosing to participate in our study. The choice to participate in a study concerned with biracial Asian Americans may be precipitated and supported by stronger ties and warm feelings toward Asian American identity. In other words, the choice to participate in our study may be an indirect expression of racial consciousness indicating attachment to one's Asian American identity. This notion of congruence is another explanation as to why Asian American identity is associated with greater life satisfaction.

Racial Invalidation

We hypothesized that experiences of racial invalidation would be related to more depressive and anxiety symptoms, and higher life satisfaction. We found partial support for this hypothesis. That is, we found that the experience of racial invalidation was related to depressive and anxiety symptoms. Although a small percentage of the variance was explained by racial invalidation in depression (10%) and anxiety (11%), these

reflect effect sizes that are closest to medium effect according to Cohen's standards (medium effect = .15; Cohen, 1992), and our findings are nonetheless congruent with prior literature that has linked some of the experiences of multiracial individuals with detrimental mental health (e.g., Coleman & Carter, 2007; Sanchez, 2010; Townsend et al., 2009). One explanation for the association between racial invalidation and psychological distress is based on identity development. As biracial and multiracial identity development models largely focus on the individual experience of self-acceptance and choice of group association, our study's findings, along with previous studies, demonstrate the important consideration of how external sources interact with personal evaluation in contributing to one's identity development (Poston, 1990; Renn, 2008). Experiencing racial invalidations may inhibit one's ability to embrace one or more of their cultural groups, as one perceives invalidations as having failed in meeting a certain standard to be considered as part of a racial or ethnic group (Franco & Franco, 2016). Together, the experiences of both being rejected from a cultural community and being unable to progress in one's identity development may be distressing and, as a result, detrimental to one's mental health.

Another explanation is based on the theorizing that racial invalidation could function similarly to the model minority stereotype among Asian American students to impact mental health. Biracial Asian Americans likely face stressors associated with both their Asian American identity and non-Asian identity, along with the general stressors of being a biracial individual. A prevalent issue for Asian Americans is confronting the model minority stereotype, which claims Asian Americans have overcome their minority status and succeeded in academic and professional fields (Museus & Kiang, 2009). In a sense, this perception places Asian individuals as "honorary Whites," and though there are tangible societal implications for this status, this perception parallels the construct of racial invalidations and their negative consequences (Bonilla-Silva, 2004). That is, racial invalidation and model minority stereotype both include the metacommunication of negating one's experiences. As our sample's non-Asian race was predominantly non-Hispanic White,

this proximity to Whiteness may further contribute to the struggle of not being seen for one's racial-ethnic identity as a whole. As with biracial and multiracial individuals in general, the lack of affirmation biracial Asian Americans may receive from others regarding their association with a cultural community can be damaging to their self-esteem and result in negative mental health .

Implications for Christian Universities

To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to examine racial invalidation among students who are enrolled in a Christian university. Our study's findings shine a light on the experience of biracial Asian American individuals on Christian college campuses and how these experiences contribute to their mental health and self-identity. Based upon these findings, we believe Christian college campus administrations have the opportunity and responsibility to support their biracial and multiracial student population. College and university campuses often have services intended to celebrate and provide community for students of color, such as the Black Student Union or Latinos Unidos. These services may cater to specific racial or ethnic groups in celebrating shared cultural backgrounds, yet there are rarely groups or services that cater to biracial and multiracial students, though these students likely have unique experiences. Our study's findings demonstrate an importance in providing spaces that validate the biracial and multiracial identity and experience so that such students feel a sense of belonging in their own identities, as well as on their college campus.

As Christian universities in particular continue to diversify, there may be another subset of actions and institutional policies required to build an inclusive college campus, following the Christian mission to serve students "from every nation, tribe, people, and language" (*New International Version Bible*, 1978/2011, Revelation 7:9). Though Christian colleges and universities have increased their enrollment of students of color over the past few decades, they still fall behind the national average, remaining predominantly White institutions (Paredes-Collins, 2009). Thus, the efforts to diversify come hand-in-hand with a need to deconstruct historical marginalization of students of color from

all backgrounds and continually engage in the conversation around racial justice and reconciliation (Smith, 2018). Biracial and multiracial individuals likely find themselves in a minority within a minority group on Christian college campuses, and administrations should take additional actions to include this rapidly growing population. As our findings demonstrated the negative impact of racial invalidation, college campus administrations should also consider policies and practices that prevent such behaviors (Smith, 2018). Examples of such initiatives may be to create inclusive and encouraging spaces for cross-cultural engagements and promote events that increase cultural awareness (Paredes-Collins, 2009). Furthermore, explicit and intentional commitments to diversity in purpose statements—perhaps even integrated with an institution's statement of faith—can express a Christian university's goal to prioritize racial reconciliation and celebrate diversity (Paredes-Collins, 2009).

Implications for Counseling

The results of our study point to the importance of cultural competence in mental health treatment because of the complexity of the biracial experience. Counselors and mental health professionals would benefit from being aware of how a biracial individual's unique racial-ethnic identity may lead to differences in health outcomes. In particular, our results suggest that the exploration of Asian identity among biracial Asian Americans can be especially promising for one's mental health, and we encourage professional counselors working with biracial Asian American college students to keep this possibility in mind. Additionally, biracial individuals may face unordinary challenges in racial invalidation when compared to monoracial individuals, as they are more likely to have parts of their racial identity be denied. Given that racial invalidation is correlated with greater anxiety and depressive symptoms, counselors should be especially attuned to reporting of racial invalidations from biracial clients as a potential contributor to psychological distress.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are limitations of the study that researchers of future projects can keep in mind and improve upon. First, our study was a cross-sectional, survey investigation of the

associations between the study variables; therefore, causality or sequence cannot be established. We encourage future researchers to replicate and extend our findings using experimental or longitudinal methods. Second, the sample was based on a particular region of the United States—the Pacific Northwest. There may be differences in experiences of racial invalidation and racial-ethnic identity among biracial individuals, depending on the urban or rural setting. Future studies should replicate and extend our findings with a non-urban sample in the United States. Third, we did not differentiate the non-Asian identity further to examine the nuanced differences between the non-Asian racial or ethnic groups. For example, someone's White identity as an Asian American individual may operate differently compared to another person's Black racial identity, especially from a perspective of privileged identities. We did not have enough participants within each racial-ethnic category to be able to examine these differences, which we encourage future researchers to investigate. Fourth, given the preliminary nature of our study, we did not examine religious factors. Despite the context of our participants (i.e., Christian higher education), not all of them will experience religiosity in the same way. Because of this, researchers might consider the assessment of religion or religious coping (Pargament et al., 2000) in addition to racial invalidation. Fifth, the inclusion of additional predictors as warranted by theoretical and empirical arguments would address the current study's limitation of the small variance explained associated with the predictors. Finally, our sample size was small and, as a result, it is possible that some of our analysis did not have sufficient power. Future studies should seek to replicate our findings with a larger sample of biracial Asian American individuals enrolled in Christian institutions.

Conclusion

Our study provided preliminary evidence for how racial-ethnic identity and experiencing racial invalidations may both play a role in shaping the mental health in biracial Asian American individuals enrolled in a Christian university. We believe that our findings contribute to the body of literature on the biracial and multiracial experience, as these individuals face unique instances and challenges related to their identity. As communities and institutions intend to serve and include such individuals, they must continue to engage with these challenges, providing support and validation.

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The Pursuit of Change and Acceptance of Minority Sexual Orientation in Psychotherapy: Retrospective Perceptions of Helpfulness and Harmfulness

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We examined a convenience sample (N = 192; M_{age} = 39.8) of sexual minorities to identify what characteristics might be related to perceiving five psychotherapy goals, four of which are associated with sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE), as being helpful or harmful. We also sought to determine whether these perceptions are associated with the health measures of depression, anxiety, life satisfaction, and physical health. Participants (93.3% White; 40% female) were recruited through socio-politically diverse venues and networks, from change-oriented to LGBTQ+-affirming. Fifty-three percent of the sample was currently affiliated with the Mormon church and 29.7% described themselves as theologically conservative. We found that the goals of reducing same-sex attractions (SSA), feeling heterosexual attractions, and eliminating SSA were, on average, considered *mildly* to *moderately harmful* by the overall sample. The goal of not acting on SSA was rated between *no effect* and *mildly helpful*. The goal of accepting one's SSA was rated *moderately helpful*, regardless of participant beliefs and background. Results of *t*-tests and linear multiple regressions indicated participants who were more traditionally religious and did not view same-sex attractions as strictly biological in origin tended to have greater perceptions of the helpfulness of goals associated with SOCE, particularly those who did not identify as LGBTQ+. Traditional religious belief, identity, and activity were associated with rating some goals of SOCE as at least mildly helpful. Effect sizes were mostly moderate to large for these statistics. There was a heightened level of depression and anxiety among these sexual minorities overall, but past pursuit of change-oriented goals did not appear to be a major explanation for current levels of distress. We conclude by outlining some implications and cautions based on our findings for both proponents and opponents of change-oriented psychotherapy approaches.

According to an American Psychological Association (APA) task force report, sexual orientation change efforts (SOCE)[1] are defined as "all means to change sexual orientation (e.g., behavioral techniques, psychoanalytic techniques, medical approaches, religious and spir-

itual approaches)" and encompass a variety of mental health and religious providers (American Psychological Association, 2009, p. 54). The report also offered the following recom-

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[1] For a number of reasons, the first author generally prefers the term "sexual attraction fluidity exploration in therapy" (SAFE-T), rather than SOCE, to more accurately describe the activities of mental health professionals engaged in such therapy-assisted explorations (Rosik, 2016). SAFE-T can be defined as the client-centered exploration of sexual attraction fluidity among clients reporting unwanted same-sex attractions utilizing established psychotherapeutic modalities. However, because SOCE is currently the more widely recognized terminology in the scholarly literature, we utilized this term throughout the current paper.

mendation: "Future research will have to better account for the motivations and beliefs of participants in SOCE" (American Psychological Association, 2009, p. 91). Despite this exhortation, there remains a dearth of research providing more than cursory attention to this issue. This may be a byproduct of the APA report discouraging the practice of SOCE in favor of affirmative approaches, citing concerns with potential harm and probable ineffectiveness in modifying sexual orientation. Since then, professional associations have almost uniformly taken positions against SOCE. Calls for such psychotherapy goals to be declared unethical and illegal have continued to grow more forceful (Blosnich et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2018; Salway, 2020). To date, 20 U.S. states and several municipal jurisdictions have enacted legislative bans on SOCE with minors, and efforts for such prohibitions to include adults are occurring on several fronts (Movement Advancement Project, 2021).

At the same time, there is evidence that a substantial number of sexual minorities may pursue SOCE, broadly defined, and some of them describe benefiting from it, while a significant minority of licensed therapists consider it ethical to assist clients in SOCE (Gamboni et al., 2018; Liszcz & Yarhouse, 2005; Stanus, 2018; Sullins et al., 2021). Hence, there remains a need for research that elucidates which sexual minorities are more likely to report experiencing change-oriented goals as harmful or helpful and the factors contributing to these outcomes.

In the present study, we examined two research questions: (a) are there specific characteristics of individuals—such as religion, sexuality, or relationship contexts—that are related to perceptions of SOCE as helpful or harmful, and (b) are there differences in the mental health of those perceiving SOCE as helpful versus harmful? We do so in hopes of addressing the APA's recommendation to develop deeper insight into the clients who may pursue SOCE. We also hope to shed light on the characteristics that may be associated with reported benefit or harm for each of these goals using a sample of sexual minorities recruited from socio-politically diverse networks.

Client Characteristics and Health Outcomes Associated with SOCE

The current literature provides some indication of the common client characteristics and likely health outcomes associated with SOCE. We investigate client characteristics and health outcomes with reference to three questions.

Who Pursues SOCE?

There is broad consensus that traditional religious beliefs are among the most important factors motivating the pursuit of SOCE (American Psychological Association, 2009; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002). Several studies noted that those engaged in SOCE were motivated to pursue change to adhere to their faith, sometimes by the recommendation of their religious leader (American Psychological Association, 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2015; Dehlin et al., 2015; Maccio, 2010). Believing same-sex sexual behavior to be sinful and heterosexual intimacy as sacred can also influence the traditionally religious client's pursuit of SOCE (Gamboni et al., 2018; Throckmorton, 2002). Intrinsic religiousness (IR) has been proposed as a motivator for client attempts at change (Tozer & Hayes, 2004); however, in one study, IR was associated with reports of less reduction in same-sex attractions (SSA) and behaviors (Karten & Wade, 2010).

Identity conflicts between traditional religion and sexual orientation have been associated with a high degree of distress (Gibbs, 2015) and with SOCE (Morrow & Beckstead, 2004), although Schaeffer et al. (2000) did not find religious SOCE to be perceived as effective in producing change. Dehlin et al. (2015) found religious SOCE to be perceived as being severely harmful. Internalized homonegativity has been identified as motivating pursuit of SOCE because of the homonegative premises underlying its practice (American Psychological Association, 2009; Jacobsen & Wright, 2014). Beliefs less directly tied to religious outlooks that have been connected to SOCE include those related to the etiology of same-sex sexuality (i.e., environmental and learned versus biological and essential; Byrd et al., 2008; Dehlin et al., 2015). Lefevor, Blaber, et al. (2020), however, did not find a significant relationship between beliefs about etiology of SSA and well-being.

Additionally, sexual minorities in mixed orientation relationships may be particularly motivated to pursue SOCE as a means of maintaining or strengthening their relationship and family (American Psychological Association, 2009). Although Karten and Wade (2010) found

family disapproval motivated some men to seek SOCE, this reasoning was the least endorsed motivating influence.

Who May Perceive SOCE to be Helpful?

Research has suggested that sexual minorities who engaged in SOCE differ on several dimensions of their sexuality from those who do not pursue SOCE. Foremost among these is the hypothesis that those who see SOCE as helpful are likely to be bisexual and more fluid in their sexual experience (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Dehlin et al., 2015). Identifying on either end of the Kinsey scale (Kinsey et al., 1948/1988) may make a person less likely to see pursuit of change as helpful. Indeed, Karten and Wade (2010) reported that the more men seeking SOCE identified as heterosexual, the less change they reported experiencing. Sexual identity may also be associated with perceptions of the effectiveness of SOCE. Bradshaw et al. noted that of those in their study who reported that SOCE was helpful, most were not lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer (LGBTQ+) identified. Within Bradshaw et al.'s sample of 1,612 participants, 4% reported a modification of their core same-sex erotic attraction. Ratings of orientation changes for those who participated in SOCE, however, were not statistically different from those who did not participate in SOCE. Sexual minorities who report experiencing an authentic sexual expression have reported higher well-being (Lefevor et al., 2019; Lefevor, Blaber, et al., 2020; Riggle et al., 2017), and it is generally believed that SOCE works against this association (Fjelstrom, 2013).

Both family pressure and social support have been linked to perceiving SOCE as helpful or harmful. Social support is a key variable in the well-being and satisfaction of sexual minorities (Lefevor, Blaber, et al., 2020; Longhofer, 2013), though it is unclear whether pursuit of SOCE might signal a lack of support from religious communities and/or a fear of ostracization (cf. Mereish & Poteat, 2015). Participation in religious activities has been found to be both harmful and beneficial for sexual minorities across the theological spectrum (Barringer & Gay, 2017; Boppana & Gross, 2019; Sowe et al., 2017). Although such activity may help mitigate the effects of heteronormativity in traditional faith

settings, it might also intensify the pressure to report SOCE as being helpful when it was not. Many researchers have suggested that pressure or coercion from family members and church authorities is a precursor to pursuing the modification of one's sexual orientation, which might result in initial perceptions and self-reports of helpfulness, but later regrets and harm (Beckstead, 2003; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002).

How Is SOCE Linked to Mental Health?

The current literature suggests that the pursuit of SOCE will be associated with serious mental health-related harms. For example, studies have suggested that undergoing SOCE may delay educational attainment and resolution of conflicts and, instead, foster client depression, anxiety, dissociation, and suicidality due to suppressing sexual feelings and reinforcing heterosexism and shame for failing to achieve sexual orientation change (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Dehlin et al., 2015; Fjelstrom, 2013; Flentje et al., 2014; Jacobsen & Wright, 2014; Ryan et al., 2018; Weiss et al., 2010). Research has found that attempts to suppress sexual thoughts can cause harm for traditional religious individuals (Efrati, 2019). Conversely, the pursuit of change-related therapy goals have been linked to positive health outcomes on the basis of (a) providing social support that allowed individuals to normalize and accept their SSA; (b) lessening the intensity of their SSA; (c) reducing preoccupations with same-sex fantasies and behaviors; (d) improving psychological, interpersonal, and spiritual well-being; and (e) developing positive, non-sexual relationships with same-sex peers (Byrd et al., 2008; Dehlin et al., 2015; Flentje et al., 2014; Stanus, 2018; Sullins et al., 2021). Across the political and theological spectrum, mental health providers appear to agree generally that acceptance of SSA is a health-promoting goal (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Tan & Yarhouse, 2010), though the meaning of this goal may take different forms within different therapeutic contexts. As a recent literature review suggested, lower self-acceptance of one's sexuality is associated with higher levels of a lack of acceptance from friends and family, a lack of disclosure to others, internalized heterosexism, and poorer mental health outcomes (Camp et al., 2020).

Limitations of SOCE Research and the Need for the Present Study

Several limitations of the current literature hamper our ability to understand which client characteristics are most strongly related to perceptions of helpfulness and harmfulness of SOCE. First, much of the literature is limited by the use of samples that recruited participants through the networks and venues readily available to researchers (Jones & Yarhouse, 2011; Lefevor et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2018; Sullins et al., 2021; Weiss et al., 2010). This tends to skew samples into one pole of bipolarities (i.e., politically liberal/conservative; religiously active/inactive; LGBTQ+–identified/non-identified) and may influence findings in important ways (Lefevor, Sorrell, et al., 2020; Rosik, Lefevor, & Beckstead, 2021; Rosik, Lefevor, McGraw, et al., 2021). Dehlin et al. (2015) attempted with some success to overcome this problem with purposeful recruitment of ideologically diverse sexual minorities, and though they obtained a relatively large sample (N = 1,612), only 28.8% of participants were religiously active and 95% identified as LGBTQ+.

Variable specification can also be a problem. Typically, in SOCE research the therapeutic goal is operationalized simply as "change" of sexual orientation, with no finer resolution of what is encompassed under this broad descriptor (Blosnich et al., 2020; Ryan et al., 2018). Sometimes measures of outcome can be confusing and potentially misleading, as is the case when effectiveness and harm are measured in a single question, rather than separate questions of effectiveness versus ineffectiveness and helpfulness versus harmfulness (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Dehlin et al., 2015). Further, clients may vary in their definitions of what "change" means (e.g., reduction in SSA, reduction in same-sex behavior, change of sexual identity).

Finally, there is the limitation of a lack of ideologically diverse viewpoints among researchers, such that research to date has been conducted by politically and ideologically homogeneous teams, sometimes leaning conservative, but more often leaning liberal/progressive. This is a serious problem in that ideological diversity among researchers provides an invaluable check against confirmation bias in the conduct-

ing and interpreting of research (Chambers et al., 2013; Duarte et al., 2015).

The present study attempted to overcome these limitations. By purposely assembling an ideologically diverse research team with varied experiences related to religion, sexual identity, SOCE, and clinical practice, we intended to increase critical thinking, guard against confirmation bias in interpreting findings, and make coauthors accountable for their results. In contrast to previous studies of sexual minorities from conservative social backgrounds, the present study was conducted mostly by researchers who have experienced SSA or identify as LGB. All authors support self-determination for SSA/LGBTQ+ persons. Furthermore, some members of the research team have held leadership positions or are well respected in both liberal and conservative organizations, such as North Star, the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity, Affirmation, and the LGBTQ+ Therapist Guild of Utah. This diversity also enabled the research team to survey a breadth of sexual minority networks, including religiously conservative, change-supportive networks rarely accessed in this literature, which we believe provided a more representative and ecologically valid sample of these individuals. Additional details regarding the formation and composition of the research team can be found in Lefevor et al. (2019).

As previously noted, our study sought to answer two central research questions: (a) are there specific characteristics of individuals—such as religion, sexuality, or relationship contexts—that are related to perceptions of SOCE as helpful or harmful, and (b) are there differences in the mental health of those perceiving SOCE as helpful versus harmful? We explored these associations in the context of specific definitions of change as encompassed in five goals of psychotherapy, four of which are commonly associated with SOCE: (a) not acting on SSA, (b) reducing SSA, (c) eliminating SSA, (d) feeling heterosexual attractions, and (e) accepting SSA. These goals are commonly mentioned in legislation that seeks to prohibit SOCE (e.g., California Senate Bill 1172, 2012). We assessed the existing literature to be sufficient to predict the following:

1. Greater religious belief and activity would be positively associated with finding SOCE helpful.
2. Greater experiences of bisexuality and fluidity and lesser belief that SSA is biological and not subject to change would be positively associated with finding SOCE helpful.
3. Indices of psychological distress would be positively associated with finding SOCE harmful.

Method

Procedure

Data Collection and Recruitment

We obtained approval from the Idaho State Institutional Review Board prior to commencing this study. Data collection occurred from September 2016 to June 2017. This involved invitations through (a) news media in Utah; (b) email lists, Facebook groups, and conventions; (c) psychological associations and support networks; and (d) mental health providers. Having a politically diverse research team enabled access to a wide range of recruitment forums. Organizations and networks utilized for recruitment ranged from religiously and/or conservatively oriented to LGBTQ+-affirming. Complete details about participant recruitment can be found in Lefevor et al. (2019). As noted, some members of the research team have held leadership roles in conservative organizations, such as North Star and the Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity. This representation may have encouraged non-LGBTQ+-identified participants to believe their perspectives would be represented.

Participant Demographics

To be included in analyses, participants must have (a) been at least 18 years of age, (b) experienced SSA at some point in their life, (c) identified their relationship status, and (d) completed the first two sections of the survey. More details about the makeup of the full sample can be obtained from Lefevor et al. (2019). A total of 1,499 respondents completed all mandatory questions, while 193 of these went on further to complete at least one question evaluating goals of SOCE. We compared those who did and did not complete the optional questions on SOCE to see if those who reported prior involvement

with SOCE differed significantly from those did not. We included single-item measures of age, education (a 6-point Likert scale from *Less than high school degree to Graduate degree*), and race (0 = White, 1 = all others). We found that these two samples were similar in terms of age, $t(497) = 1.13$, $p < .26$, race (coded White vs. Person of Color), $\chi2(1) = 1.70$, $p < .19$, proportion of self-identified theologically conservative participants (vs. all other theological orientations, 30% to 27%), $\chi2(1) = .81$, $p < .37$, and gender (coded man, woman, and other), $\chi2(2) = 2.95$, $p = .23$. Those who completed the SOCE in psychotherapy questions did differ from the larger sample with regard to education, $t(1,497) = 4.14$, $p < .001$, $d = .34$, CI [.57, .22], with the group involved in SOCE being more educated (M = 5.07, $SD = 1.10$, to M = 4.67, $SD = 1.26$), although most respondents in both groups reported having at least some college experience.

The average age of our SOCE sample was 39.82 years ($SD = 13.04$). The sample was largely White (93.3%). We had options for 12 gender categories, and participant gender was examined in the current study using the identifiers of women ($n = 37$), men ($n = 146$), and all other descriptors ($n = 10$; e.g., more male than female, more female than male, gender fluid, genderqueer and bigender).

As with the larger sample, the SOCE sample was predominantly Latter day Saints (LDS) in current religious affiliation (n = 105; 53%). Thirty-seven respondents identified as None/Unaffiliated, 17 as Multiple/Other, 8 as Evangelical Protestant, 6 as Catholic, 5 as Jewish, 5 as Mainline Protestant, 3 as Pentecostal, 2 as Baptist, and 5 as other faiths. Despite this limitation of a predominantly LDS-identified sample, participants were quite theologically diverse, with 29.7% (n = 57) reporting being theologically conservative or traditional, while another 50% (n = 96) identified as theologically moderate, liberal/progressive, heterodox, or spiritual but not religious.

The SOCE sample also was made up of a variety of sexual identities, including sexual minorities who identified as lesbian or gay ($n = 66$; 44.3%), SSA or same-gender attracted ($n = 37$; 24.8%), heterosexual with SSA ($n = 13$; 8.7%), and heterosexual/straight ($n = 10$; 6.7%). In terms of relationship status, 64 (33.3%) participants were currently in a mixed orientation

relationship or marriage, 54 (28.1%) were single and celibate, 38 (19.8%) were single and not celibate, and 36 (18.8%) were in a same-sex relationship or marriage. Religious participation of the sample was bimodal in distribution, with 69 (35.9%) participants engaging in religious activity and/or worship services more than once per week, 49 (25.5%) engaging once per week, 10 (5.2%) participating 1-2 times per month, 14 (7.3%) being involved less than monthly, and 50 (26%) having stopped attending.

Survey Design

Participants were asked to take part in a survey that was designed to identify important aspects of life and relationships for those who experience (or have experienced) SSA and identify as LGBTQ+, heterosexual, other sexual identities, or who reject a label and were involved in one of four relationship options (i.e., single and celibate; single and non-celibate; heterosexual, mixed-orientation relationship; same-sex relationship). The first section of the survey was mandatory for all participants and included demographics, health indicators, and 10 domains (e.g., relational satisfaction, religious identity, values). The second section was optional and consisted of additional questions related to each of the domains. The participants for this study had completed additional items in the "Changing distress about sexuality" domain pertinent to psychotherapy goals they pursued to address sexual orientation distress. Participants completed the survey through a website designed for the survey (4Optionssurvey.com). A description of the survey can be found in Lefevor et al. (2019).

Measures

The survey included both measures specifically created for this study and pre-existing measures and was designed to provide data to inform several studies. Some items include a *not applicable* option; these responses were removed from our analyses, leading to slightly different sample sizes. The present research incorporated the following variables.

SOCE Goals

We measured five goals, four of which are typically associated with SOCE, all measured on single-item 9-point Likert scales with respons-

es from 1 = *extremely harmful* to 9 = *extremely helpful* and a mid-point of *no effect* or neither harmful nor helpful. Respondents used this scale to rate their experiences of psychotherapy to (a) not act on SSA, (b) reduce SSA, (c) eliminate SSA, (d) feel heterosexual attractions, and (e) affirm acceptance of feelings of SSA. Similar goal rating items for personal righteousness, church counseling, and group work were also included in the survey, but we chose to limit the scope of this paper to the pursuit of such goals in the context of participants' experiences with formal psychotherapy. The goal of accepting SSA may not be traditionally associated with SOCE; however, acceptance of SSA may occur, yet not be coupled with LGBTQ+ affirmation. Because the survey was constructed so that participants could respond to each response option on these scales as separate binary variables, these separate responses were utilized to construct each of the scales. Where respondents had given ratings to more than one option used in the scale, these ratings were averaged and rounded off to the nearest point option. When this average was at a midpoint between point options, the rating was rounded off to the point nearest the midpoint of the scale for a more conservative estimate. Ratings to more than one scale point were given by no more than 8.7% of participants for any of the goals.

Beliefs

We measured five areas in this domain involving three items pertaining to religious and moral beliefs and internalized homonegativity (IH) and one etiological question. A plethora of theological views were provided as options for participants, and the category "Theological conservative, traditional, or orthodox" was contrasted with an "Other" group that included the aggregate of all other non-conservative views. Intrinsic Religiosity (IR) was measured by the statement, "My whole approach to life is based on my religion/spirituality" (Gorsuch & McPherson, 1989). These items utilized a 7-point Likert scale format from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Also using a similar 7-point scale were questions pertaining to beliefs about the morality of same-sex behavior ("It is wrong for a person to have sex with someone of her or his same sex, regardless of the level of commitment") and

etiology ("Experiencing same-sex attractions is biological in origin and not subject to change"). IH was assessed using the three-item IH subscale from the LGB Identity Scale (Mohr & Kendra, 2011). In the original psychometric study, the authors reported an internal consistency of .86 and a test-retest reliability of .92. Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .85. This scale includes the item, "If it were possible, I would choose to be straight."

Sexual Identities and Experiences

We examined four questions pertaining to sexual identity and sexual experience. The experience of sexuality fluidity was measured with the item, "My sexuality is dynamic and fluid. I might have a sexual thought about a man/men once a day and a sexual thought about a woman/women many times a day or vice versa," using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. The prioritizing of religious identity over sexual identity ("My religious/spiritual identity is more important to me than my sexual identity") and the experience of authentic sexual expression ("I express my sexuality in ways that feel best for me") were measured on similar 7-point scales. Participants were provided with 27 options for their sexual identity, which we collapsed into a binary variable comparing non-LGBTQ+-identified (heterosexual with same-sex attraction; same-sex or same-gender attracted; heterosexual/straight; non-heterosexual; do not use a label; *n* = 71) with LGBTQ+-identified (*n* = 122). It should be noted that only one heterosexually identified respondent to the questions about SOCE indicated no Kinsey-rated lifetime experience of SSA. This individual was removed from our main analyses, leaving a final sample of 192 participants, of which even those identifying as heterosexual reported experiencing SSA.

Interpersonal Relationships

We examined four variables related to relationships. Fear of family reaction was measured by the item, "I am afraid of disappointing my family for experiencing SSA/being LGBT+," measured using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*. Social support ("I meet my needs for connection, intimacy, and mutual understanding") and fear of being ostracized ("I fear I will be ostracized, harmed, and/or lose too

much if it were more known about my experiencing SSA/being LGBT+") were both measured on a similar scale. Church/religious activity was measured on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = More than once per week to 5 = *Stopped attending/not applicable*. This variable was transformed so that higher scores would indicate greater religious activity. We also created a binary relationship status variable to compare those participants in a mixed orientation relationship (*n* = 65) with those who were not (*n* = 128).

Health

Four measures were utilized to explore relations between goals of SOCE and current health. Current depression was measured using the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9; Kroenke et al., 2001), composed of nine-items including how often participants had been bothered by "feeling down, depressed, or hopeless." The PHQ-9 has good concurrent validity with the Short Form-20 (SF-20) and diagnosis of major depressive disorder (Kroenke et al., 2001). Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .91. Current anxiety was measured using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) scale (Spitzer et al., 2006), including how often participants had been bothered by "not being able to stop or control worrying." The GAD-7 has good concurrent validity with the SF-20 and diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder (Spitzer et al., 2006). Cronbach's alpha for the present study was .92. Life Satisfaction was measured utilizing the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985), which obtained a Cronbach's alpha of .90 in the present study. The SWLS was comprised of items such as, "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing." Physical health was assessed through a single item: "I am physically healthy." Life Satisfaction and Physical health were measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

Analytic Approach

Hypotheses were initially developed by the first author and then submitted to the research team for critique and some minor revisions prior to conducting analyses. All analyses were conducted using SPSS Statistics 26. Univariate analyses supported the linearity and normality of all our continuous variables. All variables

were within the acceptable range of normality (West et al, 1995), with all variables below an absolute skewness and kurtosis value of 2, with the exception of a kurtosis of 4.11 for life satisfaction. These impressions were confirmed by examination of residuals. Bivariate correlations were obtained between our continuous demographic and client characteristic variables and each of the ratings of helpfulness. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine if significant differences existed for the ratings of helpfulness for nominal demographic and predictor dependent variables. Where Levene's tests were significant, we proceeded not assuming homogeneity of variances. Correlations significant at the $p < .05$ level were utilized to identify variables to be included in a linear multiple regression with stepwise estimation, with demographic variables being entered first and the significant predictor variables entered second. For our first set of analyses, the five psychotherapy goal ratings were utilized as dependent variables and the client characteristics were entered as predictor variables to identify which client factors were associated with perceiving each goal as helpful. In the second set of regressions, the health indicators served as dependent variables and the ratings of goals were entered as predictor variables to determine associations of the perceptions of these goals as helpful with current health outcomes.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Ranges for Variables

Variable	M	SD	Range
Demographics			
Age	39.73	13.02	20-73
Education	5.07	1.10	2-6
Psychotherapy goal			
Not act on SSA (n = 135)	5.45	2.69	1-9
Reduce SSA (n = 128)	4.82	2.71	1-9
Eliminate SSA (n = 100)	3.71	2.49	1-9
Feel HSA (n = 96)	4.09	2.53	1-9
Accept SSA (n = 165)	7.55	1.74	1-9
Beliefs			
Intrinsic religiousness (n = 177)	4.58	1.47	1-7
SSA biological	4.71	1.93	1-7
SSB wrong	3.41	2.40	1-7
Internalized homonegativity	11.52	5.61	3-21
Sexual experience/identity			
Experience fluidity	2.30	1.27	1-5
Religious > sexual identity (n = 184)	4.78	2.01	1-7
Authentic sexuality	4.61	1.81	1-7
Relational Context			
Connection needs met (n = 191)	4.06	1.80	1-7
Fear disappointing family (n = 189)	3.83	2.15	1-7
Fear ostracization (n = 186)	4.15	1.98	1-7
Religious activity	2.38	1.63	1-5
Health			
Depression	17.27	6.61	9-36
Anxiety	13.64	5.41	7-28
Life satisfaction	22.12	7.17	5-35
Physical health	5.34	1.55	1-7

Note. N = 192 unless otherwise indicated. SSA = Same-sex attraction. HSA = Heterosexual attractions.

Table 2

Zero-Order Correlations of Sexual Minority Client Characteristics with Psychotherapy Goals

Client characteristics	Psychotherapy Goals				
	Not act on SSA	Reduce SSA	Eliminate SSA	Feel HSA	Accept SSA
Intrinsic religiousness	.39***	.40***	.30**	.34***	-.01
SSA biological	-.62***	-.70***	-.65***	-.66***	.06
SSB wrong	.62***	.60***	.50***	.47***	-.15
Internalized homonegativity	.34***	.33***	.35***	.32***	-.16*
Experience fluidity	.28***	.35***	.25*	.42***	-.09
Religious > sexual identity	.61***	.53***	.40***	.45***	-.07
Authentic sexuality	-.11	-.08	-.16	-.08	.18*
Connection needs met	-.10	-.04	-.05	-.05	.09
Fear disappointing family	-.04	-.04	.01	.02	-.15
Fear ostracization	.17	.15	.27**	.26*	-.11
Religious activity	.54***	.47***	.37***	.45***	.06

Note. SSA = Same-sex attractions. HSA = Heterosexual attractions.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Multicollinearity was within acceptable limits (e.g., VIFs all less than 2). Residual plots indicated that residuals were adequately distributed and that error terms were sufficiently independent. We interpreted effect sizes utilizing Cohen's (1988) recommendations for r (0.1 = small; 0.3 = medium; and 0.5 = large) and d (0.2 = small; 0.5 = medium; 0.8 = large).

Results

Client Characteristics

Means, standard deviations, and ranges for all continuous variables are presented in Table 1. Because not all participants pursued each of the five psychotherapy goals, the sample sizes for each goal are not the same. Bivariate correlations for predictor variables with the goals are presented in Table 2. None of the demo-

Table 3

Group Differences between Sexual Minority Identities for Psychotherapy Goals

Psychotherapy goal	Non-LGBTQ+ identified		LGBTQ+ identified		df	t	p	Cohen's d
	M (n)	SD	M (n)	SD				
Not act on SSA	7.12 (59)	1.53	4.12 (76)	2.63	133	8.43	<.001	1.39
Reduce SSA	6.62 (53)	1.96	3.55 (75)	2.43	126	7.90	<.001	1.39
Eliminate SSA	5.45 (38)	2.26	2.65 (62)	1.98	98	6.51	<.001	1.32
Feel HSA	5.85 (41)	1.81	2.78 (55)	2.17	94	7.54	<.001	1.54
Accept SSA	7.25 (57)	1.97	7.70 (108)	1.60	166	-1.52	.133	.25

Note. SSA = Same-sex attractions. HSA = Heterosexual attractions.

Table 4

Sexual Minority Group Differences between Conservative/Traditional/Orthodox Theology and Other Theological Views for Psychotherapy Goals

Psychotherapy goal	Conservative		Other					Cohen's d
	M (n)	SD	M (n)	SD	df	t	p	
Not act on SSA	7.06 (47)	1.79	4.59 (88)	2.69	133	6.38	<.001	1.08
Reduce SSA	6.36 (47)	2.31	3.93 (81)	2.53	126	5.42	<.001	1.00
Eliminate SSA	5.00 (37)	2.53	3.00 (63)	2.14	98	4.31	<.001	.85
Feel HSA	5.53 (34)	2.43	3.31 (65)	2.24	94	4.52	<.001	.93
Accept SSA	7.00 (41)	1.96	7.72 (124)	1.63	163	-2.35	.020	.4

Note. SSA = Same-sex attractions. HSA = Heterosexual attractions.

graphic variables (i.e., age, gender, race, and education) were significantly associated with any goal ratings and, therefore, were not included in the regressions as controls. Client characteristics significantly related to perceiving at least one goal as helpful were IR, believing SSA not to be biologically based, believing same-sex behavior to be morally wrong, IH, experiencing fluidity, prioritizing religious identity over sexual identity, fearing ostracization or harm, and engaging in greater religious activity. Effect sizes for these associations were in the medium to large range. These findings are consistent with our first and second predictions and suggest that clients who are more religious and experi-

ence sexual attraction as more fluid tend to report greater helpfulness of attempts to modify same-sex attractions and behaviors in psychotherapy.

We also found significant mean differences on ratings of helpfulness of SOCE between LGBTQ+-identified versus non-LGBTQ+-identified sexual minorities. These results are presented in Table 3. These differences suggest that individuals who reject LGBTQ+ identities tend to report change-oriented psychotherapy goals as more helpful than those who identify as LGBTQ+, with the majority of effect sizes being in the large range. Similarly, we found significant mean differences on ratings of helpfulness

Table 5

Results of Regression Models Predicting Perceived Helpfulness of Change-Oriented Psychotherapy Goals

	Not act on SSA	Reduce SSA	Eliminate SSA	Feel HSA	Accept SSA
SSB wrong	.20*				
Religious > sexual identity	.25**				
Non-LGBTQ+ v. LGBTQ+-identified	.26***	.36***	.31***	.37***	
SSA biological	-.21*	-.52***	-.49***	-.41***	
Religious activity				.18*	
Authentic Sexuality					.18*
R^2	.53	.59	.45	.56	.03
F	35.76***	56.10***	36.14***	34.06***	5.18*

Note. Only significant predictors are displayed. *$p < .05$. **$p < .005$. ***$p < .001$. SSA = Same-sex attractions. HSA = Heterosexual attractions.

between individuals reporting conservative/traditional/orthodox theological orientations versus those with other (or no) theological identities. These results are presented in Table 4. These findings also support our first prediction and suggest individuals who are more theologically conservative tend to report their pursuit of psychotherapy goals focused on sexual orientation modification as more helpful than those who are not theologically conservative, with the majority of the effect sizes being in the large range. We did not find significant mean differences between participants in mixed orientation relationships versus those in other relationship options.

The regressions of significantly related predictors on each of the change-oriented psychotherapy goals are presented in Table 5. Overall, belief in a biological origin for SSA was strongly predictive of reported harm for the change-oriented goals. In contrast, a non-LGBTQ+ identity was strongly and consistently related to more helpful ratings for each SOCE goal. More frequent formal religious activity was associated with more helpful ratings of attempts to feel greater heterosexual attractions. The goal of not acting on SSA was reported to be more helpful by participants who prioritized their religious identity over their sexual identity and who viewed same-sex sexual behavior as being morally wrong. Finally, feeling authentic in the expression of one's sexuality was found to be associated with rating the goal of accepting one's SSA/LGBTQ+ identity as more helpful. Effect sizes for these associations were generally in the medium to large range. These findings also lend support to our first and second predictions.

Health Indicators

Bivariate correlations revealed no significant associations between the four health indicators and perceptions of any of the five psychotherapy goal ratings as helpful or harmful. Hence, no regression models were explored. Thus, our third prediction was not supported. As a follow-up *post hoc* analysis, we compared means for the health indicators between participants who reported exposure to any of the four specifically change-oriented psychotherapy goals (*n* = 148) and those in the original full sample who did not (*n* = 1,350). No significant mean differences

on health indicators were found for any of these goals. Furthermore, means for both groups were in the moderately severe range (i.e., 15-20) for depression (Kronke et al., 2001) and in the moderate clinical range (i.e., 10-14) for anxiety (Spitzer et al., 2006). Life satisfaction was slightly below the non-clinical sample average (i.e., 25) for participants, regardless of whether they did or did not report pursuing SOCE in psychotherapy (Diener et al., 1985). Finally, ratings of being physically healthy were between *slightly agree* and agree for both groups.

Discussion

To better understand the characteristics of those who find SOCE to be helpful, we surveyed a group of sexual minorities recruited through socio-politically diverse networks who reported pursuing in their psychotherapy at least one goal associated with attempts to change or accept aspects of sexual orientation. We found several characteristics were significantly related to perceptions of the helpfulness of SOCE. However, we failed to find a relationship between perceptions of SOCE as being helpful/harmful and current mental or physical health. We discuss these findings below.

Characteristics of Those Reporting SOCE Goals to be Helpful or Harmful

Our findings suggest that individuals who were more traditionally religious perceived more helpful effects of psychotherapy focused on SOCE. However, single dimension measurements of religiousness may not reliably support this trend. Lefevor et al.'s (2021) meta-analytic study of associations between religion/spirituality (R/S) and health among sexual minorities found positive associations (rather than no association for other definitions) only when R/S was operationalized as religious cognitions and beliefs and sexual orientation was defined as sexual identity. Rejection of an LGBTQ+ label appears to be a marker for a constellation of characteristics, such as conservative religious beliefs, greater religious participation, prioritization of a religious identity, and the primacy of living in chaste singleness or heterosexual relationship commitments (Lefevor, Sorrell, et al., 2020; Rosik, Lefevor, & Beckstead, 2021). This may be why the rejection or adoption of an LGBTQ+ identity label was the most powerful

predictor of perceived helpfulness of the goals of SOCE for our participants. Such a labeling distinction may encompass and, hence, supersede other more standard single-dimension religious measures when examining perceptions of SOCE, provided samples include sufficient numbers of sexual minorities who reject an LGBTQ+ identity.

Participants who experienced their sexuality as authentic reported more helpfulness from the goal of accepting their sexuality. This finding may suggest that sexual minorities who accept and mindfully experience their same-sex attractions, whether they view them as central to their identity or not, will benefit from developing such an attitude (Hayes et al., 2016; Tan & Yarhouse, 2010). For example, both conservatively religious sexual minorities who identify as "heterosexual with same-sex attractions" and those who are not religious and identify as LGBTQ+ may experience their expression of sexuality as authentic within their chosen identity frameworks.

We also found that participants reporting more IH tended to report more benefit from SOCE in bivariate analyses. However, IH was not a significant predictor of helpfulness for any of the psychotherapy goals. This finding was in contrast to common expectations within the literature of IH being associated with perceptions of harm from SOCE (American Psychological Association, 2009; Dehlin et al., 2015). Such expectations may be a byproduct of an overreliance in the literature on LGBTQ+ and religiously disaffiliated samples that have by design self-selected for participants more likely to report SOCE harms. IH may share significant variance with the general religiousness expressed in other predictors (i.e., sexual identity label status) and may function for many of our participants as proxy for principled religious conviction, rather than a signal of self-loathing. This may explain why it was associated with more helpfulness in bivariate correlations, but not as a predictor variable in the regression analyses. At least for these sexual minority participants, it appears religious beliefs and identities are more influential in their perceptions of the helpfulness of change-oriented psychotherapy than direct interpersonal pressure and stigma or a lack of social support and connection. One important reason SOCE may be experienced as helpful for

these individuals is because it maintains their traditional religiosity.

Belief in a biological causation for SSA that is not subject to change was generally the strongest predictor in all regressions specifically related to the goals of modifying sexual orientation, with greater endorsement associated with greater perceived harm. This finding could result from some participants failing to experience change and concluding their attractions must be biological in nature. The fact that rejection of an LGBTQ+ identity was the second strongest predictor and positively related to perceived helpfulness of the goals of SOCE underscores Lefevor et al.'s (2021) observation that there is "a remarkable amount of heterogeneity" in the experiences of the sexual minority population. Experiencing fluidity did not show up as a significant client characteristic in our regression models when considered with the full set of predictors, suggesting the experience of fluidity is related to other factors that were more predictive of the perceived helpfulness of the goals of SOCE. This finding may reflect individuals' retrospective understanding of their fluidity and experiences with change (i.e., those who felt they experienced change in their sexual attraction may understand their sexuality to be more fluid).

Perceptions of SOCE Goals and Health Outcomes

We failed to find a relationship between current health indicators and perceptions of the helpfulness of past SOCE. This means that those who reported change-oriented psychotherapy as helpful report similar health to those who reported change-oriented psychotherapy as harmful. These outcomes appear in conflict with minority stress theory (MST; American Psychological Association, 2009; Hatzenbeuhler, 2009; Meyer, 2003), because Meyer has recently identified SOCE as a significant sexual minority stressor (Meyer et al., 2021). Our findings also diverge from previous reports indicating such goals to be either helpful (Karten & Wade, 2010; Nicolosi et al., 2000) or harmful (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Dehlin et al., 2015; Flentje, 2014) in improving psychological and physical health. We studied sexual minorities from diverse socio-political contexts, rather than homogeneous ones, and there may be a variety

of ways through which they mitigate the effects of minority stress. For example, the stress reducing benefits of belonging to a group and/or finding purpose and significance in life may be obtainable within both traditional religious and LGBTQ+ communities (Lefevor et al., 2019; Lefevor et al., 2021; Lefevor, Sorrell, et al., 2020; Rosik, Lefevor, & Beckstead, 2021; Rosik, Lefevor, McGraw, et al., 2021). These health inducing factors may help offset the putative negative health impact of SOCE for those who remain in conservative religious settings. Among sexual minorities who perceived harm from SOCE, the positive health benefits counterbalancing negative SOCE effects may derive from their participation in LGBTQ+ networks and organizations.

We hasten to point out that ratings of perceived helpfulness of SOCE were retrospective, even though roughly a quarter of our sample was still involved in their change effort. For the others, the relationship between pursuit of SOCE and mental health may be different if assessed at the time individuals were in therapy or a few years after therapy. For example, individuals who engaged in SOCE who later feel harmed may recover from the distress attributed to earlier SOCE (e.g., reinforcement of IH, self-stigma, lack of authenticity, false hopes) by developing self-acceptance, increasing affirming social support and LGBTQ+ pride, and learning to have satisfying and secure relationships (Beckstead & Morrow, 2004).

One other aspect of our results bears particular mention. The median ratings for each psychotherapy goal suggest that, on average, only the change-oriented goal of not acting on SSA was experienced as helpful (*Mdn = mildly helpful*) by the majority of respondents. This may reflect a potential for this goal to encompass both sexual minorities who wish to manage their same-sex sexual behavior (e.g., reduce sexual compulsivity) and those who seek to not engage in any such sexual conduct due to religious convictions. Goals of reducing SSA and feeling heterosexual attractions both had medians of *no effect*, while the goal of eliminating SSA had a median of *somewhat harmful*. In contrast, the goal of accepting SSA displayed a median of *moderately helpful*, possibly reflecting the benefits of shame reduction in both LGBTQ+-affirmative and change-oriented approaches to psychotherapy.

Implications for Clinicians and Researchers

Our findings have implications for clinicians on either side of the debate over SOCE. First, these results should give pause to clinicians who might entertain a client's desire to pursue change in their sexual orientation. Having homonegative religious beliefs and rejecting an LGBTQ+ identity may prompt a small but non-trivial group of sexual minorities to enter and perceive benefiting slightly from SOCE. However, the overall picture raises a very strong concern that we cannot know in advance who will report being harmed by SOCE and that few comparatively will report being helped. Our findings suggest that categorical change in sexual orientation (i.e., from exclusively or mostly SSA to exclusively or mostly heterosexual attractions) may be relatively rare, which should be included in proper informed consent for clients who seek such change-oriented goals. Our findings also suggest the importance for harm reduction of clinicians not implying to clients a guarantee or hope of change in their sexual attractions, while remaining open that some fluid clients are still discovering their dynamic sexuality. Furthermore, clinicians should not pressure clients to adopt the homonegative beliefs associated with reports of helpfulness (i.e., IH, same-sex behavior is wrong, SSA is learned and not biological). Acceptance of one's monosexual or non-monosexual attractions may be crucial for mitigating the potential for harm, especially when a client's change-oriented hopes fail to be achieved.

Such concerns do not appear as relevant to the goal of accepting SSA, whatever specific understanding clients may bring to the terminology of acceptance (e.g., a gift or trial from God to embrace; belief in equality and worth, regardless of attractions or behaviors; permission for same-sex behaviors and relationships). Developing a mindful, nonjudgmental orientation to one's sexual experience seems to help this self-acceptance goal (Brotto et al., 2016; Pepping et al., 2018; Tan & Yarhouse, 2010).

Our findings are consistent with the possibility that some highly religious bisexual and sexually fluid sexual minorities may perceive change-oriented goals as helpful because they experienced some shifting in their sexual attractions and behavior that supported their aspirations. However, due to the uncertainty as

to whether these client characteristics preceded or followed participants' pursuit of SOCE, a provider cannot definitively detect who may find such psychotherapy helpful. Our results are not about sexual orientation changes, but about identifying who might report these goals as helpful. For example, it is unknown which, if any, psychotherapy interventions would reduce SSA for individuals who experience SSA. Yet, a significant portion of traditional religious participants in our sample reported benefiting mildly from this goal. More information is needed to understand how and why they may experience a reduction of intensity of their SSA. For example, reducing the emotional distress associated with rejecting their sexuality by increasing self-acceptance and support (cf. Camp et al., 2020) may have reduced the intensity of their experience of their SSA. Nevertheless, these results should not be taken to imply highly motivated religious clients who pursue change-oriented psychotherapies and believe in non-biological causes for their SSA will report benefit from their SOCE. Nor can we be certain of the extent to which participants' perceptions of helpfulness or harmfulness associated with pursuit of these goals might correspond to objective measurements of such outcomes. Clinicians encountering such clients should be cognizant these individuals may report helpfulness in pursing change-oriented goals that is more connected to their beliefs and aspirations than to their actual experience of sexual orientation change.

Second, our findings also provide food for thought to LGBTQ+-affirming clinicians and researchers. In particular, we note that non-LGBTQ+-identified participants reported all change-oriented goals to be substantially more helpful than their LGBTQ+-identified counterparts. Mean rating differences for the non-LGBTQ+-identified participants were approximately 2.5 scale points higher than for those LGBTQ+-identified and in the helpful direction, with large effect sizes and median statistics in the *mildly* to *moderately helpful* range for all change-oriented goals, with the exception of eliminating SSA, which obtained a *no effect* median. These differences are noteworthy for at least two reasons. First, they imply that change-oriented goals, with the possible exception of attempts to eliminate SSA, may

be perceived as being helpful in psychotherapy for a certain portion of sexual minorities, most probably a subset of those reporting strong religious identities. Furthermore, clinicians should seek to understand any clients who believe their SSA is caused by trauma, upbringing, or other social circumstances and how they came to this conclusion, if they have. Clinicians should not talk clients into or out of these beliefs, but explore with clients the psychological effects of these beliefs, including how they define "attractions." A comprehensive assessment will guide appropriate psychological interventions to reduce the mental distress associated with a client's sexual attractions and development.

In addition, our results raise the possibility that research utilizing self-reported LGBTQ+ identity as a singular inclusion criterion may not generalize well to excluded non-LGBTQ+-identified sexual minorities, perhaps especially those with strong traditional religious identities. Indeed, Lefevor et al. (2021) reported nearly 75% of studies pertaining to religion/spirituality and health for sexual minorities were recruited from LGBTQ+ venues. When samples were derived from LGBTQ+ venues, the relationship between R/S and health was close to zero. In contrast, when samples were taken from non-LGBTQ+ venues, Lefevor et al. found a significant and positive link between R/S and health. They advocate for the recruitment of more non-LGBTQ+-identified sexual minorities, as well as those who inhabit conservative settings and networks. Thus, the underrepresentation of non-LGBTQ+-identified sexual minorities in research on SOCE generally and change-oriented psychotherapies in particular may plausibly misrepresent the experiences those individuals who are traditionally religious. We hope establishing there is in fact a subgroup of people who report most goals of SOCE to be helpful will spur more research into identifying who these people are, rather than simply foreclosing clinical options for them. Further research on this subject inclusive of non-LGBTQ+ identified sexual minorities is needed to substantiate our concerns.

Finally, our findings support the literature indicating greater psychological distress among sexual minorities, but also underscore the need to contextualize research findings on change-oriented psychotherapy goals. Future studies of SOCE generally and change-orient-

ed psychotherapies in particular must not only compare exposure to non-exposure groups, but also both groups to population norms to discern accurately the practical importance of any identified differences.

Limitations

Several limitations of this study need to be emphasized. First, we emphasize that our findings do not speak to the issue of whether sexual orientation or same-sex attractions can change in response to psychotherapeutic intervention. The correlational nature of this research can only assess what client characteristics are associated with self-reported harmfulness or helpfulness of the psychotherapy goals we examined, not whether the pursuit of these goals resulted in the ratings given by participants. For example, we cannot determine whether participants' endorsement of a strictly biological origin for their same-sex attractions and its association with reports of greater harm was (a) the outcome of failed attempts to change, or (b) an idea that preceded their pursuit of psychotherapy and in some manner impacted their perceptions of therapy, predisposing them to feeling more harm. We suspect the former process is more plausible. Participants' current beliefs, religious activity, social support, and mental health may be different from before or during their SOCE. We note the lack of any associations between the change-oriented goals and the health indicators, as well as the similarly elevated levels of psychological distress between those who pursued such goals and those who did not and suggest there may be much more contributing to the current distress of our participants than their exposure to SOCE in a psychotherapy context.

Our analyses were largely exploratory and based on a relatively small sample of persons engaged in SOCE, although this appears to be the norm in this area of study at present (e.g., Flentje et al., 2014; Kartan & Wade, 2010; Shidlo & Schroeder, 2002). Nevertheless, we acknowledge the need for more theory-driven research on the change-oriented psychotherapy experiences of sexual minorities involving larger datasets that purposefully recruit individuals outside of LGBTQ+–identified venues and networks. Furthermore, several of our measures consisted of single items developed for this research for which psychometric properties could not be established. Though not ideal, this is a common limitation of exploratory research and found in highly referenced studies published in this area (e.g., Dehlin et al., 2015; Ryan et al., 2018).

Another limitation of our dataset is that a large majority of religious participants were LDS and, hence, our results may not generalize to other conservative and religious traditions. However, despite a predominantly LDS sample, there was representation (*n* = 32) from other religious traditions, which may provide a cautious basis for extrapolating our results across different religious communities. Moreover, despite a predominant past and/or present LDS identity, our final sample was theological diverse, with 29.7% (*n* = 57) reporting being theologically conservative or traditional, while another 50% (*n* = 96) identified as theologically moderate, liberal/progressive, heterodox, or spiritual but not religious.

Conclusion

We examined several characteristics of sexual minority persons who reported having pursued psychotherapy goals, four of which are typically associated with SOCE. Linear regression analyses indicated that belief in a biological basis for unchangeable SSA was strongly and positively related to reports of harm across all change-oriented goals. By contrast, not identifying as LGBTQ+ was strongly and positively associated with reporting these goals to be more helpful. Aspects of religious belief, identity, and activity also were significant predictors of some goals. Sexual attraction fluidity did not turn out to be a significant predictor. Feeling one's sexuality to be authentic was associated with reporting the acceptance of SSA to be more helpful.

Accepting SSA was the only goal that was rated helpful for all our participants. Our findings suggest that clinicians will achieve reliable therapeutic benefit by focusing on affirming client acceptance of their SSA. Contrary to expectations, we found no associations between four health indicators and the five psychotherapy goals. *Post-hoc* analysis similarly found no mean differences between participants who pursued change-oriented goals and those who did not for any of the health indicators. There

was a heightened level of depression and anxiety among these sexual minorities generally, but past pursuit of change-oriented goals did not appear to be a major explanation for current levels of overall distress. Interpreted non-partisanly, these findings suggest important implications and cautions for both proponents and opponents of change-oriented psychotherapy approaches.

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Identifying Factors of Deconversion from Christianity Among American Adults: A Mixed-Method Approach

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This paper presents results of factors that contribute to deconversion from Christianity. Six hundred and eighty-nine participants (92.9% received a college education) who identified with some form of the Christian religion completed a survey comprising both forced-choice and open-ended questions. Using a concurrent triangulation mixed-method design, in which quantitative and qualitative methods are concurrently engaged, the quantitative component of this study led to a discovery of two key factors: believing that the church is out of touch with their lives and doubting that same-sex marriage is morally wrong. The common themes revealed by the open-ended data include "judgmental," "can no longer relate," "people of the church do not understand ideas," etc.

Recent survey data indicate that since 2003, more and more young adult Christians in the United States have been leaving the church, while the number of non-religious people has been rising (Smith et al., 2019). The phenomenon to which deconversion is referring has been called by many different names in the literature, including walking away from the church/faith (Need & De Graff, 1996), faith exit (Hui et al., 2018), religious disaffiliation (Albrecht & Bahr, 1983; Brinkerhoff & Burke, 1980), religious exits (Regnerus & Uecker, 2006), drop-outs (Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977), and apostasy (Brinkerhoff & Mackie, 1993). Furthermore, definitions of deconversion have described it as a break from both religious beliefs and affiliations (McKnight & Ondrey, 2008). According to Brinkerhoff and Mackie (1993), deconversion is "the process of disengagement from two major elements of religion: belief and community" (p. 235). In a similar vein, Caplovitz and Sherrow (1977) stated that this abandonment includes both a loss of faith and a rejection of the religious community. The American Psychological Association (2020) simply defines "deconversion" as "loss of one's faith in a religion, as in a Catholic of many years who becomes an atheist or agnostic." It is crucial to point out that all these definitions do not imply that those deconverted, former believers were "committed" Christians prior to abandoning faith.

It is important to differentiate between the rejection of the Christian faith and that of the Christian church. The latter phenomenon is known as "church refugee," "churchless," "unchurched," or "disengaged but spiritual," in which people regard themselves as spiritual, but not religious, or maintain the belief of God, but believe that God can be encountered anywhere, rather than only in the church (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014; Exline et al., 2020; Packard & Ferguson, 2018; Packard & Hope, 2015; Jacobson, 2016). This study focuses on ex-Christians who left the Christian faith, not churchless Christians who looked for an alternate Christian life.

It is clear that the religious landscape of the United States continues to change at a rapid rate. Pew Research Center telephone surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019 reveal that 65% of American adults identified themselves as Christians (Gramlich, 2019). However, there has been a 12% decline over the past decade (Gramlich, 2019). Furthermore, those who identify as unaffiliated with religion (e.g., atheist, agnostic, "none") now stands at 26%, up from 14% in 2008 (Smith et al., 2019). Additionally, church membership and attendance in the United States has been declining since the 1990s. For example, based on political polls that include religious attendance questions, there has been a decline of 7% each month for several decades (Smith et al., 2019). Recent statistics revealed that member-

ship of Southern Baptist churches shrunk by 1.8 million over 16 years (Banks, 2020). In addition, those born from 1981 to 1996 and 1996 to 2000 (i.e., millennials and part of Generation Z) tend to identify as unaffiliated with religion (Lipka, 2020). The terms "deconversion" and "faith exit" have been used to describe this phenomenon. Although in the past, numerous studies attempted to understand what factors contributed to deconversion (Barna & Kinnaman, 2014; Bruce, 2002; Kinnaman & Hawkins, 2011; Ro et al., 2016; Vaidyanathan, 2011; Yu & Hui, 2014), those studies used either qualitative or quantitative data, but not both, and consequently they lacked a holistic explanation. To further shed light on the issue, the current study adopted a mixed-method design. By doing so, results from different types of data sources might be converged and the conclusion can be confirmed by triangulation.

To understand the reasons behind deconversion, this mixed-method study utilized both qualitative and quantitative data. First, qualitative data are open-ended, while controlling preconceptions that may occur in the researchers (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Second, qualitative data are used to help analyze information that cannot be operationalized and measured. However, Uecker et al. (2007) argued that quantitative studies of deconversion are linked with key factors, such as personal and demographic characteristics, family background, and religious experiences. Utilizing these approaches will result in finding underlying conceptions of what causes young adults to take part in deconversion from Christianity. The research design of this current study is the concurrent triangulated mixed method (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). For quantitative data analysis, the decision tree approach was utilized, whereas both content analysis and text mining were employed for analyzing open-ended textual data. Because deconversion might have multiple factors, the authors did not operate this study with specific hypotheses. Hence, the research question is as broad as "What are the individual and structural factors of deconversion and/or unchurching?" In other words, this study is data-driven, not hypothesis-driven.

Cognitive Dissonance

The guiding psychological theory for this study is cognitive dissonance. Cognitive disso-

nance was first studied by Leon Festinger (1957), stemming from participants who observed a study of a cult, which believed that the earth was going to be destroyed by a disaster. This resulted in people quitting their jobs and leaving their homes, all to become a part of the cult that purportedly was protected from the imminent disaster. Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory suggests that humans must choose between incompatible beliefs or actions. As human beings, there is an inner drive to hold all our attitudes and behaviors in harmony and avoid disharmony. This is known as cognitive consistency (Harmon-Jones, 2019). When there is an inconsistency between a human being's attitudes and behaviors, something must change in order to reduce the dissonance. In this way, cognitive dissonance influences both religious beliefs and behaviors.

Human beings tend to self-justify their religious beliefs when contradictory evidence is presented (Mahaffy, 1966). Regardless of the truth within a notion that one may not accept, people may choose to ignore or discredit that truth in order to remain in a state of self-justification (Melvin, 2010). In other words, people will lie to themselves or promote inaccuracies because they fear a confrontation with reality. However, when information emerges that does not have any conflict with pre-existing beliefs, people tend to accept those ideas without questions. Consequently, this causes a mental strain on people because there is conflict between two or more battling beliefs (Harmon-Jones & Tarpley, 1997). A question that arises is how one acts when their core beliefs (non-religious and religious) are being challenged. From previous literature, the answers are self-justification, self-denial, and social justice (Melvin, 2010).

The nature of cognitive dissonance in a Christian refers to the awareness of one's religious beliefs being inconsistent with other cognitions. As mentioned above, this is where self-justification plays a role. Cognitive dissonance is said to be a part of living within a religious tradition that projects ideals for human behavior (Rogers, 1992). Challenges arise when individuals mature and enter a new chapter in life. As they develop new ideas and core beliefs, they are challenged by their religious beliefs. This is commonly found in younger generations. This study explores the experiences of younger adults, ages 18 to

35, which is a common developmental stage in which individuals explore and integrate new ideas that may differ from their religious background. It is hypothesized that some people can no longer relate themselves to the church when the church is too conservative to cope with how the world is currently evolving. Topics such as politics and popular culture challenge young adults to the point they leave the church because of its response to those issues (Packard & Ferguson, 2018). Postmodern culture is said to be a blend of religious beliefs that younger generations have adapted (Mueller, 2007), and it consists of a combination of biblical and personal beliefs. Other researchers, such as Kinnaman and Lyons (2012), have argued that younger generations are able to manage conflict and uncertainty as a result of postmodern culture. Still other researchers argue that younger generations do not have a "biblically grounded" worldview (McDowell & Bellis, 2006; Smith & Denton, 2005). As mentioned earlier, cognitive dissonance is an act of an inconsistency in either a person's attitude or behavior. As a result, there needs to be a change in either or both attitudes and behaviors to prevent cognitive dissonance. In the situation of self-justification, both attitudes and behaviors need to be consistent with one another. As Festinger (1957) asserted, once a person performs an action that is inconsistent with their beliefs, that behavior is difficult to change. In contrast, this carries on to the next challenge of self-denial.

Self-denial has challenged Christian formation, in the sense that Christ followers have a difficult time reconciling many of their religious beliefs with how they honestly feel on the inside. Self-denial initially results in a person being blinded by oneself (Rogers, 1992). Self-denial is related to cognitive dissonance because a person who has self-denial about their Christian faith is going to have an inconsistency with either their attitude or behavior toward their faith. There will often be an opposition within their thoughts that they feel may contradict their faith. However, although many still support what the church promotes in order to avoid being judged, self-denial will only go so far. Eventually, a person's inner beliefs may rule out what they have been taught religiously, which results in people walking away from the church; in other words, deconversion occurs.

When Hendricks (1993) interviewed different people about why they left the church, he found that many of the interviewees had either self-denial or self-doubt. One of the interviewees that was referred to as "Chris" experienced self-denial. He stated, "So I kept having this nagging feeling that I was missing something. But I didn't know exactly what it was. It kept me from hanging on to my faith" (Hendricks, 1993, p. 99). Chris had experienced cognitive dissonance due to his inner thoughts telling him something was missing, and he could no longer adhere to his faith because his attitude toward faith was inconsistent. Similarly, an interviewee named John was experiencing the same problem: "and yet, as I began to share with the group the disillusionment and emptiness that was setting in my life, I don't think they really understood what was going on in me and certainly I didn't" (Hendricks, 1993, p. 140). In a nationally representative study, Smith and Denton (2005) found that although 40% of American teenagers, aged 13 to 17, maintained their religious practice, their belief adhered to a form of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD), a worldview that God is not actively involved in one's life except when God is intended to resolve a problem. This affects a person's mental schemas: how a person makes sense of religious information, and more importantly, how one manages religious cognitive dissonance. This finding is significant as it shows that a person who professes to be Christian may or may not adhere to the foundational Christian worldview (Melvin, 2010). And eventually this tension of double life might be released by deconversion. As McKnight and Ondrey (2008) said, "In essence, those who leave the faith discover a profound, deep-seated and existentially unnerving intellectual incoherence to the Christian faith. The faith that once held their lives together gave it meaning; and provided direction simply no longer makes sense" (p. 15).

Further, social justice (e.g., racial equality, taking care of the poor and the marginalized) is considered to be a central part of the Christian tradition. The issue that emerges with social justice and cognitive dissonance is that people tend to perceive the social order as a given, and they fail to understand the connection between personal and social dissonance (Rogers, 1992). In other words, they do not understand that social injustices, which are structural in character,

cannot be easily amended by individual choices. People have a difficult time attaining and maintaining consistency with both self and society. It is quite possible that those who experience personal cognitive dissonance struggle with finding the balance of "societal" dissonance. Due to the fact that cognitive dissonance is a personal dispute and individuals have inner thoughts that do not reflect their culture beliefs, individuals who experience societal dissonance may then practice selective exposure and/or selective avoidance. The issue is further complicated by the inter-entanglement of religious belief, social justice, and political ideology. The Pew Research Center named those people who have left institutionalized religion "none" (Lipka, 2016). In the 2016 presidential election, while 81% of White Evangelicals voted for Trump, 68% percent of religious "nones" voted for Clinton. Researchers found that political disagreements in the church led some evangelicals to leave the church (Djupe et al., 2017).

Deconversion is the least talked-about mental transition among young adults. Although there are only a few recent studies on deconversion, numerous reasoning modes behind individuals choosing to leave their faith were found in these studies. However, as mentioned previously, the most common reasons are related to cognitive dissonance, such as self-justification, self-denial, and social justice.

Several studies found that self-justification and doubting whether the church supports social justice are the primary reasons some people no longer want to relate themselves to the church (e.g., Need & De Graaff, 1996; Sherkat & Wilson, 1995). Further, some researchers included individuals who had already left their religious affiliation, suggesting that participants suffered from self-identification, as opposed to self-denial (Hunsberger & Brown, 1984; Smith & Sikkink, 2003). While prior research informs the current study by laying the overall theoretical foundation (cognitive dissonance), it is important to point out that this study is intended to be data-driven. Therefore, the authors did not try to match all responses from the participants into pre-existing categories (self-justification, self-denial, etc.); otherwise, the qualitative component of this study would be similar to using forced-option survey items in the quantitative component.

Demographic Factors of Deconversion

Previous studies show that demographic characteristics are related to deconversion and cognitive dissonance. Among demographic characteristics, it is found that men have walked away from religion more often than women (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997, 2005; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Roozen 1980; Uecker et al., 2007).

However, age is said to be the bigger contributor to how devoted someone is to religion. As mentioned earlier, statistics show that there has been a decline in religion among younger generations. Prior research has indicated that younger generations perceive religion as outdated (Packard & Ferguson, 2018). Many younger adults feel this way about their current religious affiliations. Packard and Ferguson (2018) argued that, instead of letting these young adults walk away from the church, the church leadership, along with fellow Christians, should invite young adults in to talk about why they feel the way they do.

Family background and life experiences are other factors to deconversion and cognitive dissonance. In some families, parental involvement in religion was found to positively impact someone's involvement in the church; in others, though, the parental involvement hindered the individual's involvement. Socialization factors do not have the same effect across religious traditions, meaning that the influence of a parent's religion is dependent on the religious tradition that is involved (Vaidyanathan, 2011). Researchers have found that those who have deconverted state that since they were always forced to attend church with their families as a child, they no longer want to associate themselves with anything religious because they now see it as a negative experience, especially the restrictive sexual norms (White, 2014). Participants in the Lee and Gubi study (2019) revealed themes of life traumas, anger, embarrassment, feeling of fraud, and shame, expressed by individuals on ex-Christians.net. All participants revealed signs of cognitive dissonance in their responses. In contrast, participants asserted the positive outcomes from deconversion. In a similar vein, Dyck (2010) found that, when a demanding and restrictive lifestyle is placed on its members, the outcome is often the "rebellious" leaver. For those who leave the church in such a manner, they are acting out against the lifestyle

or morality of the church that they found so confining. It can be portrayed as a moral stand, or even a spiritual one against God.

In addition, young adults from divorced families have significantly lower religious involvement compared to young adults from an intact family unit. Those from divorced families reflected lower levels of attendance in religious services (Zhai et al., 2007). However, while the institution of religion (church attendance) itself was avoided by those from divorced families, the spirituality itself (closeness to God) had not changed. This suggests that something within the church influenced attendance, rather than attendance being solely an individual preference.

After reviewing the studies mentioned above on this topic, the authors of this study found five common themes within the self-reporting explanations. First, young adults in the United States are reporting that the church is not aware of the issues in today's society, and the church is not willing to accept change. Second, young adults are reporting that they can no longer relate to the church, due to either trauma or life experiences. Third, the church is "hypocritical" about many things. Fourth, there are reports of young adults still believing in God; however, they do not support the issues for which the church stands. Lastly, there are reports that the church does not talk about controversial topics; therefore, young adults do not feel like they have a safe space to go.

In summary, the literature review revealed that there might be multiple factors leading to this consequence. Although these prior findings are informative, the research team attempted to go one step further. Quantitative methods are good at showing "what" and "how much," whereas qualitative methods can suggest "how" and "why." Further, in a mixed-method study, the researcher analyzes textual data in the participants' own choice, as a supplement to the numeric data based on force-option survey items; thus, the findings can be grounded in participants' experiences (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). Although readers can put the findings of diverse studies together to construct a holistic picture of the deconversion phenomenon, at most we can call it a "meta-analysis" or "systematic review," but not triangulation (Ammenwerth et al., 2003), because settings across multiple studies are vastly different. To study deconversion with a data-driven and triangulation

approach, in this study several methods were utilized to examine quantitative data (e.g., classification tree) and qualitative data (e.g., content analysis and text mining), which will be discussed in the next section.

Method

Design

This study adopted a concurrent triangulated mixed-method design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The purpose of the triangulation design approach, in which quantitative and qualitative methods are concurrently employed, is to bring forth different, but complementary, perspectives by placing an emphasis on convergence and validation.

Participants and Procedure

This study is a part of a larger project, which consists of sub-projects focusing on different population segments. In this study, the focus is on younger American adults. Participants in the entire sample included 783 people; however, in alignment with the specific target of this study, the responses of older participants (age > 40) were not utilized. The age range of 18–40 for this

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[1] In the era of big data analytics, data scientists accumulate data sets from different sources so that the overall pattern can emerge from the data. General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago (2020) is a good example. To obtain a representative, nationwide sample, NORC researchers recruit participants from different cities and states over a long time span. Unless the researcher aims to investigate an issue by taking geospatial variables into account, usually GSS data sourced from different locations are aggregated into the analysis (Gitlin, 2019, Yu et al., 2018).

While some researchers have run separate analyses for online and campus samples (e.g., Lehmann & Steele, 2020), some have pulled them together into the same analysis. For instance, in the Marks et al. (2020) study on multiracial identity integration, 61 students were recruited from two departments (psychology and education) of a mid-South university, whereas 320 were recruited from Amazon MTturk. The preceding authors justified the aggregated sample by arguing that no noticeable difference between online and campus samples was detected in prior research. Specifically, a study conducted by Casler et al. (2013) indicated that participants recruited via Amazon's MTurk, those recruited via social media postings on Twitter, Facebook, and Reddit, and a standard sample of students on a college campus were almost indistinguishable in terms of response patterns. A similar study by Bartneck et al. (2015) reached the same conclusion. Because MTurk respondents are affiliated with many different schools or organizations, the particular Christian university can be viewed as one of many locations for sub-sampling. To enhance generalizability, the data collected from the Christian University and MTurk were combined for this study.

study was based on Stage 5 of Erikson's (1968, 1982) theory of psychosocial development. Specifically, people before and after age 40 represent different life stages in social development, mainly reflected by their education, occupation, marriage, and family (Danigelis et al., 2007; Neugarten, 1968). Thus, after removing participants above 40 years from the sample, the total number of participants was 689.

Participants were gathered from a Christian university and Amazon MTurk, an online data collection site. All analyses were conducted utilizing both the university students and Amazon MTurk participants. Participants included both males (*n* = 213) and females (*n* = 456). The age range is 18-40 and the mean age is 23.8, with a standard deviation of 5.08. Because the age distribution is skewed (skewness = 1.25), the median (22) and the mode (20) are also report-

ed here. Other demographic information about the participants is reported in Tables 1 to 3. It is important to point out that some participants skipped some questions and, therefore, different analyses had different sample sizes.

After receiving the recruitment message, participants clicked on a link and were presented with an informed consent document. This document informed each participant that their participation is strictly voluntary and they may choose to close the survey at any time. Upon consent, participants began the survey. There were two rounds of data collection. The first round was limited to the university students only. Students were asked to voluntarily participate in a study with regard to their current faith. The second round was open to participants provided by MTurk, who identified as holding to some form of Christianity currently or in the

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency	Percentage
White	352	51.08
Asian	76	11.03
Black or African American	53	7.69
Hispanic	137	19.88
Native American, American Indian, or Alaska Native	4	0.58
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	8	1.16
Others	41	5.95
Unreported	18	2.61

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
High school graduate	47	6.82
College freshman	11	1.60
College sophomore	85	12.34
College junior	179	25.98
College senior	232	33.67
Graduated with a bachelor's degree	78	11.32
Graduate student	17	2.47
Graduated with a master's/doctorate degree	21	3.05
Unreported	19	2.76

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Religious Affiliations

Religious affiliation	Frequency	Percentage
Catholic	165	23.95
Eastern Orthodox	17	2.47
Evangelical	145	21.04
Mainline Protestant	108	15.67
Fundamentalist	8	1.16
Non-Denominational	88	12.77
Other (Syrian Orthodox, Seventh-Day Adventist, Moravian)	121	17.56
Unreported	37	5.37

past. For the university students, the incentive was extra-credit, whereas Amazon credit ($1.50) was given to MTurk participants.

Both forced-choice survey items and open-ended items were presented to the participants. The survey regarding faith and church experience was adapted from Hui et al. (2018), which was built upon the framework of Jameison's study (2002). Utilizing exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with an oblique rotation, Hui et al. (2018) concluded that the survey items could be classified into three dimensions, namely, positive experience, negative experience, and ideological fit. Examples of positive experience items are "Most of the decisions the church made are correct" and "The church spends donations in the right places." Examples of negative experience items are "Some leaders in church act autocratically" and "Some recent actions by the church disappoint me." Examples of ideological fit items are "There is a disconnect between church and my life" and "My church places too much emphasis on subjective feelings" (See the Appendix).

In the Hui et al. (2018) study, eigenvalues of these factors yielded from EFA were 5.5, 2.015, and 1.129, whereas eigenvalues yielded from the parallel analysis were 1.169, 1.139, and 1.15, respectively. Also, Cronbach alphas of these three constructs were .93, .67, and .75, respectively (Hui et al., 2018).

To ensure content validity, the adopted survey items were reviewed by content experts (pastors and professors), and three pilot studies for testing wording clarity and user interface were run. It is important to note that, in the current study, our team aimed to find out how perception of a concrete statement, not an abstract construct, could predict deconversion; therefore, each item was entered into the model separately. To be specific, it is more informative to find that people who agree that "rejecting same-sex marriage is morally wrong" tend to leave their church than saying "ideological misfit" drives people away from Christianity.

In this study, the quantitative data were analyzed by the classification tree, which is a data mining method, whereas the open-ended data were analyzed by content analysis and text mining. The research design and data collection method were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) based on adherence to the Ethical Code of Conduct of the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003).

Quantitative Data Analysis

Dependent Variable

The outcome variable for the quantitative analysis is the status of Christians with regard to their strength of faith and church attendance. The categories for classification are based on the research study by Kinnaman and Hawkins (2011). According to their study, some Christians who no longer attend church do not necessarily lose their faith. Rather, their discontent with the church drives them to become spiritual "nomads" and "exiles." Those who totally gave up their faith are called "prodigals," or simply "ex-Christians." In a similar vein, the participants were classified into four categories based on their response to a forced-choice

question about their faith status: "Which of the following responses best describes your church attendance and faith?" The first category is "Committed Christians," who are Christians who continue to attend church and have a strong faith ($n = 390$). The second category is "Doubters," who are Christians who still attend church, but have serious doubts of their faith ($n = 49$). The third category is "Disengaged," who are Christians who have ceased attending church for one year or longer, but did not lose their faith ($n = 154$). The fourth category is "Deconverted," who are ex-Christians who stopped attending church and left their faith altogether ($n = 79$).

Seventeen participants did not report their faith status. Quantitative analyses were conducted after combining "doubters" and "deconverts" into one group called "abandoned faith or have serious doubt." Conceptually, doubters embrace humanist and secular philosophy, while religious belief no longer plays a central role in their life. Following this line of reasoning, there is a large degree of overlap between the two groups (Shermer, 2008, 2017). In addition, very often "doubters" become "drifters" (Dyck, 2010). These are people who have participated in the church, but leave slowly. They do not tend to hold strong feelings for or against Christianity and often consider themselves to still be participating Christians, even if their lifestyle and church attendance suggest otherwise.

Predictor Variables

The predictor variables are measures of agreement to statements regarding ideological fit, positive church experience, and negative church experience using a 5-point scale, where 1 is *strongly disagree* and 5 is *strongly agree* (See the Appendix for the questions).

Classification Tree

The classification tree approach (Breiman et al., 1984; Podgorelec et al., 2002) was utilized to identify which independent variable(s) can make a decisive partition of the data by dividing the whole group into subgroups with reference to the dependent variable. This process is iterative and, therefore, a classification tree is also known as a recursive partition tree. The purpose of this iterative classification is to rank the predictor variables by their importance. In programming terminology, a classification tree can be viewed as a set of "nested-if" logi-

cal decision points. For example, after systolic blood pressure, age, and sinus tachycardia are identified as the number 1, 2, and 3 predictors of heart attack, a physician can use three simple questions to determine whether the patient is at risk: What is the patient's systolic blood pressure over the initial 24-hour period? If it is 180 or higher, what is his/her age? If the patient is 62.5 years old or older, does he/she display sinus tachycardia? Because the classification tree is used for decision support, this approach is also known as the decision tree. This technique belongs to the school of data mining, which aims to discover the pattern of the data at hand, rather than reporting the probability of the test statistics in the context of sampling distributions. Unlike traditional regression analysis, the classification tree approach is non-parametric and assumption-free (Fielding, 2007). In addition, it has built-in mechanisms to avoid over-fitting, which often happens to regression modeling (Harrell, 2001). When more variables are added into a regression model, the R^2 always goes up. On the contrary, a classification tree can be pruned to remediate overfitting and over-complexity. The classification tree approach is suitable to this study because the research team aims to discover both the data pattern and an optimal, not complicated, model in order to gain interpretability for the finding.

Data partitioning in a classification tree is based upon the entropy algorithm that involves the LogWorth statistics. "Entropy" literally means "degradation to disorder" or "chaos." During the partition process, observations with similar values (pure or homogeneous) are put into the same subgroup with reference to the dependent variable. If the subgroup is totally homogeneous, the entropy indicator is zero; in reality, though, it is extremely unlikely to obtain perfect homogeneity. LogWorth is calculated as $-\log10(p$ value), where the p value is calculated by taking into account the number of different ways splits can occur. This p value is associated with the difference in the error sum of squares (SS) due to the split. The splits can also be determined by maximizing a LogWorth statistic, which is related to the likelihood ratio Chi-square statistic, known as G^2. As the LogWorth increases, the p value is smaller, meaning that the Chi-square value for the model is larger. In other words, a bigger LogWorth means a split

on the variable that can better isolate pure homogeneous subgroups (less entropy or chaos) (SAS Institute, 2011).

Further, in a single analysis, the result might be over-fitted, meaning that the model could well-explain the data at hand, but the conclusion could not be replicated in other samples. Cross-validation was employed to rectify the situation. To be specific, the sample was randomly assigned into three subsets, namely, the training set ($n = 264$), the validation set ($n = 204$), and the test set ($n = 204$). After the initial model was created with the training set, it was verified with the two other subsets.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Open-Ended Questions

Informed by theory (cognitive dissonance) and previous empirical studies (deconverted Christians perceived a gap between their belief and their lives), the open-ended survey items are concerned with the discrepancy between expectations and church experience, which entails different aspects as follows:

> If you think there is a disconnect between the teaching of the Bible about what the church ought to be and the actual church that you are experiencing, please describe what the disconnect is and why.
> If you think there is a disconnect between the teaching of the Bible about what the leadership (e.g., Bishop, Pastor, Minister, Priest, Elder, Deacon) ought to be and the actual leadership that you are experiencing, please describe what the disconnect is and why.
> If you think there is a disconnect between the teaching of the Bible about what Christians ought to be and the actual congregants that you encounter, please describe what the disconnect is and why.
> How would you describe the relationship with your church members?
> If you have any negative experience in church, please describe what it is.

Content Analysis and Text Mining

There are many forms of data analysis tools that can be utilized to explore the qualitative data. For this study, we chose content analysis and text mining. The former was implemented in MAXQDA (VERBI GmbH, 2018), whereas the latter was conducted through JMP Pro (SAS Institute, 2018). Based on the framework of qualitative analytical procedures developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), the common strategy of content analysis includes the following steps: (a) the analyst carefully reads the open-ended data and takes notes; (b) they perform data reduction by selecting, focusing, and condensing the data that are relevant to the research questions; and (c) they organize and present the reduced data and the common threads. At the end, direct quotations are used to illustrate the common themes or concepts extracted from the data (Romanowski, 2009; Yu et al., 2011). This study is data-driven in essence and, thus, we did not use the predetermined themes to frame the coding.

Text mining is a process of extracting useful information from document collections through the identification and exploration of interesting patterns (Feldman & Sanger, 2007). Text mining is based on natural language processing, which is a subfield of artificial intelligence (AI) and computational linguistics (CL). These technologies can analyze human language with algorithms that can handle "fuzzy" structures (Gelbukh, 2007; Jurafsky & Martin, 2000; Kao & Poteet, 2007; Mehler & Köhler, 2007). There is a widespread criticism that qualitative research is subjective, and thus it cannot produce replicable and generalizable conclusions (Carey et al., 1996). The problem could be caused by the fact that a human coder is subject to many uncontrollable factors, such as fatigue, boredom, varying emotional states, and carelessness. As a remedy, text mining can produce consistent results, no matter who runs the program. In this sense, there are two levels of method triangulation in this study: (a) quantitative and qualitative data analyses; and (b) human coding and text mining.

<div align="center">

Results

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Quantitative

As shown in Table 4, there were 57 females and 70 males who "abandoned faith or have serious doubts," 290 females and 99 males who asserted, "I continue to attend church and have faith in Christ," and 109 females and 44 males who asserted, "I have not attended church for over one year, but I maintain my faith in Christ." Females were more likely to maintain their faith than males. Fisher's exact test verified the as-

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics of Faith Status by Gender

Church attendance and faith status	Gender			
	Female		Male	
Abandoned faith or have serious doubts	57	12.50%	70	32.86%
Continue to attend church and have faith in Christ	290	63.60%	99	46.48%
Have not attended church for over one year, but maintain faith	109	23.90%	44	20.66%
Total	456	100.00%	213	100.00%

sociation between gender and faith status (*p* < .0001). Replicating previous research, more men than women walked away from religion (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1997, 2005; Caplovitz & Sherrow, 1977; Roozen, 1980; Uecker et al., 2007).

In Figure 1, participants who reported that they abandoned faith or have serious doubts are rep-

resented by the dots at the bottom of the graph, with a line as the separator. Those who reported that they have not attended church for over one year but still maintain their faith in Christ are represented by the dots in the middle, bracketed by two lines. Those who continue to attend church and have faith in Christ are represented by the dots at the top of the figure. The dots at the top

Figure 1
Data Partitioned by Predictors
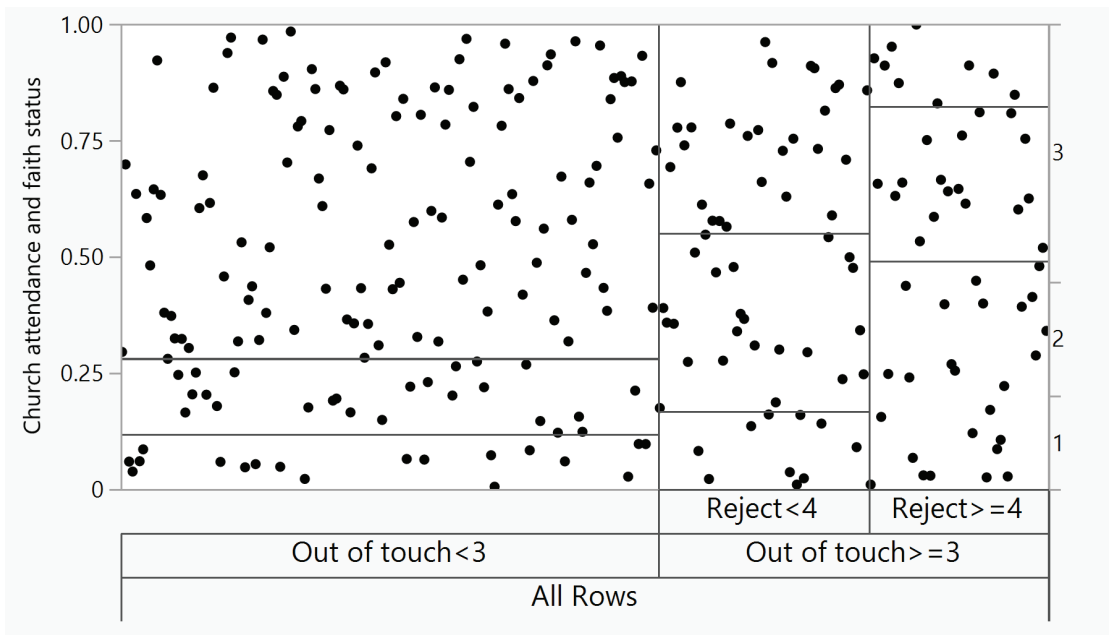
Vertical legend:
1: I abandoned faith or have serious doubts.
2: I have not attended church for over one year but I maintain my faith in Christ.
3: I continue to attend church and have faith in Christ.
Horizontal legend:
Out of touch: The church is out of touch with my life.
Reject: Rejecting same-sex marriage is morally wrong.
Note. The X-axis denotes the important factors detected by the algorithm. The locations of the data points do not correspond to particular data values.

quadrant outnumbered two other categories. Those are participants who perceived that the church is out of touch and were resentful of the church's rejection of same-sex marriage.

The classification tree identified only two important predictors. Figure 2 illustrates how the data are partitioned in a tree structure. In each branch of the tree, there are three rectangles depicting faith status. The bar on the left symbolizes "abandoned faith or have serious doubts," the middle one represents "continue to attend church and have faith in Christ," and the rectangle on the right depicts "have not attended church for over one year but still have faith in Christ." The length of the bar implies the proportion of participants in the category. The branch in the middle of the tree indicates that the most important predictor of faith status was the response to "the church is out of touch with my life" (negative church experience). When the average rating on this variable was lower than 3 on a 5-point scale, participants were more likely to maintain their faith and church attendance, as indicated by the longer middle bar. If the average rating was 3 or higher, the probabilities of

being in one of the three faith statuses were almost even, as indicated by the similar length of the bars. Within this subgroup (see the bottom branch of the tree), participants whose level of agreement to the statement "rejecting same-sex marriage is morally wrong" was lower than 4 tended to keep their faith and attend church, as shown by the longer middle bar. Conversely, if the level of agreement was 4 or higher, there was a higher chance to give up both church and faith, as shown by the longer bar on the left.

To avoid over-fitting, the sample is randomly partitioned into three subsets for cross-validation. The area under curve (AUC) of all three subsets, which indicates the probability of correctly predicting the outcome, are shown in Table 4. According to Hosmer and Lemeshow (2000), if AUC is between 0.7 and 0.79, the model is considered acceptable. If it is below 0.7, then the discriminatory power of the model is just slightly better than guessing. The final testing model indicates that for predicting who would give up faith and church (.7205), and who would continue to keep both (.7132), the model is satisfactory. However, for the participants

Figure 2
Classification Tree
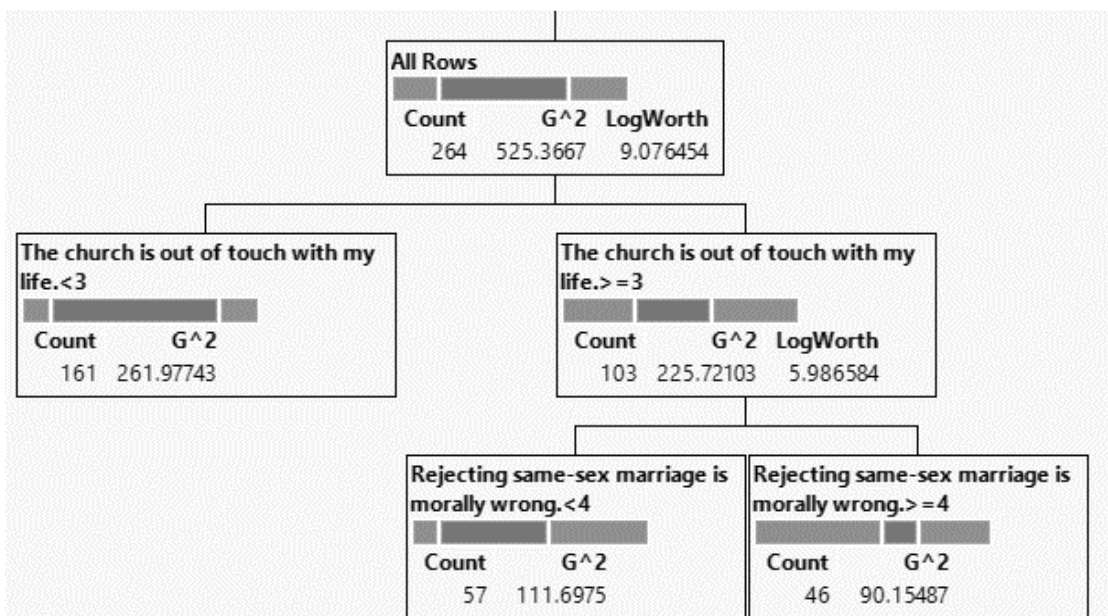
Note. The importance of the predictor variables is ranked in a hierarchy.

who stopped attending church, but maintained the faith,the model has very weak predictive power (.6311). It is important to point out this AUC criterion is nothing more than an expert's opinion and, therefore, it should not be treated as the absolute standard.

Content Analysis and Text Mining

The qualitative data were imported into MAX-QDA for content analysis, finding similar results to the quantitative result: participants who asserted that they had become atheist are those who could no longer relate to the church. The concept web in Figure 3, generated by MAXQDA, displays inter-relationships among the most common co-occurring codes (e.g., became atheist, no longer can relate). The straight line is indicated by the frequency number listed next to the categories. The higher the frequency number, the more times participants mentioned the categories in their responses. According to the concept web, "No longer can relate" was at the top of the concept web, indicating that it was the strongest common co-occurring code that shared a relationship with the other codes. The response "Became Atheist" was the second strongest common co-occurring code, having the strongest inter-relationship with "No longer can relate." The response "Busy" had the second strongest inter-relationship with "No longer can relate." Also, the responses "judgmental," "do not like members of the church," "people of the church do not support my ideas," "became atheist," and "no longer can relate" co-occurred most often, while "waste of time," "have not found right church," and "busy" also appear to be strongly interconnected with "judgmental." Simply put, as the concept web descends, the pattern continues, and the further away the code is, the less of an interconnection it has with the strongest code. However, each common code is a significant finding because they all share an inter-relationship with each other.

The results from content analysis indicate the discrepancy between what the participants expected and what they actually experienced. As mentioned earlier, there are four aspects of Christian cognitive dissonance: social justice, self-denial, self-justification, and self-identification. In regard to discontent of social injustice, one participant asserted, "I have a negative perspective of God and do not believe that he is wholly good. I do not wish to be a part of a religion that is supportive of the injustice and brutality of humankind." In a similar vein, another participant said, "The church is all about making money, and it doesn't do much to help the needy in the community. My church has homeless people less than a mile from it, and they never receive help." Similar criticisms can be found in other respondents: "The Bible said you should give back to others, your neighbors and especially those that are less fortunate but I think a lot of churches do this for show." "In the Bible, Jesus is extremely focused on the poor and treating those as we would like to be treated."

The following response from a participant shows his experience of self-denial as he blindly followed some ideas in question:

I took psychedelic mushrooms and, in the expanded state of consciousness, realized that

Table 6

Recurring Themes Regarding Perceived Disconnect and Negative Experiences in Church Discovered by Text Explorer in JMP

Phrase	Count
closed minded	4
judgmental	4
barbaric	3
Christians are too hateful	3
difference destroyed	3
irrelevant to daily life	3
just made up stuff	3
ruined by the Republican	3
New Testament is about loving	3
Bible is barbaric	3
destroyed or shunned	3
hateful these days	3
sexual preference	2
encouragement of child abuse	2
encouragement of spousal abuse	2
religious are closed	2
religions created war; willing to kill	2
abortion and sex	2
judgement and hate	2
judgmental and hypocritical	2
money and control	2
outdated	2
women and homosexuals	2
birth control	2
socially liberal	2

Figure 3
Concept Web

No longer can relate. (42)

Busy. (27)

Became atheist. (37)

Don't like service/rituals. (25)

People of the church don't support my ideas. (19)

Have not found right church. (17)

Do not like members of the church. (12)

Waste of Time. (11)
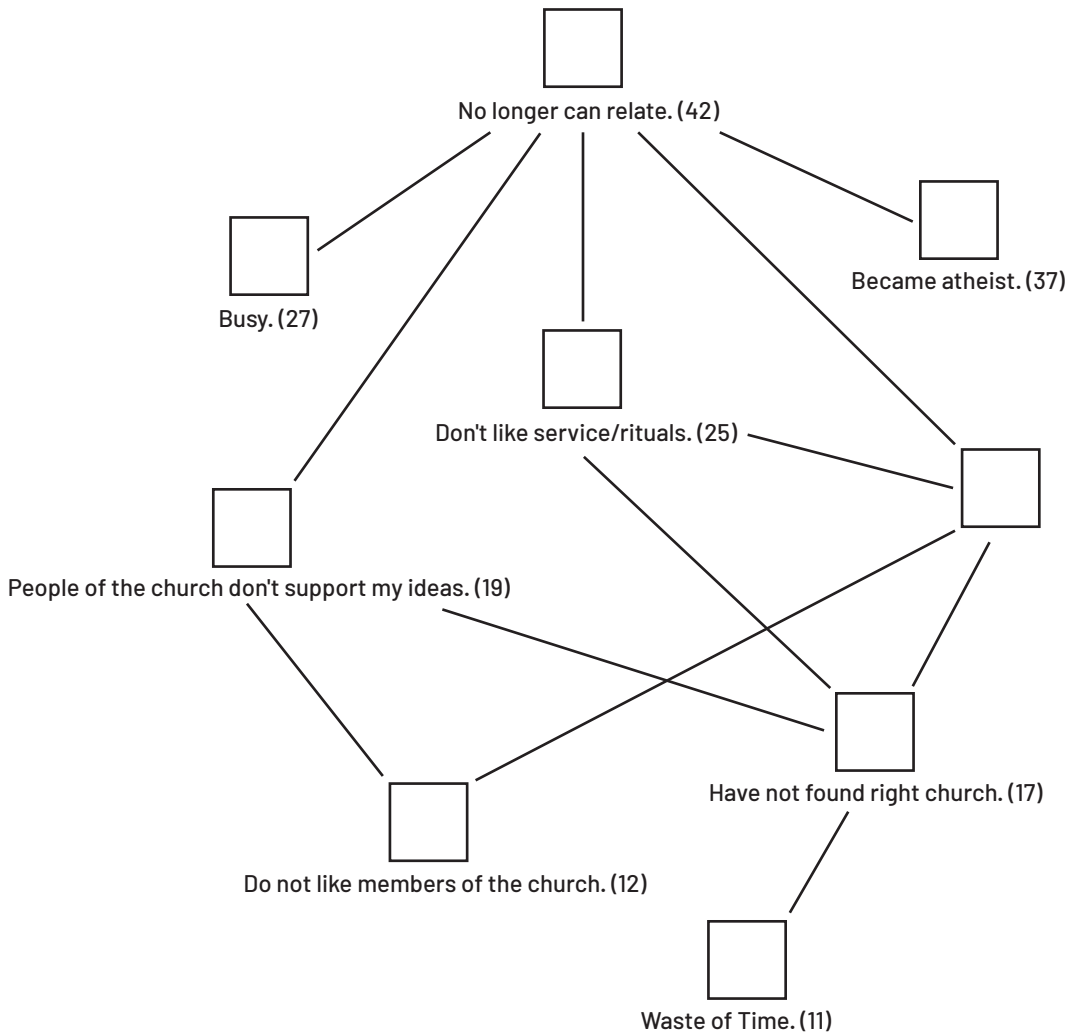
just because I believed something didn't make it true, that my beliefs were only taught (without evidence) at a young and impressionable age at which I also believed in the monster in the closet and Santa Claus. I was in a state of consciousness that did not cling to ideas or identify with them. With that, I wouldn't say I gave up my faith so much as realized that I was blindly following something and was making myself emotionally unwilling to consider alternative views.

Next, the failure of self-justification is manifested in the response from this participant:
Gay marriage is a big problem in my church. It makes people break relationships both with God and each other. Pastors are against people constantly trying to use Scripture to show it is not biblical, which makes my friends cold hearted to church because of this opposition.

This participant indicated signs of mental strain between two conflicting beliefs, namely, gay marriage and the church tradition. Another participant was concerned with divorce. She wrote, "I think life evolves constantly. Everyone can marry whom they want. Divorce is all over the place among Christians. Who is to say what is sacred. Fix your own self before fixing others!" Thus, the challenge arose when she failed

to rationalize one of her core beliefs, leading her to question the traditional Christian teaching about marriage and divorce.

Last, in regard to the challenge of self-identification, some respondents found it difficult to identify themselves as a member of the Christian community that is far from the ideal (e.g., a loving and supporting community). For example, one participant said,

> In America, we believe in religious freedom. Politically, the church is called to be different than other place; however, now church focuses on everything and picking wrong battles. Church would have been more effective by loving than protesting or shooting and being mean to them. Church would be more effective to be loving and caring. Changing churches' approach would make a change; they should get a relationship with people first, then try to change them.

In a similar tone, another participant wrote,

> I think, in general, many churches are teaching a worldly view in one way or another. Some want us to believe that an all-inclusive world is the one Jesus wanted; others want us to feel comfortable being surrounded by figures and statues of false gods. The Bible teaches against these things.

In addition, the following participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the Christian church that is not inclusive:

> They are preaching about unconditional love, yet they condemn all sorts of people who don't fit into the Christian mold. I personally don't think that fits the description of unconditional love, because clearly there are all sorts of conditions that a person would need to qualify first before Jesus will accept him or her. They don't use love with people they consider "other." They use shame, guilt, and violence in their message (you'll burn in hell) if you don't accept Christ as your savior.

> The church I'm experiencing is very shallow; our pastor turns people away because of their dress code and it makes me angry. The Bible says to love everyone; Jesus loved everyone. He hung out with tax collectors and outcasts and he never cared how they were dressed.

> I feel that attending [the Christian university] has made me not like the Christian community. I think that this school is filled with self-righteous trust fund babies. This makes them close

minded and not open to other walks of life.

Similarly, as discovered by Text Explorer using JMP, phrases denoting negative experiences in church had their highest counts among phrases such as "closed minded" and "judgmental," moderate counts among "barbaric," "Christians are too hateful," and "hateful these days," and lower counts among "sexual preference," "abortion and sex," and "money and control" (See Table 6). Based on the recurring themes regarding perceived disconnect and negative experiences in the church, it was found that participants were experiencing cognitive dissonance. Thus, the internal attitude and behaviors are inconsistent with each other.

Discussion

Implications

One of the major findings in the current study was that some participants can no longer relate themselves to the atmosphere of traditional churches. Simply put, as participants transitioned into adulthood or a new chapter in life, they stopped attending church, either abandoning their faith or having little to no faith due to its lack of relevance. The results align with the claims of Packard and Ferguson (2018), who found similar results, asserting that popular culture and politics may relate to why young adults are changing their beliefs.

The classification tree showed that the church is out of touch and the anti-homosexuality attitude in the church were crucial factors in deconversion. When the tree was forced to further split the data, the same variables kept recurring, meaning that other variables did not matter. In addition, the results from the participants' open-ended responses did reveal signs of cognitive dissonance during the deconversion process. The four main aspects of Christian cognitive dissonance in relation to deconversion, namely, social justice, self-denial, self-justification, and self-identification, were all detected in the content analysis. Taking all of the above findings together, the results not only verify existing theories of cognitive dissonance, but also challenge it in a way that will encourage others to further explore other potential factors of deconversion.

Further, the participants who asserted that they can no longer relate themselves to the church are the same people who have become

atheists. Based on the findings of similar studies, a more plausible explanation to this correlation would appear to be that the church is outdated (Packard & Ferguson, 2018; Putnam et al., 2012).

It is worth noting that many Christian denominations were included in this study, and, thus, the implications may vary depending on denomination. However, it is clear that many younger adults are concerned with the traditional beliefs within the church, which are in conflict with, or irrelevant to, their beliefs, values, and experiences. The results of this study suggest that many of the church's beliefs and practices are disconnected from the experiences of its members. However, it is not an isolated event in history for socio-political factors to be in tension with the church. For instance, Galileo was tried by the Catholic Church for promoting the heretical belief that the Earth revolves around the sun.

Given the historical pattern of disconnect between socio-political movements and the religious institution in place, it is important to consider the ways in which young people may prepare for these areas of disconnect. Research has shown that Christian college experiences promote faith-learning integration, as seen in growth of critical thinking abilities (Kim, 2020). By fostering critical thinking abilities, an individual is better able to integrate complex ideas and evaluate the information in a meaningful way. Encouraging critical thinking in young people would help them develop the abilities necessary to manage the cognitive dissonance they may experience between the church and their socio-cultural setting.

While the approach to this issue would vary by denomination, it is worth evaluating whether the goal and mission of the local church is being achieved. If the church is not meeting the needs, questions, and concerns of many of its members, perhaps the church's mission is not always aligned with its action. One way the church may better meet the needs of members with these concerns is to engage with their questions and concerns in respectful and empathetic ways. Local churches have the unique and important opportunity to have meaningful relationships on an individual level and understand the needs of those who are involved in the church. Open conversations that seek to understand others' perspective can have a profound impact on the quality of relationship, respect, and understanding. By simply talking about and addressing the needs of the individual, the church becomes more relevant to the emotional, environmental, and spiritual needs of the individual. By doing this, individuals may be less compelled to leave the church to manage their cognitive dissonance and more likely to experience a change in attitude and behavior that creates room for more integrated beliefs.

Limitations

Although the sample size was not small, the sampling scheme was convenience sampling, instead of random sampling. Additionally, females accounted for the majority of the participants, and most of the participants identified as White. All of the above limits the generalizability of this study.

The reliability of self-report data is an Achilles' heel of survey research. First, the authors let the participants report and define their own faith status. It was up to the participant to define what "strong faith" means, and the so-called committed Christians might not have been actually committed. In a similar vein, one might argue that those who thought they were Christians were not serious about their faith, and, thus, they had never been deconverted. Nonetheless, it is difficult, if not impossible, to verify the participant's spiritual journey. Because this study is about personal and sensitive information (e.g., negative experience in the church), there is also a possibility that some participants might not have been fully candid in their responses. This shortcoming is pervasive in survey research. Take the World Values Survey (World Values Survey Association, 2020) as an example. This international survey contains questions regarding political and religious orientations and, thus, besides the issue of honesty, it is inevitable that people of different cultures interpret the questions and choices differently. Strong assumptions about mutual cancellations of measurement errors are made to this type of research.

Another source of unreliability is memory error. People might re-interpret the past on the basis of current ideas and experiences (Loftus, 2016; Schacter, 1999, 2001). To be more specific, "consistency biases" might lead people to

edit history so that the past is in alignment with what people feel and believe now. For instance, after a person left the church due to a traumatic event, they tended to interpret everything in the church as negative and omitted the positive experiences. "Egocentric biases" might drive people to remember the past in a self-enhancing or self-justifying manner. For example, a deconverted Christian might blame every dispute on the "hypocritical" pastor and church members, but never think about their own responsibility. "Stereotypical biases" might affect memories and perceptions in social settings. For example, when a person constantly receives harsh criticisms against Evangelicals, they might view everything said by Evangelicals as "narrow-minded" and "anti-intellectual." Given the possibility of these potential biases and memory errors, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution.

Future Directions and Recommendations

Future studies should take the above limitations into account. Specifically, multi-stage sampling, in which the entire population is partitioned into different segments, should be employed in order to enhance the generalizability of the results. Secondly, future studies are needed to establish other possible themes found in those who have deconverted from their faith; this, however, cannot be done unless there are honest responses. The remediation could involve doing field observations in church settings, rather than solely counting on self-report data. In addition, the literature review revealed that men are more likely to deconvert from Christianity than women, and younger people are more vulnerable than older adults to deconversion. Future research can investigate gender and age differences in terms of cognitive dissonance regarding faith exit. Further, the literature review indicated that some young people do not develop a solid Christian worldview that can inform their understanding and discernment across domains, including political and social domains. The authors of this article had reviewed literature and collected data regarding worldviews of social and political issues, such as the perception of the 2016 election, climate change, gun control, immigration, racism, consumerism, and health care. However, these complicated controversies deserve

a paper in its own right. As mentioned before, this study is a part of a larger project, and these issues will be addressed in our future study. In closing, shedding light on the topic of deconversion may help not only churches, but also individuals who are thinking about walking away from the church. For a long time, some Christian churches have been using a war analogy to frame the challenges encountered by Christians: the secular, humanist, and postmodern world, which is hostile to Christianity, tries to lure people away from the truth (Fry, 2014). The authors are doubtful whether this narrative can reduce or stop deconversion. Further data-driven research that gives a voice to deconverted Christians may help to bring about openness to new perspectives and communication within the church.

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Appendix

Questions Related to the Independent Variables in the Questionnaire

To what extent do you agree with the following statement? Please answer all items using a 5-point scale (5 = strongly agree, 1 = strongly disagree)

Ideological fit (this header was not shown in the survey)

There is no absolute moral truth. What is right or wrong depends on the situation.

No religion or philosophy can monopolize the whole truth.

Religion is anti-science.

Creationism is unscientific (Creationism is the conviction that the universe was created in the way described by Genesis).

Intelligent design is unscientific (Intelligent design is the theory affirming that the universe originated from an intelligent designer instead of randomness; however, this viewpoint is not necessarily tied to any specific creation account of any religion).

Evangelicals are narrow-minded (Evangelicalism is the Christian belief that salvation results from accepting Jesus Christ as the personal savior and the Bible is the ultimate authority of doctrines).

Evangelicals should support the Republican Party.

Under no circumstance should abortion be legalized.

Conditional abortion (e.g., pregnancy resulted from incest, rape, and the mother's life being threatened by continuation of conception) can be legalized.

Same-sex marriage should be legalized.

It is morally wrong to believe that homosexuality is immoral.

Rejecting same-sex marriage is morally wrong.

Positive experience (this header was not shown in the survey)

Most of the decisions the church made are correct.

The church spends donations in the right places.

I have a fairly good relationship with leaders in church.

I have an important role in the church family.

I always have channels to express my suggestions to the church.

I have many good friends in church.

The majority of my close friends and I go to the same church.

People in church sometimes contact me and show their concern

Negative experience (this header was not shown in the survey)

Some leaders in church act autocratically.

Recently I was hurt in church.

Some recent actions by the church disappoint me.

The church is not what she is supposed to be.

The church is short of female leaders.

My church is placing too much emphasis on subjective experience.

My church is placing too much emphasis on rational analyses.

My church is placing too much emphasis on dogmas and creeds.

The church is out of touch with my life.

Experiences of Grace as Told by Gay Christians

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Positive psychology has yielded rich insights about the nature of human flourishing and is just beginning to broach the topic of grace. Because of the central role grace plays in Christianity, a qualitative exploration was conducted with a sample of Christian participants identifying as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Transcripts from 25 semi-structured interviews were coded and analyzed using grounded theory. Most participants described growing up in relatively conservative Christian communities where their emerging sexual identity was discouraged and then finding new faith communities in late teenage or adult years where they can experience and practice their faith more freely. They described God as loving and grace as available freely to all, even as some have reverberating doubts about their changed theological views. We discuss clinical implications for working with gay Christian clients in psychotherapy, emphasizing that faith communities are not necessarily places to be avoided, but can actually be places of healing and support.

Though positive psychology itself is not a field explicitly tied to religion or spirituality, it is note-worthy that the constructs studied in positive psychology were first identified by considering the themes of the major world philosophies and religions (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Thus, many of the topics studied in positive psychology deeply root themselves in religion and spirituality, including forgiveness, gratitude, humility, wisdom, and awe (McMinn, 2017). A relatively new construct in positive psychology is the experience of divine grace and its psychological concomitants (Emmons et al., 2017; Hall & Mc-Minn, in press; Hodge et al., in press).

Funded by the John Templeton Foundation, Emmons et al. (2017) embarked on an impressive multidisciplinary effort to articulate grace in a way that would lend itself to empirical investigation. Based on this multidisciplinary theoretical work, they defined grace as, "the gift of acceptance given unconditionally and voluntarily to an undeserving person by an unobligated giver" (p. 277). The Templeton Foundation then funded an additional project that involved eight qualitative studies investigating how Christians of various persuasions experience divine grace. Each of these studies involved between 25 and 30 interviews, using a standardized set of interview questions. Hall and McMinn (2021) completed a qualitative synthesis of seven of these studies and reported that the lived Christian experience of grace is best captured in two definitions. A general definition that seems to apply for most Christians in their study was, "the unmerited expression of God's love, in which God offers the gift of relationship with Godself" (p. 11), and a more particular definition applying to some believers was, "the unmerited expression of God's love, in which God offers the gift of relationship with God through the work of Jesus, whose death on the cross allows for the forgiveness of sins which separated people from God" (p. 11).

Another recent development in the positive psychology of grace is an ambitious review by Hodge et al. (in press), in which the authors reviewed all current empirical literature on the topic, both published and unpublished. They discovered 61 empirical studies, 50 of them quantitative in design and 11 qualitative. These studies used a variety of different scales to assess how grace is perceived and can be roughly divided into four categories: descriptive studies about what people believe and how they experience grace, measuring grace, correlates of grace, and grace as an intervention. The twelve inter-

Author Note

vention studies where all offered in relation in a religious or spiritual context, and they provide promising evidence that grace may be helpful in promoting mental health, positive relationships, and virtue development. Hodge et al. (in press) suggested that systematic qualitative research may be helpful to better refine the construct and measurement of grace for future studies.

The study reported here was completed as one of the eight funded qualitative studies designed to explore how Christians experience divine grace. The focus of the other studies was mainline (2 studies), evangelical, Latter Day Saint, Roman Catholic, and Quaker Christians, as well as a study with older adults who identify as Christian. The focus of this study is to investigate how Christians who identify as lesbian or gay experience divine grace. Prior to this study, there have been no reported qualitative studies exploring the lived experience of divine grace among gay Christians.

The historic tension between Christianity and gay individuals is well-established (Meyers, 2018; Yarhouse et al., 2018) and, at least to some extent, mirrored in tensions familiar to psychologists of religion and spirituality. A task force appointed by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2009) articulated standards for sexual orientation change efforts and, in the process, distinguished between organismic and telic congruence. Whereas some religions emphasize living consistently with particular values (telic congruence), models of lesbian, gay, and bisexual psychology focus more on living fully into one's sense of self (organismic congruence). This is an important distinction, highlighting familiar tensions for psychotherapists who work with religious clients, as well as for religious individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

This study, then, is one of several funded studies designed to assess the lived experience of grace among Christians. In this particular study, we interviewed Christians who identify as sexual minorities.

Method

Participants

Participants for this study were collected via the snowball method and were included based on their self-identification of being both gay (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual) and Christian. We did not require the acceptance of any specific Christian denomination or doctrine for inclusion in the study. The initial recruits were selected via personal connections with one of the authors. These were typically friends, colleagues, or former students. At the end of the initial interviews, we asked the participants to refer their friends and make social media announcements, which included the contact information of the authors and a brief abstract of the study proposal.

Overall, we were able to conduct 25 interviews (17 male, 6 female, 1 transgender male, 1 person who chose not to specify). Twenty-four of the 25 participants identified as non-Latinx European, with the remaining participant identifying as European and Latinx. A majority of the participants (20 participants) identified as gay or lesbian, four participants identified as bisexual or pansexual, and one person chose not to specify. The median age of participants was 29 years, ranging from 22 to 67. Participants reported having been involved religiously and spiritually for an average of 24 years. Participants also reported that they received an average of 15 years of education. Finally, 16 participants were Protestant (progressive, mainline, or evangelical), with one person identifying as Catholic, three people who identified as Other, and five people who chose not to specify.

Measures

A semi-structured interview was created by several researchers collaborating on the project funded by the Templeton Foundation, providing a standardized inquiry into the experiences of divine grace (see Table 1). The interview instrument involved several iterations before being finalized, with each member of the core research team providing individual feedback, then an extended meeting to discuss and revise questions collaboratively. Finally, a program office at the Templeton Foundation met with several members of the core research team to make additional revisions. As mentioned earlier, this instrument was part of a larger grant funded project involving 8 grounded theory qualitative studies, each focusing on a unique population who identify as Christian.

Procedures

Interviews were conducted in person ($n = 11$) and via the Zoom audiovisual communication application ($n = 14$). Interactions were record-

Table 1

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Theme	Question
Christianity	Please tell me the story of how your experience as a Christian has played out in your life?
Your View of God	In your view, what is God like? Can you think of a particular story or example that has helped you understand God?
God's View of You	We've talked a bit about how you view God. How does God feel about you? Again, a story or example would be very helpful.
Saving Grace	[I've heard you mention the word grace] OR [Christians often speak of grace]. Christian theologians often mention the concept of salvation by grace. What does it mean for you to be saved by grace? And not just what does it mean in your in terms of theological knowledge, but what does that mean to your own personal identity?
Accepting Grace	Do you find it difficult to accept God's offer of salvation by grace? Are there concerns that the term raises in your thinking or in your experience?
Teleology/Sanctifying Grace	We've just discussed the idea of being saved by God's grace. Are there other ways you experience God's grace in an ongoing way in your life?
Spiritual Struggle	What is the hardest thing you have ever gone through? Did it change your experience in being a Christian?
Common Grace	How does God feel about those are not Christian? Does this topic of grace apply to those outside the Christian faith?
Explicit/Implicit Views of God	Sometimes what people believe in their head about God doesn't fully match what they experience in their experience of God. On the topic of grace, how does your head knowledge and your experience of God differ, and how are they the same?
Spiritual Practices	Are there particular spiritual practices that you find helpful in experiencing God's grace? If so, talk some about how you experience that practice.

ed with an iPhone connected to lavalier microphones for the in-person interviews and with the built-in Zoom recording function for remote interviews. The interview's audio material was then uploaded to an automated transcription service (temi.com). The resulting transcripts were then cleaned by reviewing the text in conjunction with the audio and correcting any mistakes made by the software. Once transcripts were cleaned, they were uploaded to the qualitative research application (dedoose.com).

We used grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Ponterotto, 2005) as our strategy for analyzing interviews. Given the exploratory nature of the research, it was deemed prudent to use grounded theory to help identify themes emerging

from interviewees' experiences. A qualitative approach such as content analysis presumes more *a priori* knowledge than available about how people might experience grace. A phenomenological approach would avoid the assumption of *a priori* knowledge, but would be limited in yielding identifiable themes for subsequent research. In grounded theory, researchers look for themes that emerge from the data, while recognizing some subjectivity in this process. The perspective uncovered in each interview is perceived to be knowable, but only through the imperfect lens of subjective interpretation. Thus, we do our best to recognize subjective bias, while also looking for prominent themes that emerge in multiple interviews.

Five of the authors participated in the grounded theory analyses, including one experienced and published qualitative researcher (McMinn) serving in a supervisory role, three doctoral students (Schollars, Peterson, Webster), and a dissertation coordinator (Dunlop) who had listened to each of the interviews to assess for proper depth of inquiry. To address and acknowledge subjectivity, we used a Google Doc application to participate in a process known as "bracketing" (Fischer, 2009). Bracketing is a practice arising from the phenomenology movement (Tufford & Newman, 2010). In the present study, we recorded our own histories and experiences of Christianity, as well as sexual minorities. We then reflected on ways our perspectives and biases might interfere with data analysis and described ways we might mitigate these confounding factors. In this case, the five authors who participated in coding all described themselves as shifting from a conservative Christian background toward a more inclusive and progressive view of Christianity. This process was important because it allowed us to reflect on potential biases in how we read the narratives and also to explore the topic of the study so that the pursuant codebook would portray a deeper, more nuanced reflection of the participants' reports.

Next, each collaborator reviewed the transcripts on our own. We noted potential themes and recorded memos that provided justification for the inclusion of the theme. After that, we reviewed each theme as a group and included those themes we agreed upon. The transcripts were separated into blocks of five to eight interviews. Two collaborators reviewed the same block before meeting to compare their level of agreement and discussed areas of difference and adjusting ratings accordingly. While some qualitative research is based on establishing inter-rater reliability and then having one person rate the remaining interviews, in this study we opted for the more intensive approach of having two raters consider every interview and then meet to discuss coding similarities and disparities. In all instances, we were able to achieve consensus. This is the same process used by Hall and McMinn (2021) to review interviews across the various studies funded by the Templeton grant. Once all transcripts were coded and discussed, the authors moved on to the analysis of the primary and secondary themes found in the data through axial coding. In this phase, major categories were identified and other themes organized around these axes.

A written summary of results was then provided to participants for a process known as member-checking (Birt et al., 2016). This offers the opportunity for participants to provide additional input or correct conclusions that may seem incorrect to them. Among the 2 participants who responded, both affirmed the themes we identified and no additional recommendations were offered.

Results

Many participants (*n* = 17) reported a history of conservative upbringing with regards to religion, politics, or both. As a result, they (*n* = 16) often described a developmental path that began with a sense of being different and even flawed. They also tended to report a period of questioning, beginning sometime in middle school or high school, where they began to differentiate and entertain the possibility that their sexuality and religion might not be incompatible. One 25-year-old participant described it this way:

> So I guess whenever I first started to discover that my sexuality was not straight, it was scary. It was something that I pushed down a lot and hid from and did everything I could to pretend it didn't exist. But the more and more it became like a formidable force in my life... the more dissonance I felt. So the trajectory was realizing that I was attracted to men and trying my hardest to like pray the gay away, for lack of a better term. All the while since my parents were such avid members of my church community, I was as well. So also trying to juggle the part of upholding that image of a strong Christian, a leader of the youth group, et cetera. Trying to deal with that while also like grappling with this gigantic secret and doing everything I could to make it go away through the power of prayer.

Most participants described their theology as having shifted during the process of coming out. In some instances, participants reported ongoing strain with family members who disapproved of their sexuality. Other participants described their family members changing their views after the participant came out, and they reported that their family now maintains an affirming stance. A minority reported that there never was any conflict in their families regarding their sexuality.

We organized data analysis around four major themes related to the interview questions: (a) the nature of God, (b) the saving nature of grace, (c) tensions and struggles involving grace, and (d) ongoing disciplines related to grace. Examples of each organizing theme and subtheme are shown in Table 2.

The Nature of God

Throughout the interviews, participants made a number of observations regarding who they understand God to be. If God's grace is described as a gift, it seems only natural that participants would be observed pondering the nature of the giver. We found three subthemes regarding the nature of God: God's essential character is love, God affirms me, and God is present during difficult times. Examples and frequencies from each of these subthemes are provided in Table 2.

Overall, participants described God as one who is loving in essence, one who loves them and takes pride in who they are, and one who remains by their side when they encounter life's evils and hardships. In describing the nature of God this way, they were not just making theological assertions about God's character, but also reflecting on God's personal, relational, caring presence in their personal lives. Often this was related to their sexual identity, with many participants noting that God is proud of them and affirming of who they are. A 30-year-old male expressed his view that, "God calls us to see our goodness, worthiness, and belovedness... because that's how I think God sees us." A 67-year-old male reported, "God is probably very proud of me, of who I've become and what I'm doing." It is noteworthy that participants were able to name specific experiences where they encountered God's presence in ways that led them to conclude these things about God's character.

Saving Nature of Grace

The interview (Table 1) asked specifically about the saving nature of grace. Participants affirmed this idea, but typically not in the same way as they had learned about saving grace in childhood. This organizing theme was further divided into five secondary themes: (a) grace as unearned, (b) grace as forgiveness, (c) grace as relational, (d) inclusive views of grace, and (e) the ubiquity of grace. Again, examples and frequencies of each are offered in Table 2.

Many (*n* = 15) participants discussed the unearned nature of grace, not so much because they are sinners in need of saving, but because it is simply in God's nature to offer grace instead of shame. A 28-year-old female commented, "God sent his son for us to have eternal life with him and to give us grace basically. And I don't use it as a way to be puritanical about it like... 'I'm not worthy, you know.' Of course we're worthy... he created us in his design and everything around us in his design... To deny that would be to deny yourself and the peace of God that is within you and within everybody else."

Some participants (*n* = 7) made reference to the forgiveness that comes with saving grace, but this was neither a majority of participants nor a prominent part of any of the interviews. Others (*n* = 11) emphasized that saving grace is relational, not so much about the forensic qualities of being saved from deserved punishment, but more about entering into relationship with God and others because of the gift of grace. A 26-year-old male noted, "Doctrines of hell aside, it seems to me that the posture of God is fundamentally one of seeking to restore relationship." Participants sometimes noted how they were saved from loneliness as the result of God's grace and the connections that come from being in community with others who share their faith views and affirm their sexual identity. Still others saw themselves as being saved from existential fear after having experienced a mystical connection with God, which provided reassurance that they were not alone in the universe or that God was not disinterested or displeased with them.

Often, participants narrated their initial encounters with the concept of grace in childhood as having been presented as a way to avoid damnation and attain union with God in the afterlife. In these narratives, grace was seen as a gift given on the condition of accepting a specific doctrinal belief or sacrament, such as acknowledging their sinfulness and need for Jesus to save them from their sins. Most of the participants in this study (*n* = 18) experienced this as a difficult or even damaging narrative, especially as they grew into awareness of being gay in faith communities where this was typically unacceptable. Their current views have shifted away from any conditionality to grace. Most (*n* = 16) narrated a theological development that has culminated in

Table 2
Response Themes

Primary Theme	Frequency of Coding	Secondary Theme	Example
The Nature of God	16/25	God's Essential Character is Love	*And I think that my, my definition of God, my relation-ship with God comes from 1 John 4 where we talk about God is love. Let us love one another for God is love. And if you don't love, then you don't know God.*
	20/25	God Affirms Me	*I can lean into that voice of truth and hear God's saying, [NAME], I've been in all of this. I've never abandoned you. All of this belongs. I'm still here. Like there's no hatred, there's no disappointment. There's just so much grace. Like where I want to be so hard on myself, which I often am for whatever it is. Who I sense God to be is like the kindest, most loving thing. So I think God is really proud of me.*
	13/25	God is Present in Difficult Times	*And that was the period of time that I like to say that I really clung to God, that I did really turn to my faith to help me find answers. And, I think my faith really got me through that. I miss that time in a lot of ways. Not the pain of that, but I miss how close I felt to God, during that time and you know, and I fully recognize that that was because I moved toward him.*
Transforming Nature of Grace	14/25	Grace as Unearned	*I think growing up like what you, what, yeah, what do you do to become worthy? You have to prove your worth. You're having to prove your worth to God, to where now it's like kind of no matter what I do, I'm already acceptable and good. I don't have to like be, I don't have to be trying to be good for God. I don't have to be hustling myself in some way.*
	7/25	Grace as Forgiveness	*It's about walking in faith and that God has grace for every part of the journey. When you walk in faith, you get shit wrong because your main goal wasn't to be right. And I just realized my main goal was no longer to be right, but to be faithful, which means that there is so much grace extended over all the things that I did wrong in all the decisions that may not have been the best. And it just changed everything, truly changed everything.*
	11/25	Grace as Relational	*I think for me personally, I think that's become more a centerpiece of how my faith is and what I think about my own relationship with God it's something that on my own, I would just be incapable.*

Table 2 (continued)
Response Themes

Primary Theme	Frequency of Coding	Secondary Theme	Example
	16/25	Inclusive Views of Grace and Salvation	*I'm much more global and much more universal in terms of it's not just about Christians, it's about we're all creations of God and every one of us has that same and equal claim to his grace.*
	8/25	The Ubiquity of Grace	*I can sort of experience God's grace in this moment here in terms of just the sort of freely given gift of life and the sense I have of the continuation of that as I like to become aware of it.*
Tensions and Struggles Related to Grace	6/25	Difficulty Accepting Salvation by Grace	*I think I sometimes feel that I'm not worth it, that there ought to be worthier candidates on the matter. But I don't think that makes me particularly unique.*
	8/25	Reverberating Doubts about Progressive Views	*think my only concerns with...kind of what I've just said is I don't always fully believe it in my heart. Where I wonder if it is a like, what if I'm wrong and it's a transactional belief and I didn't do that and then I'm [doomed]. I think that's a similar thing with all of these different theological concepts where I've reached a place that feels congruent, but there's still a lot of doubt because of the shadow of my upbringing in which, well, what if I am wrong and that was right, then I'm [in trouble].. So I think that's sometimes my concern...like it sounds really great. Like God does love us all and his grace covers us all. What if my conservative background is correct and this new thing is too good to be true?*
Ongoing Disciplines of Grace	9/25	Nature	*And I would say, you know, hiking through nature, I definitely feel like I feel God more there than in a building.*
	10/25	Community	*I mean, I would say that I would say that there is a sense, the most palpable form of that comes when I feel like I'm in a community of truly loving people who are interested in trying the best they can to work out this we're that we're sort of trusting in. And being a part of a community of people who are interested in that as sort of where, where the identity would come in for me.*
	7/25	Learning	*I just value so much of just being like in the Bible, like, just like studying hardcore.*

Table 2 (continued)
Response Themes

Primary Theme	Frequency of Coding	Secondary Theme	Example
	10/25	Creative Expression	*The spiritual pathway proposed by Ignatius of Loyola is one that says really straightforwardly, there'll be times, months, years when you go by, when you might when, the deepest question of your heart might be, "Does God exist?" And he would say, well, pray anyway. Because it might be that it can help you pay attention to that devastation. It might be that in the, uh, the emptiness of that, that you'll discover something creative or something about what it means to be human or something that is close to glory in terms of virtue and power, imagination and art.*
	19/25	Prayer and Quiet	*I see a lot of value in like the meditation kind of sitting and being still, I have found value in those as well. Meditation, contemplative kind of things. But the times when I felt like I really experienced God, it's walking the prayer labyrinth, walking in general can be a spiritual practice or yoga or anything where I'm moving any kind of movement, has been really been when I've experienced God.*

a description of grace being offered to all humanity, regardless of doctrinal belief or religion, and often experienced in the everyday joys of life. Grace was viewed as being available to all people, in the present, as opposed to grace being solely about eternal destiny. Many rejected the idea of hell, and some expressed uncertainty about any form of afterlife, or at least did not perceive it to be particularly relevant to their daily experiences of grace. A 27-year-old male respondent described it this way: "God's grace isn't conditional on us accepting anything. So I think grace applies to everyone. His love applies to everyone. It's not conditional on whether you officially believe or not, whether you say the sinner's prayer or not. I think his grace covers everyone."

The theological distinction (see Berkhof, 1979) between common grace (grace available to all through the gifts of creation) and salvific grace (grace available to Christians) was not one articulated by our participants. They tended to see all grace as one thing, ubiquitously available, as the gift of relationship with God and all the goodness that God has ushered into the world.

A 28-year-old female stated, "So I believe that everyone has at least tiny moments where they have been offered grace and offered enough air to keep living for that day where they didn't do anything to deserve it."

Tensions and Struggles Related to Grace

Some participants reported their beliefs about grace also resulted in some negative feelings and struggles. This theme was further divided into two secondary themes: (a) difficulty accepting salvation by grace, and (b) and reverberating doubts about progressive views. Examples of each can be found in Table 2.

Several participants (*n* = 6) described a range of difficulties in the way they experience grace. Some described feelings of being unworthy of God's grace. They believed in God's grace theologically, but experienced visceral feelings of unworthiness, often feelings that are still reverberating from childhood faith experiences. A 28-year-old participant described, "I'm constantly having to battle the programming in me that says I'm not worthy of being loved or that

I've destroyed my body, like my body is no longer a temple." Another participant, a 43-year-old male, expressed suspicion about the whole concept of grace because of inherent unworthiness implied by the concept.

Some participants (*n* = 8) described doubts and disbelief in their own views of God's expansive grace, even as they tended toward progressivism. One married female of undisclosed age put it this way: "I think there are many times when I think that God is disappointed in me or is ashamed of my sexuality and like being married to a woman. And that 100% stems from my upbringing and family." Those who faced doubts about their progressive views sometimes experienced fear that their eternal security might be compromised by their open theological views.

Ongoing Disciplines of Grace

Participants reported a range of spiritual practices they use to maintain their relationship to God and God's grace. We found five secondary themes observed within this data category, including spiritual practices involving nature, community, learning, creative expression, and quietness or prayer. Examples are given in Table 2.

Participants reported fulfilling spiritual lives. Most participants reported regular church attendance and spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, theological study, and creative expression. They reported feelings of affirmation from God, awareness of God's presence through beauty, gratitude, and remembrance of God's support during difficult times. Characteristic of these common experiences is they were not ecstatic and frenzied, but introduced a feeling of social, emotional, and cognitive stability.

Discussion

The gay Christians interviewed in this study expressed belief that God is epitomized by love and holds an affirming stance regarding their existence. In one sense, this is consonant with a religion that teaches "God so loved the world" (New International Version Bible, 1978/2011, John 3:16) and "God is love" (New International Version Bible, 1978/2011, I John 4:8); in another sense, though, this represents a shift for most participants in relation to experiences of shame and rejection in their Christian experiences, often because of teachings about sin and sexuality.

The doctrines of grace and sin are closely linked in Christianity (McMinn et al., 2006). Jonathan Edwards, one of the most influential Christian theologians of the 18th century, wrote in his *Religious Affections* that the more aware a person is of their need for grace, the more they will be aware that they are "infinitely deformed because of [their] sin" (Edwards, 1746, p. 148). Likewise, the famous 20th century evangelist, Billy Graham (2005), said this about grace: "We deserve to die for our sins—but in His grace, God sent His Son into the world to die in our place." In these views, grace is a divine gift that heals or corrects humankind's natural state of brokenness and the dire consequences that come from this condition. Grace, mediated through the work of Jesus Christ, saves Christians and makes them acceptable to God. Many of our interviewees now push against this view of grace that requires it to be paired with sin and its consequences.

When participants' narratives seemed to fall in line with the conventional pairing of sin and grace, even these similarities were usually only on the surface. For example, participants sometimes referenced the concept of forgiveness in their grace narratives, but tended not to describe forgiveness as being saved from hell. Rather, they viewed God's forgiveness as a sudden awareness that they were already accepted, and they believed that God loves them despite their imperfections. Further, participants also described a felt awareness that God never held anything against them in the first place and they did not earn God's favor, nor did they ever need to. Thus, in the eyes of the participants, the transformative nature of God's grace is similar to the Rogerian notion that unconditional positive regard will naturally lead to human flourishing (Emmons et al., 2017).

As mentioned earlier, Hall and McMinn (2021) synthesized seven studies, including this one, and found this general definition for almost all participants: "the unmerited expression of God's love, in which God offers the gift of relationship with Godself" (p. 11). The gay Christians interviewed in the present study endorsed this view of grace, while generally avoiding the more particular views found in studies with evangelical, Roman Catholic, and Latter Day Saint Christians: "the unmerited expression of God's love, in which God offers the gift of relationship with God through the work of Jesus, whose death

on the cross allows for the forgiveness of sins which separated people from God" (p. 11). When gay Christians in this study mentioned grace in relation to sin, it was more as a relational experience, where the function of Christ's life and death was not just to save humanity from sin; rather, it was to bring a message to all people that God loves them, is patient with them, actively facilitates their growth toward wholeness and flourishing, and desires to be nothing but kind to them. This felt awareness that they are accepted by God allowed participants to move forward with a new sense of self-worth. These narratives are conspicuously different from the narratives of grace that many of the participants experienced in childhood forms of their faith.

Relational theologies of grace sit firmly within the bounds of Christian theological discourse, though they might be absent in some contemporary churches. The current resurgence of the contemplative tradition in Christianity reflects this relational view of grace that "completely rearranges the spiritual universe most of us were educated into, where grace was an add-on, an occasional filling of the gaps, a churchy thing, a prize for the perfect, and, even then, only now and then" (Rohr, 2014, p. 15). Similarly, the feminist Catholic theologian Catherine LaCugna (1991) described God's interaction with people in a way that is reflective of the participants' narratives: "God does not have to be loved in order to love. This is not the situation of the creature who learns to love in response to being loved. God is Love itself and the origin of Love, that is to say, God is the origin of existence" (p. 303, emphasis in original).

Participants narrated complex experiences during their spiritual practices. Many contemplated beauty, God's presence in other human beings, and God's presence in nature, art, and science. Such processes are reminiscent of the individuative-reflective and conjunctive stages of faith development described by Fowler (2001). The individuative-reflective stages were observed when participants reported a process differentiating from the beliefs and values passed down to them and creating a new set of values regarding gender, sexuality, and Christianity. In other narratives, the conjunctive stage of faith development was evidenced in narratives, for example, where participants were able to experience feelings of forgiveness and affection and

retain fulfilling relationships with family members who continued to reject their sexuality.

Unsurprisingly, some participants also narrated a felt sense of struggle related to grace and their acceptance by God. They had difficulty coming to terms with this new notion that they are loved by God just the way they are. Even some who reported profound mystical experiences, where they felt God's unconditional love for them, tended to report alternative experiences where they doubted God's approval or worried their experience was mistaken. This may speak to internalized messages from their earlier faith experiences, where they may have learned that being gay—or at least acting on their gay orientation—is not acceptable to God or other Christians. These messages from early in life still raise important questions for some of the participants, even as they have come to believe differently than what they learned in their religious upbringing.

Clinical Implications

Several implications are important for psychotherapists to consider. First, while it may be necessary for some who identify as gay to leave their religious or spiritual practices, it is important for psychotherapists to recognize the loss inherent in such a decision. Some participants reported that losing their ability to authentically practice their religion was similar to losing their ability to express their sexuality. Simply ceasing their practice of Christianity was not perceived as an option for some of the participants of this study. Many reported their faith communities to be important in their maintenance of awareness of God's love for them.

Second, religion and spirituality are distinct in various ways, and this distinction may be particularly important among those who identify as gay (Stern & Wright, 2018). Many participants in the present study spoke affirmingly of both religion and spirituality, though certainly their views of religion changed in the process of coming out. One possible explanation for this is a nuanced difference in terms. Lefevor et al. (2019) noted that the congregation-level affirmation of the gay identity predicted positive attitudes amongst individual congregants. This speaks to the possibility that religion itself is not inherently antagonistic to one's gay identity; rather, it is the social environment of religious meetings

and rituals that may be antagonistic. Clinicians should be aware of the potential positive mental health effects of their clients' religious congregation, rather than assuming religious involvement is consistently positive or negative. Here, it is also useful to remember the distinction between organismic and telic congruence discussed earlier (APA, 2009). Not every gay Christian will choose to resolve their inner tension by embracing organismic congruence. Some will opt, instead, to embrace the values of a faith community that does not endorse genital same-sex behavior, while striving toward congruence in living out those values. Only one participant in the current study was choosing this path of telic congruence, whereas the vast majority were opting for organismic congruence.

Third, psychotherapists should include an assessment of their clients' religious and spiritual involvement during intake (Richards & Bergin, 2005). Terepka and Hatfield (2020) reported that a large majority of people consider their religion to be an important aspect of their mental health, but therapists are less likely to mention it at intake. Further, clients who were asked about religion at intake perceived a stronger therapeutic relationship than those who were not asked. Thus, an assessment of clients' religious affiliation is clinically indicated. Due to the complexity inherent to being part of both gay and Christian communities, it may be even more important for therapists to explore this with their gay clients.

Fourth, congregational opposition to gay identity carries a stronger message than simply requesting that congregants not fall in love with people of the same sex. Participants reported that as they came to realize the reality of their sexuality, they also became aware of feelings of deep shame. Bjork-James (2018) reported evidence that some Christian sects view sexuality as an expression of moral allegiance (or lack thereof), as opposed to a self-expression of their humanity. This dynamic contributes to the alienation of gay individuals from some Christian congregations because of their perceived disobedience of God's wishes. This disobedience then becomes grounds for exclusion, and exclusion is sometimes framed as damnation in this life and the next. The result of congregational exclusion is a person who feels like they have not only been deemed deviant, but also a person who feels like they are essentially worthless and unlovable. Such hegemony not only affects their view of their own sexuality, but their basic sense of self-worth. Clinicians should be aware that religiously-oriented strain between their gay clients and their congregations is likely to affect multiple layers of their clients' identity development.

Finally, participants' description of grace as a sudden awareness of feeling unconditionally accepted is reminiscent of a former literature on the concept of acceptance in the therapeutic relationship. Sandor Ferenczi, a psychoanalytic contemporary of Sigmund Freud (who later ousted Ferenczi), rejected Freud's conception of analytic neutrality and compared the therapist's communication of love to "glue" that mended a broken psyche (Schneiderman, 1989). Otto Rank, likewise, named love as a key therapeutic factor (Rank, 1996). Finally, Carl Rogers, who was deeply influenced by an interaction and pursuant friendship with Rank, famously established unconditional positive regard as an evidenced-based intervention (Kramer, 1995).

More recently, Bland (2009) described the impact of environments that insinuate that their members "not be who you are" (p. 334). He went on to describe how partial disavowal of one's self leads to shame and guilt caused by the collision between accepted and unaccepted parts of the self. The antidote to this malady is the therapist's acceptance of all the client's parts of the self. The impact of such a sensibility is that clients feel more comfortable processing their shame in the presence of someone else whom they know will not add to their shame. Bland termed this sensibility grace.

An important takeaway for clinicians is the importance of maintaining an accepting (i.e., graceful) sensibility within their therapeutic relationships. Clinical empathy is sometimes insinuated as a simple parroting of feelings, designed to fill the space between interventions. However, in this study, a powerful factor present in participants' grace experience was a visceral knowledge of their acceptance by God. It seems that feeling accepted is more than a cognitive understanding of one's acceptance by another. This necessitates that the therapist participate in their own personal work to shape a sensibility within themselves that communicates to their

clients, on a level deeper than verbal, that the client has inherent worth. Grace is both understood and felt.

Limitations

Several limitations to this study should be noted. This is a convenience sample, and the vast majority of participants had opted for organismic congruence over telic congruence. Perhaps because of this, participants generally leaned toward more progressive theologies than what would likely be observed among those who identify as gay, evangelical, and Christian.

Also, a large majority of the participants in this study reported a high level of education, often in theology-related disciplines. It is unclear if education alters faith narratives within the gay population, but the sample is not particularly representative in this regard. We did not collect information about where participants were educated, but it seems likely that the location of education—particularly theological education, perhaps—would have a bearing on how people experience divine grace in relation to sexual identity.

It should also be noted that the majority of participants claimed Protestant faith backgrounds and congregational membership. People from other denominations within Christianity might describe grace differently. For example, not all sects of Christianity preach a doctrine of salvation by grace alone. So, it might be that salvation and grace are not as tied in other Christian bodies compared to those that are Protestant and located in the United States. A large portion of participants were also European American and cisgender male, so future research should include greater diversity as well.

Conclusion

Although it might seem understandable for some psychotherapists to assume religion and/or spirituality should be discouraged when working with gay clients who have felt damaged by religion, the narratives reported here suggest otherwise. Religious involvement in an affirming faith community can provide a positive support structure and an experience of grace, which may provide corrective experiences for those who have previously experienced shame in relation to their religious views and communities. Our findings point to the importance of a felt sense of acceptance by God in the lives of those who are practicing Christians and gay. Gay Christians who have negative previous experiences in faith communities are likely to develop new narratives in the process of coming out and finding more open and affirming places of worship. These new narratives emphasize the relational nature of a loving God who freely dispenses grace to all.

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An Integrative Approach to the Remediation of Student Trainees in Christian Counseling Programs

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Remediation has only recently begun to gain momentum as a topic of interest in the literature of counselor education and supervision. Even more sparse is literature that addresses gatekeeping and remediation in Christian counseling programs. This paper attempts to present a view of integrated faith and practice in remediation processes based on Scripture, clinical literature, and ethics codes. Such integration includes a recognition of the biblical support for upholding standards of professional practice and engaging in the remediation process. Christian counselor educators are empowered by the Holy Spirit, equipped with the Word of God, and positioned in the family of God to pursue and correct students who are demonstrating problematic behaviors. The article concludes with a biblically-based picture of the remediation process. Scripture gives many examples of remediation, with God himself as the initiator of remediation. Christian counselor educators have an opportunity to reflect the self-sacrificial, pursuing love of God through remediation in Christian counseling programs.

Programs

Review of Literature Exploring Remediation in Counselor Education

The gatekeeping function of counseling faculty and supervisors has been widely cited and taught (Bernard & Goodyear, 2018; Forrest et al., 1999; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Johnson et al., 2008; Vacha-Haase et al., 2004). While professionals are in agreement that gatekeeping is an ethical requirement for counselor educators, current literature regarding remediation primarily explores the ethics and process of remediation (Baldo et al., 1997; Bemak et al., 1999; Bodner, 2012; Henderson & Dufrene, 2017; McAdams & Foster, 2007; Vacha-Haase et al., 2019; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010), circumstances surrounding remediation (Chi-Sing Li et al., 2009), and models of gatekeeping (Baldo et al., 1997; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Lumadue & Duffy, 1999). To date, no researchers have published outcome studies that evaluate the effectiveness of remediation interventions, though some studies have explored the appropriateness of personal counseling as an intervention (Elman & Forrest, 2004). In 2008, Brear et al. pointed out that few studies had

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been conducted on gatekeeping specifically in the field of counseling, with most research focusing instead on the field of psychology. Researchers seemed to have accepted the call and have since been producing quality literature exploring remediation in counseling programs specifically (Brown-Rice & Furr, 2016; Chi-Sing Li et al., 2009; Foster et al., 2014; Freeman et al., 2016; Kress & Protivnak, 2009; Schuermann et al., 2018). Greater consensus is beginning to emerge in the field of counseling to guide gatekeeping practices, including unified use of descriptive language, provision of written expectations and processes, and ensuring due process for students (Homrich & Henderson, 2018). However, the literature exploring remediation in Christian psychology and counseling programs is sparse to say the least.

One study by Palmer et al. (2008) explored the issue, finding that educators in Christian programs for master's-level students in mental-health related disciplines (clinical psychology, counseling, social work, etc.) cited similar numbers of students with problems of professional competence (10.9%) to those cited in Gaubatz and Vera (2002), who surveyed secular institutions. The same study by Palmer et al. (2008) showed that rates of intervention at the Christian institutions were similar to those of secular institutions (p. 34). According to a literature review conducted by Brear et al. (2008), es-

timates of annual impairment in social science programs range from 4.6% to 10.4%. Henderson and Dufrene (2017) acknowledged that educators may be hesitant to initiate remediation with students because of the time involved for both supervisors and students. Kerl and Eichler (2005) recognized that counselor educators may refrain from the remediation process due to fear of retribution. The same authors indicated that educators, being counselors themselves, may overemphasize their helper roles to the detriment of their responsibilities as evaluators and gatekeepers (Kerl & Eichler, 2005, p. 77). Of course, student dispositions play a role in receptivity to and engagement with the remediation process, with some issues being more amenable to change than others (Freeman et al., 2019). Students who respond poorly to remediation may simply leave their programs, but others may give poor evaluations of their evaluators, ruminate on their shortcomings, or act passive-aggressively in the remediation process (Kerl & Eichler, 2005). The hesitancies of counselor educators, along with the varied reactions of students, make remediation an emotionally charged and potentially complicated journey. Remediation may be further complicated in Christian counseling programs due to legal issues related to differing standards of behavior often present in Christian institutions. A thorough exploration of those legal issues is outside the scope of this paper. However, Homrich and Henderson (2018) emphasized a guiding principle pertinent to the present discussion: programs must make all standards clear in student handbooks, providing informed consent to students entering programs. This practice of informed consent applies to Christian and secular programs and should include information regarding remediation practices.

The issue of gatekeeping presents complexities across both secular and Christian programs; however, Christian programs face unique challenges related to integration. Palmer et al. (2008) referenced added considerations related to gatekeeping in Christian programs, such as students' sense of calling and educators' views of grace, that further obfuscate the gatekeeping process (p. 37). Applied theology clearly plays a role in the gatekeeping function for Christian counselor educators, as well it should. The purpose of this article is to develop a biblical understanding of the remediation process for Christian counselor educators in order to encourage ethical, effective, biblically grounded, and Spirit-led remediation processes in Christian counseling programs.

Biblical Call to Professional Standards

Professional standards may appear to rest squarely in the secular domain. After all, secular boards determine professional licensure, and secular systems enforce accreditation standards. However, Christian counselors have a call to excellence in all areas, including soul care, which requires attention to and promotion of professional standards as manifestations of Christian faith (American Association of Christian Counselors [AACC], 2014, ES1-200). Godliness in the life of the Christian counselor would be to act as Christ would act, to reflect the character of God in clinical practice. Reflecting the character of God and walking in a manner worthy of the gospel (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Philippians 1:27) through promotion of professional standards includes applications of selfless love, stewardship, self-examination, and the exercise of what Watson (2018) called "practical wisdom." While Christian standards of care developed from a biblical worldview may occasionally put counselors at odds with secular professional standards (for example, if secular professional standards require a counselor to affirm all legal sexual practices as positive expressions of love), more often Christian standards of care actually overlap and exceed secular professional standards.

Christians bear witness to their place in the family of God through their demonstrations of love (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, John 13:35). The second greatest commandment, to love neighbor as self (Mark 12:31), requires that Christian counselors care for the souls of their clients as they would want others to care for their own souls. The Christian counselor who seeks to demonstrate love will find the blueprint in God himself, since "God is love" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 1 John 4:8). Since love can be expressed through a wide range of behaviors, any definition must be broad to encompass all loving actions. For the sake of this paper, Grudem's (1994) definition will suffice: "self-giving for the benefit of others" (p. 199). Christian counselors give of themselves

for the benefit of others. Watson (2018) promoted application of the virtue of love through "relational competence" in counseling. She tied the virtue to professional standards addressing the demonstration of positive regard and interpersonal relationship skills (Watson, 2018, pp. 89- 90). Interpersonal relationship skills encompass many behaviors, ranging from patient listening to loving confrontation. Christian love encompasses and supersedes minimum interpersonal competencies to provide the highest level of care out of honor for the imago Dei in each person. By requiring counseling students to meet professional standards, counselor educators promote an ethic of self-giving love that displays regard for persons through the competent application of professional skills.

Counselor educators also recognize the gravity of the trust and power inherent in the helping professions. The nature of the work as relational and vulnerable and the position of the counselor as one of authority requires counselors to be held to high standards (AACC, 2014, ES1-110; *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Matthew 18:6, James 3:6). Students who cannot meet competencies in counseling skills or character, yet forge ahead in spite of this, demonstrate a self-oriented ethic that does not take into consideration potential impacts on clients (AACC, 2014, ES2-210-b). This behavior constitutes poor stewardship of the power and trust that counselors have been given. Counselor educators must help students conceptualize professional standards as a means of ensuring that the counselor is caring for clients well, which reflects faithful stewardship of the trust and position that they have been given (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 1 Corinthians 4:2).

Explicit professional standards also protect against the self-deception inherent in the human heart (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Jeremiah 17:9). In the book of 1 John, the apostle spoke to the benefit of walking in the light to avoid self-deception since all are prone to sin (1 John 1:5-9). Holding up deeds for examination against an external standard provides accountability, reassurance, and freedom. Such reflection fosters transparency, repentance, and redemption, continual processes in the lives of Christians as they work toward sanctification alongside the Holy Spirit. 1 John 5:17 identifies all wrongdoing, a word of-

ten translated to mean "breach of duty," as sin (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). If a Christian has a duty, then breaching that duty is sin, which requires repentance, turning away from that action and toward what is right (Romans 6:12-14). Professional standards help Christian counselors recognize breaches of duty and help promote the reflective practice that Watson (2018) associated with the virtues of temperance (pp. 148-150) and wisdom (p. 109). This reflective practice guards against self-deception as Christian counselors honestly evaluate their work.

Christians are ultimately called to do everything as unto the Lord (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Colossians 3:23-24), which is a call to supreme ethics, dedication, and excellence. The work of a Christian is a sacred affair. Watson (2018) associated competence and sound ethical decision-making with the virtue of wisdom (pp. 108-111). Professional standards aid wisdom by providing guidance for good clinical judgment. Proverbs exhorts the reader to pursue wisdom relentlessly (Proverbs 1:20-33, 4:5-9, 8:1-31), noting that "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Proverbs 9:10). As far as professional standards align with biblical wisdom, Christian counselors ought to value those standards as sources of common grace wisdom and exceed such standards through excellent clinical practice as done unto the Lord.

The nature of the task of counseling as giving care to image-bearers of God makes it a particularly sacred task, one in which Christian counselors ought to strive to exceed baseline standards of professional conduct. Certainly, Christian counselor educators do well to uphold professional standards in their supervision and teaching of Christian counselors (AACC, 2014, ES1-760), which means that Christian counselor educators are also called to the process of remediation as a means of fulfilling biblical calls to justice, brotherly love, and caring intervention.

Biblical Call to the Remediation Process

Christian counselor educators must promote beneficence and nonmaleficence in counseling, ethical principles that ultimately reflect love toward students and clients. As educators who endorse the competency of graduating students, Christian counselor educators must

honestly assess counselor competency and intervene for the sake of both students and clients (AACC, 2014, ES1-750-e). The American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) states that supervisors "monitor client welfare and supervisee performance and professional development" (F.1.a). Looking the other way regarding issues of competence puts vulnerable clients at risk. Rather than being a punishment or rejection, remediation helps students achieve professional competencies that are appropriate to their stages of development as counselors. The process requires loving honesty and intervention. However, the remediation process may also lead to a realization that the student may not be fit for the profession if the student does not demonstrate an ability to meet professional standards. In such cases, Christian counselor educators must maintain their integrity by dismissing the student from the program, recognizing that they cannot in good conscience recommend the student for graduation. Remediation promotes justice for clients, development of knowledge and wisdom in students, and for some students, character development in the form of repentance and sanctification.

Just as God cares for and protects the vulnerable (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Psalm 82:3-4; Isaiah 1:17), so must Christian counselor educators care for and protect the vulnerable (AACC, 2014, ES1-110-c). Christian counselor educators demonstrate this virtue of justice in the way they monitor client welfare and uphold professional standards of practice in their own practices and with their students. Glance et al. (2012) cited the empathic nature of counselor educators as one potential barrier to carrying out the remediation process. Kerl and Eicher (2005) cited "conflict and negative attention" as reasons educators may avoid gatekeeping responsibilities (p. 78). These authors pointed out that the fear of consequences is not unfounded, as many students do respond negatively toward supervisors who engage in remediation and gatekeeping. Fear of litigation has also been cited as a reason educators may be hesitant to intervene (Baldo et al., 1997; Frame & Stevens-Smith, 1995; Gaubatz & Vera, 2002). While issues of conflict avoidance may stifle the will to intervene, Proverbs 24:10-12 promotes the responsibility to intervene in cases of potential harm:

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small. Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work? (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011)

While the remediation process requires significant strength, intentionality, and work, students are worth the effort of intervention. The parable of the lost sheep (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Luke 15:3-7), while primarily addressing salvation, also speaks to the value of putting in extra effort to pursue one who wanders. Counseling students may be "stumbling to the slaughter" through characterological issues that affect professional behaviors, skill deficits, or other problematic behaviors that can lead to client harm or failure in the field of counseling (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Proverbs 24:11). Just as God cares about redemption enough to intervene, so Christian counselor educators must "avoid avoidance" by intervening when a student demonstrates problematic behavior. The call to lay down one's life for a friend (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, John 15:13) for the Christian counselor educator may take the form of self-sacrificial entry into the remediation process.

According to Henderson and Dufrene (2013), the top five behaviors identified by faculty as requiring remediation included "(1) receptivity to feedback; (2) basic counseling skills; (3) boundaries with clients, supervisors, and/or colleagues; (4) openness to self-examination; and (5) advanced counseling skills" (p. 2). Some skill deficits may be indicative of lags in comprehension and mastery, while others may reflect psychological disorders. In such cases, counselor educators must honestly and compassionately address the issues, helping students gain knowledge and wisdom, while recognizing that some students will be able to overcome deficits and others will not. Some students may require educational opportunities, while others will need access to psychological services or a leave of absence from the program. The AACC *Code of Ethics* (2014) states that "Christian counseling educators help students overcome

limitations and deficiencies that might impede performance" (ES1-750-d). Equipping students through the remediation process in such cases can develop the knowledge and wisdom required for ethical, competent counseling.

Some problematic behaviors, however, are reflective of sin dominating in a student's life. Behaviors that could reflect sin include refusal to humbly accept feedback, acting disrespectfully toward clients, peers, or supervisors, putting self-interest above client care, and crossing boundaries with clients, peers, or supervisors. James 5:19-20 applauds the one who brings a sinner back from wandering; Galatians 6:1 speaks to the role of Christian brothers and sisters in restoring those caught in sin; and a resounding lesson in Genesis 4:9 is that we are, indeed, the keepers of our brothers and sisters (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). While counselor educators may be hesitant to address problematic behaviors, Scripture speaks positively of rebuke delivered in love (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Proverbs 27:5-6), speaking the truth in love (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Ephesians 4:15), and the competency of believers to judge amongst themselves (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 1 Corinthians 6:1-6). Christian counselor educators have a call to intervention in cases of Christian trainees demonstrating sinful problematic behaviors due to the inherent dual relationship of both supervisor and brother and sister in Christ. As "wounded healers" (Nouwen, 1972), Christian counselor educators recognize that "[w]e must confess in humility how often we fall short of charity because of our own self-interest and the repetition of relational patterns from our own histories" (Watson, 2018, p. 101). The profession of Christian counseling requires ongoing confession, repentance, and restoration as an ongoing part of the Christian life. Through the remediation process, Christian counselor educators can affirm the value of repentance and restoration in the life of a fellow believer, recognizing the value of such character development in the lives of counseling trainees. Just as sin and grace are important concepts in counseling (McMinn, 2008), so sin and grace are important concepts in the supervision of Christian counselors.

Whether the problematic behavior of a student reflects unique challenges in meeting standards or the behavior reveals sinful dispositions leading to noncompliance, the caring exhortation of a supervisor who is also a fellow Christian protects the student against the danger of self-deception (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Hebrews 3:13), upholds the virtue of justice, and reflects God's caring pursuit of those who are wandering. Thankfully, Christian counselor educators are positioned and empowered to engage in the remediation process.

Christian Counselor Educators as Positioned and Empowered for Remediation

Christian counselor educators hold an unavoidable dual relationship with students who are seeking to become Christian counselors. Educators and students are sisters and brothers in the family of God. This dual relationship certainly benefits both student and educator, though it has been cited as a source of some tension for Christian counselor educators (Scott, 2020, p. 110). First, Christian counseling students are being socialized into the profession. Educators play a role in that socialization, guiding the students' perceptions of themselves, others, and the world. Students who desire to integrate their faith benefit from the influence of Christian counselor educators who hold and teach through the lens of the biblical worldview, as opposed to a secular worldview. Further, the spiritual familial relationship between Christian counselor educator and student actually serves as a prerequisite for the biblical restoration process. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). Paul addressed the restorers as "brothers," indicating that kinship in the family of God uniquely positions believers to engage one another in restoration. The phrase, "you who are spiritual," in Galatians 6:1 assumes that the restorers are Christians walking according to the Spirit, a lifestyle further elucidated in Galatians 5 (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). Christian counselor educators, therefore, have a position in the family of God that enables them to act as those who pursue the wandering or transgressing brother. The shared worldview between Christian brothers and sisters serves a vital role in remediation,

since the end of the remediation process should be for a student to reflect Christ in the way the student behaves according to professional and biblical standards. The worldview of counselor educators affects the teleology of the remediation process.[1]

Further, Christian counselor educators are positioned to recognize the spiritual nature of earthly problems. Problematic behaviors and issues of character are not merely about meeting earthly standards and requirements. Rather, behaviors reflect the heart and have spiritual and interpersonal implications. Even unintentional problematic behaviors hold spiritual significance, since Christian counseling is a spiritual endeavor and counselor trainees are spiritual beings. Skills deficits may not always be "heart issues," as such deficits may derive from ignorance or lack of practice. However, ignoring skills deficits can indicate any number of heart issues: overcommitment, self-deception, pursuit of comfort, and even laziness. Problematic behaviors in areas of social skills may simply indicate a personality that is not suited to the counseling context, but ignoring such a mismatch may indicate an unwillingness to love others more than self, a form of self-deception, or a desire for position, rather than a commitment to brotherly love. Problematic behaviors, like most issues in life, often have both earthly and spiritual considerations involved. Having access to the wisdom of God and the Holy Spirit, Christian counselor educators are positioned to recognize the spiritual nature of problematic behaviors.

Christian counselor educators are also positioned to engage in remediation because they experience the restoration provided through Christ every day. All Christians are those who have been restored by God through Christ. All Christians continually engage in the process of sanctification, in which Christ is remediating the believer in an ongoing change process (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 2 Corinthians 3:18). Christian counselor educators, as those who have experienced and continually experience restoration, can lovingly provide remediation to students as part of

the students' sanctification processes. In this way, Christian supervisors engage in a parallel process as "wounded healers" (Nouwen, 1972). Since sanctification is a process empowered by the Holy Spirit, Christian counselor educators are empowered for the process of remediation, and Christian counseling trainees are empowered for change (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Romans 8:9-13; 1 Peter 1:2). When Christian counselor educators engage in the remediation process, they wage war with weapons that have "divine power to destroy strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:3-4), recognize that they are "not waging war according to the flesh" (2 Corinthians 10:3), and are empowered by the Spirit of "power and love and self-control" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 2 Timothy 1:7). Christian training contexts prove fertile ground for spiritual warfare. Therefore, Christian counselor educators must put on the full armor of God and rely on the power of God to engage in that spiritual warfare (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Ephesians 6:10-18).

Finally, the gospel empowers the remediation process. Christians are empowered by the freedom to obedience that was bought by the blood of Christ. Christian counseling students have unique hope for restoration because they are made free from the dominion of sin by the grace of God through Christ Jesus (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Romans 6:1-14). Christian counselor educators can walk into the remediation process with hope and confidence, empowered by the Spirit and emboldened by the knowledge that Christian counseling students are free by the blood of Christ to grow, repent, and be restored.

A Biblical Vision for Remediation of Counseling Students

While Scripture does not give specific instructions for the remediation of counseling students demonstrating problematic behaviors, it does give guidance for the nature of correction and restoration processes and several stories that provide a blueprint for biblical remediation.

The spirit in which remediation is undertaken must reflect the biblical, loving nature of confrontation. Kallaugher and Mollen (2017), in their exploration of students' experiences of remediation, identified the perceived intentions of

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[1] While a discussion of the role of education in the socialization process is beyond the scope of this paper, a review of works such as Berger and Luckmann's (1967) *The Social Construction of Reality* may contribute to a more thorough understanding of the influence of education on professional socialization.

remediators and relationships with remediators as central factors in students' experiences (p. 279). Since love is the motive of the process, remediation should reflect love as outlined in 1 Corinthians 13 (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). Remediation should be done without resentment, rudeness, or irritation. Remediators must be patient and humble, bearing with the student as the student learns, hoping for the growth of the student, and enduring the process required to bring about restoration to good standing. Remediation must be a process that demonstrates a joyful embracing of both truth and grace, as Christ embodies both (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2011, John 1:14). The truth delivered in the remediation process ought to focus on building up the hearer (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Ephesians 4:29). The process must be done in a spirit of gentleness (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2011, Galatians 6:1), reasonableness (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Philippians 4:5), and humility (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Philippians 2:4). Remediation ought to honor the dignity of the student as an image-bearer (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Genesis 1:26–27). The process should reflect biblical wisdom (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2011, 2 Timothy 3:16), focus on equipping the student for good works (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 2 Timothy 3:16), and focus on correction, rather than punishment (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Hebrews 12:7–11). Remediation plans ought to be action-oriented, rather than insight-oriented (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2011, James 1:23–24). While the process of remediation may feel like a trial, remediators should undertake it joyfully, not in a spirit of grumbling (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Philippians 2:14; James 1:2). Ultimately, the remediation process, as a disciplinary procedure, is intended to produce "the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Hebrews 12:11).

Having considered the nature of the remediation process and spirit of the remediators, we turn our attention to the process itself. First, remediators must self-reflect on their own role in the problem (*The Holy Bible, English Standard*

Version, 2011, Matthew 7:5), knowing that they also are prone to the human tendency toward self-deception. For instance, have expectations been clearly communicated to the student? Has the behavior of the educator contributed to the problem in any way? Has the student been provided with sufficient guidance and ample resources to meet the standards set forth? In this self-reflection, the Christian counselor educator may discover a need to correct their own course first, which would be a successful outcome. Next, the remediator can engage in confrontation, according to the principles of Matthew 18:15-17 (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). First, the remediator approaches the student in a one-on-one setting to address the issue. If the student is unresponsive, then two educators meet with the student to address the issue. This can mitigate the reactivity that a student may have to one particular faculty member or supervisor and any tendency to believe that one faculty member or supervisor is "targeting" the student (a form of self-deception in which the student believes the problem lies with the remediator, rather than with the student). If the student is still unresponsive, then they can be brought before the entire faculty to either address the issue or to leave the program. While Matthew 18 lays out a plan of action for biblical confrontation, other parts of Scripture provide exemplary pictures of biblical confrontation and restoration.

God himself first demonstrated the process of confrontation and restoration in the Garden of Eden (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Genesis 3). When Adam and Even sinned, God did not ignore or excuse it. He did not wait and hope that the problem would resolve itself. God pursued Adam and Eve. He initiated the confrontation with a question that promoted self-reflection: "Where are you?" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Genesis 3:9). God then followed up with more questions: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, Genesis 3:11). In 2 Samuel 12, a similar picture forms when Nathan confronted David by first using a parable to promote self-reflection, then directly addressing the behavior. The process of first encouraging self-reflection, then following up by directly addressing the behavior,

clearly proves effective (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). Returning to Genesis 3, God directly addressed the wrongdoing and outlined consequences of the action that Adam and Eve took (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). God began to share a plan for reconciliation that develops and comes to fruition in the rest of the biblical narrative. Throughout the process of restoration, God remains connected to mankind, working toward redemption. Christian counselor educators can reflect this process in remediation by pursuing students with problematic behaviors, using questions and stories to promote self-reflection, directly addressing problematic behaviors, sharing consequences of those behaviors, and outlining a plan for restoration to right standing in the program (a remedy). Educators can then walk alongside students as they follow the plans, remaining connected throughout the process. When students who had experienced remediation were interviewed, those who experienced ongoing support from faculty reported a more positive experience overall, demonstrating the functional wisdom of ongoing connection with students in the process (Kallaugher & Mollen, 2017, p. 279). A biblical commitment to relational connection will help students endure the process of change.

Once the student successfully completes the plan, the student enters into the process of comfort and affirmation. After a Christian repents and pursues restoration, other believers must forgive and comfort them, lest they be overcome by excessive sorrow (*The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011, 2 Corinthians 2:5-8). The example given in 2 Corinthians demonstrates wisdom for addressing the shame, lack of confidence, and stigmatization that often accompany the remediation process (Kallaugher & Mollen, 2017, pp. 279-280; *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, 2011). Christian counselor educators must follow all the way through to the phase of comfort and reaffirmation of love in order to help the student successfully move forward from the remediation process.

The possibility also exists that students will be unwilling to pursue remediation, in which case counselor educators must uphold their duty to dismiss such students from their programs. Such dismissals need not be done in anger or resentment. Rather, Christian counselor educa-

tors can hope and pray that students will experience change and find an area in which their skills and dispositions can be successfully applied. Counselor educators can serve dismissed students by helping in the process of finding an area for which such students are better suited. This practice affirms the value of the student, recognizing that they have strengths that can be applied to benefit the world, even if those strengths are not suited to the field of counseling.

Certain instances of extreme unethical behavior may not fit this process. For instance, a student who develops a sexual relationship with a client may be subject to immediate expulsion from a program, without opportunity to remediate. A student who practices while under the influence of mind-altering substances might also be subject to immediate dismissal. Such actions may disqualify a student from the ministry of counseling, at least for a period of time. Christian counseling programs must clearly identify circumstances that would result in immediate dismissal in student handbooks, a practice which provides a form of informed consent for participation in the program. The biblical remediation process outlined above merely serves as a template, and Christian counselor educators must still exercise wisdom in their gatekeeping responsibilities. However, the process outlined in this article would apply to the remediation of behaviors identified by Henderson (2010).

While Scripture does not directly address remediation in Christian counseling programs, it does provide wisdom for characteristics of loving confrontation, along with guidelines and examples of restoration processes. Christian counselor educators can use biblical wisdom both explicitly in remediation policies and plans and implicitly through Christlikeness to guide their attitudes and actions during remediation processes. A uniquely Christian remediation process integrates biblical wisdom, is executed by Christian counselor educators empowered by the Holy Spirit, and promotes the welfare of students and clients, including their spiritual welfare.

Conclusion

Remediation has proven to be a complex and often emotionally-charged process across secular and Christian counseling programs alike. Gatekeeping responsibilities often bring

up feelings of fear, avoidance, and distress for counselor educators, and Christian counselor educators face additional complexities, such as applications of grace and consideration of callings. While the remediation process can appear intimidating, Christian counselor educators are positioned and empowered to uphold professional standards in ways that honor the imago Dei in students and ultimately honor God. Scripture gives guidance for the attitudes that should characterize the process, as well as steps in the process itself. This paper provides one perspective on integration in gatekeeping for Christian counselor educators. Equipped with wisdom and the Holy Spirit, Christian counselor educators can lovingly and sacrificially engage students in the remediation process, reflecting the loving pursuit and restoration of the errant that God himself has modeled.

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I Cry Out Loud so That God May Hear Me: An Intersubjective Use of the Psalms

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This paper explores a theological and intersubjective understanding of praying the psalms in the life of Judeo-Christian faith in order to deepen the way Judeo-Christians and Judeo-Christian leaders pray the psalms. Walter Brueggemann has described praying the psalms as a way to help the Judeo-Christian get more in touch with their faith experiences and with God. The intersubjective psychoanalytic understanding by Jessica Benjamin provides a depth to praying the psalms not only by utilizing Brueggemann's categories, but also enriching them by offering an explanation of the relational processes at play. Intersubjective processes such as mutual recognition and the analytic third provide a deeper understanding for praying the psalms in order to strengthen spiritual and relational intimacy with God.

The Book of Psalms is commonly referred to as the "prayer book of the Bible" (Bonhoeffer & Bethge, 1970, p. 4). It portrays seasons of faith, testimonies to God's character, and is even considered "a manual on God's relationship with us" (Goldingay, 2018, p. 10). The unique literary context of the psalms also tells us that the psalmists speak about a communal dynamic for relating both to God and their faith community. Judeo-Christians who pray the psalms today actually connect with the psalmists' accounts of faith as they read, sing, or pray the psalms in their own faith and cry out loud so that God may hear them (cf. Psalm 77:1).

Walter Brueggemann (1984, 2002, 2007; Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014) has been significant for the resurgence of the contemporary use of the psalms. He has provided a typology of the life of faith by framing the psalms in categories of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation (Brueggemann, 1984). This structure helped create a heuristic so that people of faith can more readily pray, or "reperform," the psalms (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). By praying the psalms, Judeo-Christians can better understand their own experiences and gain knowledge about God (Brueggemann, 2002). Furthermore, the psalms also become

therapeutic and provide healing by helping Judeo-Christians to express their deepest emotions to God (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). While Brueggemann acknowledged the fundamental relationality in the psalms, he did not fully explain the relational dynamics at play in this process. Since a relational transformation is the heart of healing in the psalms, I will argue that an intersubjective understanding of praying the psalms helps to deepen the ways in which Judeo-Christians engage this practice.

If praying the psalms is fundamentally a relational process, then there is a co-created nature that must be acknowledged and understood. To aid in this relational understanding, I will utilize an intersubjective psychoanalytic understanding by Jessica Benjamin. Benjamin (2016) presented a compelling view of intersubjectivity that is "understood both in terms of the philosophically defined problem of recognizing the other as well as the developmentally defined capacity to recognize the other" (p. 155). The goal of relational intimacy and development for Benjamin is mutual recognition, which is a process of "being able to sustain connectedness to the other's mind while accepting his [sic] separateness and difference" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 24). Mutual recognition is achieved by surrendering to the third, a stance by which one can hold union and differentiation of self and other in relationship. This stance of surrender and recognition gives way to being able to have a vantage point outside of the two in relationship, birthing a shared reality and mutual influence. By exploring the intersubjective concepts of

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mutual recognition and the third in praying the psalms, this paper will seek to deepen Brueggemann's understanding and aid in relational and spiritual transformation for Judeo-Christians.

Defining Terms and Traditions

When I speak about "praying the psalms," I recognize that this is a view embedded in a specific theological tradition. Moreover, my use of intersubjective psychoanalysis is yet another specific psychological tradition. Since these traditions are central to the intersection of this paper, my approach toward the psalms may resonate best with those from similar traditions (Strawn et al., 2014). My hope is that this paper will also act as a voice beckoning others from different contexts to consider the ways in which their own traditions intersect in order to produce a genuine life of faith.

Relationality is a foundational starting point for both my views of intersubjective psychoanalysis (Benjamin, 2018) and relational theism (Sanders, 1998, c.f. Pinnock, 2001; Shults, 2003). Both of these traditions are rooted in the relational turn in philosophy, theology, and psychology. By using the terms "relational turn" and "relationality," I am referencing the postmodern philosophical shift whereby relationship, as opposed to substance, acts as that by which we understand knowing, reality, and being in the world. Anthropology, then, is rooted in prioritizing relational capacities that develop the self and reality instead of prioritizing the substance that makes up individuals. While there are some who may critique my use of the relational turn, my hope is that this paper will make a strong argument for how relationality deepens the practice of praying the psalms and can benefit all who aspire for a more genuine life of Judeo-Christian faith.

Intersubjective Psychoanalysis and Jessica Benjamin

Intersubjective psychoanalysis has argued for a radical transition for understanding how social bonds contribute to the makeup of another's mind and affect, as well as the psychic life of subjects (Benjamin, 2018). This theory holds a relationally-centered anthropology and may even provide a framework for understanding Judeo-Christians as they pray. Some may argue that psychoanalytic theory should remain within the analytic dyad; however, Benjamin (2018) argued that intersubjectivity provides social implications that also benefit other disciplines. In this same vein, I argue that intersubjectivity can serve to explain and understand relational dynamics in religion.

Contemporary neuroscience has helped to frame intersubjective anthropology by emphasizing the roles of affect regulation and relationship on the development of the brain (Schore, 2000). The discovery of mirror neurons and the role of imitation have revealed how we are wired to observe the intentions, feelings, and behaviors of others (Brown & Strawn, 2012). More specifically, affective neuroscience has shown how infant development is rooted in the affect-driven nature of the infant-mother relationship (Schore, 2000). Beyond the emotion regulation and behavioral influences, contemporary neuroscience has also explained how social dynamics produce an "as if it were me" experience for the observer, which then creates a theory of mind, an inference of another's mental state. As persons go throughout their world engaging with other persons of the same human nature, a complex and dynamic system exists between the constant intersection of persons' imitations and desires of one another (Brown & Strawn, 2012). Therefore, neuroscience aids in presenting an intersubjective view of human development that explains anthropology as "whole-embodied-persons-embedded-in-the-world-of-relationships" (Brown & Strawn, 2012, p. 97).

Out of these ideas of anthropology, Benjamin (2018) proposed an understanding of intersubjective psychoanalysis around the idea of recognition between the "reciprocal knowing interaction" of minds (p. 1). This approach to relational psychoanalysis shifts the focus from intrapsychic conflict within classical psychoanalysis by emphasizing an intersubjective, relation-seeking component to human development and interaction. The human mind, therefore, is not a defined monadic system, but is an interactive system that is socially constructed (Benjamin, 2004). Furthermore, consciousness itself is not something isolated, but a product of the interaction of multiple minds (Spezzano, 1996). Therefore, people go through life interacting with each other as living subjects with socially-constructed realities simultaneously

influencing and being influenced by others who are wired the same way. I argue that this way of existing in the world necessarily includes the life of religious faith.

Mutual Recognition

If human beings interact in an intersubjective fashion, growth for humans must involve recognition. "Acts of recognition," Benjamin (2018) stated, "confirm that I am seen, known, my intentions have been understood, I have had an impact on you, and this also must mean that I matter to you; and reciprocally, that I see and know you, I understand your intentions, your actions affect me and you matter to me" (p. 4). These acts of mutual recognition function as the basic encounters and fundamental postures that are needed to have relational connection between persons (Benjamin, 1990).

Mutual recognition plays out in intersubjective psychoanalysis in a two-person, intersubjective experience, but can also be applied to all relational encounters. This greater social reality is what bears significant application to how Judeo-Christians pray the psalms. In psychoanalysis, the analyst and patient move in and out of mutual recognition by way of surrendering to the third, "the position in which we implicitly recognize the other as a 'like subject,' a being we can experience as another mind" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 4). There is an understanding that recognition occurs moment to moment, where each person can bear the potential to act upon the other or conversely be acted upon by another. The seesaw effect of one's will acting on or being subverted by another's is what Benjamin calls the "doer/done-to" dynamic or "complementarity," a contributing force to enactments and impasses in the analytic context (Benjamin, 2018). The goal in intersubjective psychoanalytic psychotherapy is, therefore, to move beyond the "doer and done-to" mode and into mutual recognition (Benjamin, 2004).

If relational transformation includes movement toward mutual recognition for relational growth, how might this be at play when a Judeo-Christian prays the psalms? Benjamin (2018) utilized three relational states to describe the progressive nature of mutual recognition: rhythmic third, complementarity, and differentiated third. I believe that further explaining this progression aids in understanding the relational transformation when praying the psalms.

Rhythmic Third

For Benjamin (2018), the "rhythmic Third" is the primary state of union by which an infant experiences attunement and accommodation with their mother (the explicit mother/infant terminology is used within Benjamin's psychoanalytic theory). During infancy, the pre-verbal attunement of the mother and child creates a union and bond. Benjamin (2004) previously described this experience as "the One in the Third" since there was a "felt experience of being one with the other" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 30). There is a connection between the two that is grounded in shared experiences and patterns of being together. The synced nature of this dyad creates an alignment that lacks a certain distinction because "both of them simultaneously create and surrender to" their interaction (Benjamin, 2018, p. 31). However, the rhythmic third lacks differentiation and recognition of the contribution of individual subjectivities. As a way of initiating the maturation process toward differentiation, the complementarity dynamic is experienced.

Complementarity

When there is a breakdown in recognizing each other, the sense of union is lost. Benjamin (2018) described this breakdown as a "collapse into twoness," where "the other appears as object or objectifying, unresponsive or injuring, threatening to erase one's own subjectivity or be oneself erased" (p. 4). The lack of seeing the other as a subject with subjectivity leads to a "doer and done-to" dynamic, where the two are locked into a battle over whose subjectivity will take more space. This locked state does not allow for conflict to be worked through, further splitting the two. There is no space for navigating a resolution together in this locked state, since it only allows for options of resistance or submission (Benjamin, 2018). In order to break from this state, there needs to be the recognition of one's own contribution to hurting the other and producing the breakdown (Benjamin, 2018). By doing so, there is the flexibility for space to recognize the other and lead to another point of view. The new space is considered thirdness and allows for the negotiation of differences and connection (Benjamin, 2018).

Differentiated Third

Benjamin (2018) is clear in stating that the third is not something to be achieved, but is "an inter-

active process that creates a dialogic structure" (p. 35). The dialogic structure allows for there to be the existence of both sameness and distinction in relationship, which offers the opportunity for both to experience mutual recognition. The differentiated third is this experience of union in distinction, or distinction in union, that gives way by surrendering to being with the other. Emotional liberation comes from not only being the one recognized, but by also doing the recognizing (Benjamin, 2018). Furthermore, the differentiated third opens one to a different morality, or moral third, which is "the orientation to a larger principle of lawfulness, necessity, rightness or goodness" (Benjamin, 2018, p. 37). This is different from compliance or submission, since it emphasizes self-understanding in light of recognizing the other. Life in the differentiated third is emergent and transformative. Creation and newness come as a surprise since the encounter is something truly co-created.

While Benjamin's intersubjective process is spelled out in the analytic and social contexts, it lacks theological explanation on its own. Intersubjectivity presents a certain anthropology and relational dynamic between humans, but does it include the person of God? Can intersubjectivity deepen the way a Judeo-Christian understands their relationship with God, too? I believe that the theology within relational theism upholds a deep theological reality for relating to God and others in an intersubjective fashion.

Relational Theism

There are a number of theological traditions that share my view of relationality in Christian theology (e.g., Reformed traditions, Wesleyan traditions, Anglicanism). However, I find that John Sanders' definition of "relational theism" is helpful to identify what these theological traditions have in common for an intersubjective view of the psalms. He states that relational theism is "any model of the divine-human relationship that includes genuine give-and-take relations between God and humans such that there is receptivity and a degree of contingency in God" (Sanders, 1998, p. 12). Theological views such as presentism (Sanders, 1998) or open theism (Pinnock, 2001) hold this view of relational theism and have a history of being criticized within evangelicalism (Pinnock, 2005). Although this is the case, I hope critics of relational the-

ism may be open to affirming its motivation for deepening the intimacy between God and humanity, especially in suffering (Sanders, 1998). I believe that further explaining theological anthropology, theology proper, and Scripture from a relational theism perspective will help to emphasize the importance of an intersubjective view of praying the psalms.

Theological Anthropology

One area within relational theism that is fundamental to the God-humanity relationship is theological anthropology. Relational theism upholds a view of theological anthropology derived from the relational turn in philosophy, which defines humanity in terms of relationship to God through the biblical account of the person of Jesus Christ. This relational nature is oriented in God and extends through relationship to all other humans and elements of creation (Shults, 2003). It highlights more than just relationships, since it acknowledges that "knowledge emerges out of relationality inherent in reality" (Shults, 2003, p. 58). Therefore, it is also a metaphysical view that helps to understand human nature, human reality, and human relationality.

If relationality helps to form the very experiences of reality for human beings, then the human body and human context are data hubs for understanding human nature. Human nature is no longer seen in dualistic categories (i.e., body and soul), but rather as a unified whole self (Brown et al., 1997). This is an area of theology that has been significantly influenced by the work of neuroscience and the explanation of consciousness as an emergence within the brain (Shults, 2003). Some contemporary theologians have moved toward seeing human nature in a holistic model in the biblical texts (Green, 2008; Murphy, 2006). Therefore, theological terms such as "soul," "spirit," "heart," and "body" are all "referring to the whole person under a particular aspect of his or her being in relation" (Shults, 2003, p. 176). With this holistic and relational perspective in mind, the theological concept of the "image of God" appears to refer to the complexity of relationality, instead of some kind of immaterial soul (Brown & Strawn, 2012). Human nature, therefore, is inextricably linked to relationality, causing the body and social contexts of humanity to be immensely important for understanding reality.

If human nature is seen in holistic terms, then the way in which humans construct reality is out of free willed, embodied, and embedded experiences. There is an inherent intuition in human persons that they have freedom of self (Pinnock, 2001). The ability to choose, have preference, make mistakes, love, etc., cannot fully exist with a God who is coercive and deterministic. Rather, humans make use of their complex brain functions by way of the embodied and emotional information they experience in social context and express through free will (Brown & Strawn, 2012). Even complex tasks like memory and language are produced by embodied and embedded experiences (Brown & Strawn, 2012). Thus, when we speak about God, faith experiences, or really anything, we use human embodied experiences as referents for our language (Sanders, 1998). Human beings bring human-centric experiences to spirituality, especially while praying the psalms, as a way of constructing reality, but also in how humans relate to God.

Theological traditions within relational theism acknowledge that there is a bi-directional connection between God and humanity. This connection is inseparably linked to the nature of God and the nature of humanity. If there is mutual influence between God and humanity, then part of human nature includes being "collaborators with him [God] in achieving the divine project of mutual relations of love" (Sanders, 1998, p.12). While human nature includes the supernatural presence of the Spirit by way of Christ, relational theism also acknowledges an anthropomorphic emphasis in relationship with God (Sanders, 1998). This means other people actually help construct the emotional and relational experiences for relating to God, becoming quite literally the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Corinthians 12).

Theology Proper

Relational theism begins with an argument for a God who is genuinely related to creation by making Godself known and knowable through revelation for the purpose of co-existing with God in love (Pinnock, 2001). God values humanity's freewill by not forcing God's will upon humanity, but by being faithfully present. The combination of God's presence and holistic relationality means that God is immanent in creation and accessible in all things. Further, God is presented as a faithful relational partner in a manner that is affected by what happens in the world (Pinnock, 2001). Therefore, relational theism rejects theological ideas of the immutability and impassibility of God. Rather, God is personal and actually hears Judeo-Christians' prayers, feels their neediness, and responds according to their cry. I argue that this is seen in both the visceral language of the psalms and the posture Judeo-Christians take as they come to the psalms out of neediness and desperation for a God who is involved in their reality.

Doctrine of Scripture

Inherent in my relational use of the psalms is a particular doctrine of Scripture. In addition to affirming traditional Christian orthodox views of Scripture (e.g., inspiration, canonization, authority), the psalms highlight the subjective and objective natures of Scripture (Pinnock, 2000). By subjective, I mean that the psalms depict real human experiences in human language toward God (Goldingay, 2018). I believe that the psalmists represent both personal and communal experiences informed by embodied and social contexts. By objective, I mean that the psalms also represent true characteristics of God (Pinnock, 2000). The psalms, as a result, are active for the Judeo-Christian today by helping to make sense of their life of faith and by relating to God (Brueggemann, 2002).

Relational Dynamics in the Psalms

Having established the relational traditions at play in this paper, I now use Brueggemann's typology for the psalms in concert with intersubjective theory. At the core of Brueggemann's view of the psalms is a function that draws Judeo-Christians into relationship with God in honesty (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). The psalms, therefore, contain multiple relational dynamics at play. First, the psalms function as a developmental relational commentary on the life of faith. Though not to be taken rigidly or in a linear progression, his typology of orientation, disorientation, and new orientation mimics the processes of human life. They speak to the different seasons of life, such as comfort, safety, celebration, fear, desperation, and agony. Second, praying the psalms is an act of relating to God, highlighting the active presence of subjectivity between both God and the prayer. Being written by those in relationship with God

for others in relationship with God, the psalms function as "models of prayer that can be re-uttered" for our healing (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014, p. xiii). When there is relational breakdown with God, relational repair is needed to move forward. Third, the psalms also expose individual and communal experiences in the life of faith. The Book of Psalms is written as poetry or songs for a communal audience, as well as a means to connect the individual with God (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). Both in the modern use of the psalms and the original construction, the interplay between individuality and community emphasizes social construction. Thus, the psalms also tell the prayer what kind of use is helpful for relating to God and others. These three relational dynamics will be expanded in what follows.

I must acknowledge that by utilizing intersubjective theory, I am limiting what I can say about the supernatural nature of God. Intersubjectivity is helpful in exposing relational dynamics at play between persons in a certain social system. When God intervenes in human lives out of this system, psychology is limited to only speaking to the experiences of humanity, not God, which is theology's task. As a result, I acknowledge that intersubjective theory is a powerful resource for understanding relationships in the life of faith and not some exhaustive theory for the Christian life.

The Psalms in Developmental Typology

Psalms of Orientation

The psalms of orientation describe "*satisfied seasons of well-being* [emphasis is original] that evoke gratitude for the constancy of blessing" (Brueggemann, 1984, p. 19). They are accurately described as orienting since they act to a settled confidence of faith in God. In orientation, these psalms describe the ways in which life's anxieties are not threatening since there is trust that God is reliable and present (Brueggemann, 1984). There is a glad sense of security and gratitude toward God to live in a world without fear. These psalms can, therefore, produce a sense of safety and security in God and the community of God.

The psalmists are writing expressions of faith that are both personal and communal, echoing the confidence and equilibrium of the faith community surrounding them. Brueggemann (1984) described that these psalms not only "serve as a 'sacred canopy,'" but also function

as a "form of social control" (p. 27). This connotes a kind of union with the faith community for young Judeo-Christians to be brought up and oriented toward the world with which they live. Brueggemann (1984) argued that "the religious power of these psalms is considerable *for all sorts and conditions of people* [emphasis in original]" (p. 28).

The psalms of orientation describe a union-like relational experience within a faith community that serves to inform an individual in their life of faith, echoing the experience of union in the rhythmic third (Benjamin, 2018). Developmentally, the psalms describe a faith that is not matured in that it is shared and not differentiated. Both the psalms of orientation and rhythmic third are underlying relational experiences that orient one's experiences in a secure manner. Benjamin (2018) is helpful by indicating that there is a role for the faith community to affectively attune to the relational needs of someone who is at this relational stage. This Judeo-Christian needs the people they are connected to because they may not have developed the regulatory capacities to integrate their life with their new faith. Like the infant with the mother, a Judeo-Christian can experience a sense of relational oneness in the faith of their church/synagogue community when explicit theology, liturgy, and communion serve to hold their experiences and mimic a secure base (Bowlby, 2008). As a result, they take on the sense of stability that is aligned with the other as a good object, attributed to God (Parker, 2008). Therefore, the community of faith and state of orientation in the psalms indicates that there is a developmental experience in the life of faith that is heavily influenced by the relationships around them.

The Israelite writers of the psalms held a collective identity in addition to their communal practice (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). This meant that all relationships in Israel contributed to this foundational orienting identity, which means that relationships outside of the churched context have an effect on one's life of faith. Thus, the infant-mother dyad in Benjamin also influences the life of faith in the psalms of orientation. Primary relational instincts, such as mirroring, affect attunement, and accommodation, give way to a sense of oneness when the mother can maintain awareness of the in-

fant's needs, as well as her own perspective (Benjamin, 2018). These experiences provide the safe relational "canopy" with which there are affective and relational referents to then turn to God and say, "The Lord is merciful and compassionate, very patient, and full of faithful love. The Lord is good to everyone and everything; God's compassion extends to all his handiwork!" (*Common English Bible*, 2011, Psalm 145: 8-9).

Psalms of Disorientation

The psalms of disorientation describe the psalmists' hardship, pain, hurt, abandonment, or near-death experiences that are contrary to how they first knew their relationship with God to be. They give voice to these life experiences through the emotional poetic form of lament. During these instances of suffering, God is described as being absent or not having the interest in the writer's experience that they once knew God to have (cf. Psalm 13). The language used is raw, gritty, and at times violent (cf. Psalm 137:9). As such, these psalms appear dark and are a "means of *expressing* that tries to match *experience* [emphasis in original]" (Brueggemann, 1984, p. 53). They also imply that it is unjust that the life of faith would include such painful experiences. Lament psalms help to bring potentially unwelcomed emotions to light by modeling raw and unfiltered emotions. They seek to put blame on God, petition God to change things, complain to God, and try to sway God to act in their favor (Brueggemann, 1984).

Put simply, psalms of disorientation indicate trouble in one's relationship with God (Brueggemann, 2002). God had a unique covenantal relationship with Israel, but even David struggled to understand how God could provide safety when others were out to kill him (cf. Psalm 86). Conflict is inevitable in relationships, and the psalms of disorientation shed light on the developmental process of conflict in relationship with God. Specifically, these psalms indicate that conflict is necessary for maturity and display a deep trust in God's ability to work within the conflict (Brueggemann, 2002).

Intersubjectivity offers a helpful way to understand what has contributed to the relational breakdown. From a developmental state of orientation or union, some event shatters the sense of safety experienced at this point. As a result, the psalmist turns to God, replies with complaint, and urges God to do right according to their needs (cf. Psalm 86). The painful breakdown from oneness into twoness creates separation and an inability to recognize the other (Benjamin, 2018). In this state, the two are locked in "doer/done to" dynamics, where the power of an individual's subjectivity finds dissonance with their relational partner. For the psalmist, there is dissonance between their faith in God and their current suffering. It is also assumed that because their experience is so prominent, their particular view of God also does not include recognizing them in their suffering. Therefore, God is blamed for being the one who allows wrongdoing to happen and not necessarily those doing the evil (cf. Psalm 77). Further, the psalmist's desire to have God on their own terms, as evidenced in the petitions for God to act, creates an inability to understand what God is doing in the midst of their suffering (cf. Psalm 35). Without an ability to repair, the psalmist may be stuck with a theology where God is unresponsive or injurious.

Psalms of New Orientation

The move from disorientation to new orientation is one that bears "witness to the surprising gift of new life just when none had been expected" (Brueggemann, 1984, pp. 123-124). This category of psalms describes a newly realized faith as a result of disorientation and suffering. The psalmists describe engaging in a different kind of relationship with God that produces a new understanding of God and the life of faith (cf. Psalm 93). The movement from breakdown to repair can even be seen as a surprise, unable to be understood (Brueggemann, 1984). However, there are relational experiences described in these psalms that help to shed light on this faith transformation.

In a developmental typology, the psalms of new orientation depict a transformation toward relational differentiation. The process from establishment to deconstruction has given birth to a resurrected relationship with God; it is a result of co-creating a new faith with God. In these psalms, the psalmist models how to hold on to their experience, while also claiming a repaired trust in God. While the psalms give credit to God for the transformation, and rightly so, there is not much explanation as to how the transformation happened. Benjamin (2018) offered insight

by stating, "to heal psychologically, we need the other's witnessing and empathy, but also to create conditions for mutual sharing of positive affect so as to inflect even the witnessing of suffering with the opening to mutual transformation" (p. 12). Mutual recognition brings liberation in both being recognized and doing the recognizing (Benjamin, 2018). However, before recognition can happen, there needs to be acknowledgement of contribution to the breakdown.

In Psalm 32, David confessed his sin in the midst of feeling oppressed, acknowledging his part of relational conflict with God. His confession gave birth to a sense of forgiveness and relief from his groaning and resulted in exclaiming God's faithful love (cf. Psalm 32:10-11). It is important to remember the communal context that perhaps bore witness to David's pain. David confessed his sin to Nathan after he sinned against Uriah and Bathsheba (cf. 2 Samuel 12:13). Nathan assured God's forgiveness, offering validation and a referent for knowing how God works. David continued in Psalm 32 to speak of God's forgiveness to others, offering an extension of the same acts he received from Nathan. In this relational experience, David was able to make sense of the relational breakdown with God, experience being recognized, and then recognize God's action toward him. David's account also displayed God's pursuit of David to reestablish relational intimacy.

Perhaps these psalms show us that part of how God works in new orientation is by way of utilizing the co-created nature of the communal life of faith. Since intersubjectivity highlights the role of social construction, Judeo-Christians may move in and out of mutual recognition with God and others who also share relationships with God. Faith development in the psalms, therefore, cannot be purely individualistic and inevitably includes relational ruptures. However, the psalms also portray the ways in which God is faithfully and actively moving toward the believer to establish relational repair after a rupture. When we cry out loud so that God can hear us (cf. Psalm 77:1), God hears our prayers and responds, telling us about God's relational characteristics. Therefore, the psalms inform us about how the life of faith may look, and they also act as the very means by which we can be drawn into an active relationship with God through Scripture.

Praying the Psalms as Relational Action

It is one thing to just understand oneself and God through the text of the psalms, but Brueggemann is also encouraging that the psalms are to be prayed or "reperformed" (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). If persons of faith are praying the psalms, what is happening in that process of prayer? Prayer, being a relational act, is a way in which Judeo-Christians communicate with God. The words of the psalms act as a liturgy that Judeo-Christians can use to disclose their deepest emotional secrets with God when they lack the language or insight (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). The words of the psalms can also serve as acts of faith, holding to testimonies of God's faithfulness in light of suffering. In these ways, the psalms illuminate and evoke an intrapsychic reality within interpersonal relationships.

Building off of the relational turn in psychoanalysis and relational theism, the act of praying the psalms is an embodied action. When we read and pray another person's writing, we engage with it as if we feel and act the very things they describe (Brown & Strawn, 2012). So, in Psalm 6:6-7 where the psalmist said, "Every night I drench my bed with tears; I soak my couch all the way through; My vision fails because of my grief; it's weak because of all my distress" (*Common English Bible*, 2011), we can feel the visceral pain and sorrow because our brains imagine what it would be like to actually put ourselves in that state. Stories and testimonies act as subjective accounts that influence our faith. When we pray the psalms, we engage with the original writers and their writings testify to ways in which God might relate to us, broadening our scope of relationship with God. The temptation is that this action can be done individualistically. While there is value in praying the psalms in personal devotion, it also limits us when we do not also consider how the psalms are a communal book written from a collective faith. As a result, we must also consider the relational shifts at work when praying the psalms as members of Christ's Body.

There are two relational shifts in the psalms that Brueggemann identified, one toward disorientation and another toward reorientation. In disorientation, the movement arises out of some injustice, bringing the need for a theodicy. In the psalms, theodicy is about the legitima-

cy of one's view of the world, indicating a need for recognition (Brueggemann, 2002). When we lament, we put to speech to God and others the injustice we experience. A Judeo-Christian can pray laments, which "*may evoke reality* [emphasis in original] for someone who has engaged in self-deception and still imagines and pretends life is well-ordered, when in fact it is not" (Brueggemann, 1984, p. 53). These psalms act like a mirror to reveal and feel difficult emotions and trouble in one's relationship with God (Brueggemann, 2002). When Judeo-Christians pray these emotionally evocative psalms, they invite God into their most intimate places and experience change in their distress and relationship with God (Cohen, 2008).

The psalms also tell us about how God pursues and moves according to the cries of God's people. While psalms of disorientation aid in bringing hidden or defended emotions to God, that awareness is not what ultimately shifts to new orientation. Rather, Israel sang songs of praise after disorientation because God had chosen to resolve their experiences (Brueggemann, 2002). God, being our faithful relational partner, heard Israel's cries and responded to change their circumstances. When the psalmists "[cried] out" to God and made their hopes known (e.g., Psalm 3:4, 4:7-8), they displayed trust that God would act according to their demands (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014). Praying these psalms can provide a sense of being validated, which can create enough space to have faith to surrender to the relationship and recognize that God does not conform to our categories. In so doing, the believer and God engage in mutual recognition, co-creating a transformed faith relationship. The relational emphasis in praying these psalms is further emphasized when placed in social construction categories within intersubjectivity.

Praying the Psalms and Social Construction

A final area of intersubjective exploration in the psalms lies within the interplay between individual and communal relating. Hopefully, it has been clear that an intersubjective use of the psalms is inseparably connected to our holistic and contextual human nature. The Book of Psalms was written with this communal identity in mind, prompting implications for our communal use of it. I argue that the practice of reading,

praying, and singing the psalms in a community context bears greater implications for transformation than only practicing them individually.

The relationships in the faith community act as the very emotional and relational referents for how Judeo-Christians relate to God. Without others to hear our pain, validate our worry, and acknowledge our anger, there are limitations to how we might experience those emotions with God. When others read the psalms aloud and testify to their work in their life, those who listen are influenced by placing themselves in an "as if" state (Brown & Strawn, 2012). Even if a listener is not in a time of mourning, an openness to recognize the other who is mourning creates the opportunity for bi-directional influence with divine implications. With this in mind, it causes a different kind of recognition to come to light when the psalmist prays, "I cry out loud to God—out loud to God so that he can hear me!" (*Common English Bible*, 2011, Psalm 77: 1). We are reminded of God's character and we experience the emergence of spirituality as a result of being a part of God's Body. Brueggemann and Strawn (2014) spoke to this influence in stating, "Thus the practice of the Psalter protects the community from both religious temptations of negating the reality of God or negating the legitimacy of the life of the community" (p. 2). Therefore, Judeo-Christians need each other to be the Body of Christ to one another, both needing to be recognized and to do the recognizing (cf. Benjamin, 2018). Remembering our experiences of God for others, with others, and in front of others are ways of establishing the third, resulting in relational transformation through faith (cf. Psalm 77).

Religious and Clinical Applications

Lament prayers have been widely avoided in church contexts, creating experiences that "much of contemporary prayer is denial, as though our secrets can be hid from God" (Brueggemann & Strawn, 2014, p. 92). However, praying lament psalms are an essential experience of an intimate life of faith. Laments can be sung in musical worship, like the psalms, prompting communal and individual invitation to a deeper relational reality with God. Church leaders must guide the gaze of Christians to such a reality so that leaders can offer and model the invitation from leadership positions. As a Body, the

church can lament injustices such as racial violence in the world by making their pain known and their requests heard. As an individual, the Judeo-Christian can hear a sung or read lament as a chorus of validation to their personal angst, offering an opportunity for God and others to come close. Within liturgical traditions, lament psalms are often read alongside of church communities worldwide from the Lectionary and church calendar. Such liturgies beckon Christians to the emotional ebb and flow of the life of faith. The vision given by Israel in the Psalms is an orientation to relational intimacy with God and others, drawing communities of faith to consider prayer a life source for the Body of Christ. Therefore, adequate implementation of psalmic theology and lament practice is needed from congregational gatherings and small group studies to bearing each other's pain and personal prayerful complaint.

Laments also have a crucial place in the counseling, psychological, and spiritual direction contexts for people of faith. As a psychologist who is a Christian working with a Christian client, laments offer an integrative invitation to joining in another's pain as the therapeutic dyad jointly calls on God's work in that client's life. An example of this is seen in the work with a Christian client who lost loved ones in acts of violence. The therapist and client called upon the psalmist's example of lament to voice the internal anger and rage against those who stole life from the client with joint awareness of God's presence in session. Without even needing to speak their own words, the client resonated with the psalmist's pain in Psalm 77 as it were their own. The client accepted the invitation to voice their rage and pain, prompting the opportunity to be seen and cared for by both the therapist and God, changing the ways in which they could recognize God's work in pain. In helping contexts like therapy, counseling, or spiritual direction, the caretaker can be the very love of God by giving a relational experience that helps to access the hidden painful secrets previously warded off from self, others, and God.

Conclusion

Intersubjective theory magnifies the transformational process in the psalms. Psalmic theology bears witness to faith transformation, but does not fully address the relational dynamics active in this process. Three areas of relationality in the psalms were explored in intersubjective psychoanalytic thought in order to offer a deeper way to understand and practice the psalms in the life of faith. By amplifying the relational dynamics of the psalms, Judeo-Christians can better grasp God's immense love and faithful pursuit of them as they cry out to God.

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Intervention in Research and Practice

Considerations in Culturally Modifying Psychotherapy

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Introduction

For nearly 30 years, researchers, practitioners, and scholars have been wrestling with how to best adapt psychotherapy interventions to be of maximum efficacy with diverse populations. In today's climate, practitioners are aware of the need to provide culturally informed treatment. However, questions regarding how to accomplish this still exist. The American Psychological Association has put forth guidelines to address multicultural education, training, research, and practice to ensure that general competencies when working with culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse clients are met (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003; APA, 2017). Nevertheless, implementation of these guidelines is not always clear.

Practitioners are charged with providing culturally sensitive and congruent care; yet, the relevant resources to meet these complex challenges may be elusive. Sue and Sue (2013) suggested that, in light of current research, it is most effective to choose an empirically supported treatment and culturally modify it to address the needs. This approach allows for the practitioner to individualize a treatment approach by taking into account the unique aspects of the client. While it is widely recognized that culturally adapted treatments have been found to be more beneficial to culturally diverse clients (Benish et al., 2011), it can be difficult to determine a course of effective treatment. This article seeks to address this concern by providing a brief review of the literature with regard to key considerations in developing and implementing culturally modified interventions, while also illustrating how this presents within a Bahamian Christian context.

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Brief History: Why Cultural Modification is Necessary

Psychotherapy's historical roots can be traced back to its European and Western ancestry. In an ever expanding application of psychotherapy to diverse individuals from various contexts, it is essential to consider how to apply such a practice in a culturally responsive and congruent manner. The U.S. social and political context necessitates that practitioners be cognizant of how the historical and current forms of oppression influence the experiences of many marginalized individuals and how this also impacts the expectations and outcomes of psychotherapy (Bernal & Domenech Rodriquez, 2012). Psychotherapy's Western roots have a tendency to focus on a more individualistic value system and deprioritize an interdependent and interconnected way of being, which has the potential to underutilize key cultural protective factors. Additionally, more traditional forms of psychotherapy deemphasize spiritual practices and cultural values that are inherent to the growth and development of diverse individuals (Sue & Sue, 2013). To date, there have been several meta-analyses that have reviewed culturally adapted intervention studies and favor the use of culturally adapted interventions (Nagayama Hall et al., 2016). As the field of cultural adaptations continues to develop, Miranda et al. (2005) called for more consistent and systematic processes in culturally appropriating treatment for diverse clients.

Approaches to Cultural Modification

Cultural adaptation of any type must first begin with cultural humility. Cultural humility is a learning posture adopted by the practitioner that starts with curiosity and a sense of deference, respect, and openness to the cultural experiences and background of the other (Hook & Davis, 2019). This approach focuses on "ways of being" with the client as a central tenet of the multicultural orientation framework. Such an approach has been associated with positive treatment outcomes (Hook & Davis, 2019) and sets the tone for valuing the diverse individual.

Ecological Framework

Bernal and colleagues developed a conceptual framework to support culturally modified treatment. They identified eight components of culture that could be adapted to enhance the ecological validity of interventions (Bernal et al., 1995; Bernal & Saez-Santiago, 2006), thereby enhancing engagement and treatment outcomes for diverse clients. These dimensions include language, persons, metaphors, content, concepts, goals, methods, and context (Bernal et al., 1995). *Language* has the ability to transmit culture, convey nuances, and facilitate emotional expression. Therefore, interventions need to be language specific and go beyond a literal word for word translation to ensure embedded signifiers are addressed and communicated. The person's dimension addresses both the client and the therapist, in addition to their relationship. This dimension recognizes that the therapist needs to be aware of not only the client's culture, but their own beliefs, values, experiences, etc., and how they inform the treatment process. *Metaphors* relate to the use of familiar objects, symbols, images, etc., that represent the clients. This can be achieved visually through the use of cultural artifacts and design aesthetics and verbally through the use of embedded cultural sayings, common colloquialisms, etc. *Content* describes cultural knowledge, which can be a more challenging dimension to address, as it causes the practitioner to be familiar with the generational shifts in cultural values, customs, and beliefs, while also being aware of the client's current context. *Concepts* denote the constructs used within a theoretical framework, making sure that they are operationalized and communicated in a congruent manner. *Goals* refer to the outcomes that both the client and therapist desire from the treatment process. It is essential to strive for congruence and fit the goals within a culturally relevant frame to ensure credibility and buy-in. *Methods* refer to the actions taken to obtain the treatment goals. The final dimension, *context*, takes into consideration the totality of the client's experience, including social, economic, political, and developmental factors with regard to how this impacts the client.

Cultural Sensitivity Approaches

Cultural Tailoring

Pasick et al. (1996) offered insight into the relevance of using culture as a guide for adaptation, as opposed to ethnicity and race. They also challenged readers to consider the adaption practice of cultural tailoring, which is defined as "the development of interventions, strategies, messages, and materials to conform to specific cultural characteristics" (Pasick et al., 1996, p. 145). A tailoring approach goes beyond issues of race and ethnicity to capture the factors that are salient to values, beliefs, traditions, social norms, and experiences of individuals and groups. A tailoring method allows the client's context and culture to be fully seen and actively incorporated into the treatment process.

Cultural Sensitivity Framework

Resnicow et al. (1999) developed a cultural sensitivity framework that offers two levels of influence in modifying interventions: *surface* and *deep* structures. *Surface* adaptations refers to providing overt and recognizable preferred cultural symbols of which the target group will immediately identify and relate to. In a clinical setting, this could include ensuring that clinicians conduct therapy in the client's preferred language, paired with an ethnically matched therapist, when available, the clinic's aesthetic is culturally relevant, and treatment takes place in a context that allows for convenient and comfortable access (e g. a church, community center, etc.). The purpose of *deep* structures is to develop interventions that are congruent and fit within a target culture, incorporating context, beliefs, worldviews, etc. It is common for surface adaptations to increase receptivity, openness, and engagement to treatment, whereas *deep* structures offer points of contextual convergence. By default, deep modifications are more complex and require greater thought and resources. However, they are also credited in significantly improved mental health outcomes.

Culturally Adapting Evidence-Based Practices

Adapting evidence-based practices (EBPs) has the potential to decrease disparity gaps for diverse communities. Though it is not without controversy, EBPs opened the door to more fully integrating the context and culture of the cli-

ent. Multiculturalism and EBPs can be complementary. EBPs include "the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture, and preferences" (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice, 2006, p. 273). The literature notes that the effectiveness of culturally adapted treatment has been as much as five times greater in the reduction of psychopathology than nonadapted interventions (Nagayama Hall et al., 2016). There are two common approaches to adapting EBPs that will be discussed, including top-down and bottom-up frameworks.

Top-Down Approach

Hwang's (2006) Psychotherapy Adaptation Modification Framework (PAMF) posits that various domains of mental health are influenced by culture and, therefore, treatments need to be adapted to incorporate the values, beliefs, and worldview of the individual. PAMF provides a guide to key *domains, principles, and rationales* of mental health practice that warrant individualized attention and cultural customization. *Domains* refer to the areas of a therapeutic approach that are under consideration for modification. *Principles* refer to the suggested practices on how to adapt treatment for a specific target group. *Rationales* provide the reasoning behind why the modifications would be of benefit. This model helps the clinician think through their rationale in a systematic manner to determine how and why to make specific modifications (Hwang, 2006; Hwang, 2012). Hwang (2006) posited that PAMF supports the practitioner in thinking through (a) issues of cultural complexity, (b) orienting the client to psychotherapy, (c) exploration of the client's cultural beliefs of mental health concerns (d) enhancing the client-therapist relationship, (e) the understanding of culturally congruent coping and help-seeking behaviors, and (f) cultural treatment and intervention issues (Hwang, 2006; Hwang, 2012).

Bottom-Up Approach

Hwang (2009) developed the Formative Method for Adapting Psychotherapy (FMAP), which offers a bottom-up culturally focused collaborative approach. FMAP has five phases meant to be accomplished in conjunction with the client or relevant stakeholder: (a) collaborate and generate knowledge; (b) integrate information, with theory and empirical and clinical knowledge; (c) review the co-constructed culturally adapted intervention with the stakeholders and update, as needed; (d) test the culturally adapted intervention; and (e) finalize the culturally adapted intervention (Hwang, 2009, Hwang 2012). Nagayama Hall et al. (2016) found that this type of bottom-up strategy tends to be more culturally responsive and addresses specific concerns within a target cultural group.

Though initially developed to address separate concerns, PAMF to improve cultural competence for providers and FMAP to support the design of culturally based EBPs, both models can be combined to offer a systematic approach in adapting treatment for diverse clients (Hwang, 2012). An integrated top-down, bottom-up framework has the capacity for cultural specificity and the inclusion of empirically supported treatments (Hwang, 2012). The combination of the two allows for a complex interplay between cultural and clinical concerns.

Cultural Modifications: A Christian Illustration

Given the centrality of faith for some individuals and groups, a culturally modified framework provides an opportunity to integrate a Christian perspective into the treatment process. Worthington and Sandage (2016) noted that spirituality is filtered through one's context and culture. They suggested an individual makes meaning or uses hermeneutics to interpret their spiritual experiences, based on their world views, beliefs, etc. Such complexity calls for a clinical approach that can address multidimensional aspects of the individual. Abernethy and colleagues modified a classic group therapy intervention to support the socialization of adults exposed to community violence in the Bahamas (Abernethy et al., 2017), a context where over 90% of the population identifies as Christian. Given the participants' culture and context, the intervention was modified to reflect the Bahamian values of community interconnectedness and family centeredness, supported by strong Judeo-Christian beliefs (Abernethy et al., in press).

A culturally responsive approach to the participants' Christian faith included the integration of spiritual beliefs and interventions. In the Bahamian culture, stigma and shame are related to mental illness and therapy. Therefore,

the researchers intentionally named the intervention "The Family: People Helping People." Not only did this increase responsiveness and acceptability to the intervention, but it also leveraged another important cultural value, that of family centeredness. As the name implies, the focus of treatment was on how each individual could play a role in the healing of their community, a more communal versus individualistic approach. This name also operationalized a strong Christian value of taking care of one another and bearing one another's burdens. In lieu of providing the therapeutic group in a clinical setting, the treatment was offered in a community-based setting, allowing members access to treatment without being attached to a stigmatized therapeutic milieu.

The flow and structure of each group session was also influenced by the Christian values and beliefs of the participants. The group began with a guided meditation that was culturally tailored to include images, metaphors, and symbolism salient to their context and culture and concluded with a prayer of healing and guidance as they entered into the discussion phase of the group intervention. Throughout the group, additional spiritual interventions were incorporated, including the corporate singing of communal songs (spirituals and hymns), along with prayers spoken aloud. The spiritual music helped to shape the sacred space and conveyed deeply felt ideas that the participants could affirm in harmony. It was common for the spontaneous use of song led by the group facilitator or members in moments to express the inexpressible or draw attention to other entrenched emotions and beliefs. The therapist-client relationship, or, in this case, member-leader relationship, was constructed to reflect a Bahamian sensibility. Though there was an identified facilitator of the group, this facilitator was also a member of the community and had been exposed to the same types of experiences as the group members. The leader was able to convey culturally congruent spiritual beliefs and practices that represented a truly collective and embodied approach. "The Family" illustrates how a community-embedded group can be modified to embrace culture and context, including spirituality.

Conclusion

Culturally modified interventions take seriously a systemic approach to integrating empirically supported treatments, along with culture and context of the target group. Practitioners can glean from these approaches, frameworks, and guidelines to influence their practice with diverse clients. Culturally responsive models explicitly call for the client's culture and context to be considered in all aspect of practice, with a stance of cultural humility. This approach takes seriously the ways in which an individual's context must be embedded to support engagement and treatment outcomes. This includes being spiritually or religiously sensitive, as this is an equally important domain of culture.

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Assessment in Research and Practice

Religious/Spiritual Well-Being Measures

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In the psychology literature, well-being has been described by various dimensions, including perceived quality of life, positive affect, flourishing development, or even having the necessary resources in order to meet psychological, social, and physical needs (Lawton, 1983; Dodge et al., 2012). Some have also described subjective well-being with three distinct aspects: evaluative well-being (life satisfaction), hedonic well-being (feelings of happiness, sadness, anger, stress, and pain), and eudaimonic well-being (sense of purpose and meaning in life) (Steptoe et al., 2015). Much of this literature mentions positive and negative aspects of psychological well-being, but it often overlooks another dimension of well-being, which we believe could be very informative—religious/spiritual well-being. Religiousness and spirituality have been studied for decades within the field of psychology and have been found to play a significant role in individuals' physical and mental health (Demir, 2018; Koenig, 2009). Research publications regarding spirituality, religiousness, and health have increased significantly over the past two decades (Demir, 2018). Even with the increased interest and publications, studies often include spirituality as a variable (e.g., coping) that is typically then linked to psychological well-being (Koenig, 2009). However, religious/spiritual well-being can be an important outcome variable to assess with Christians not only in research, but also in practice. In this article, the distinction explored was how religious/spiritual well-being among Christians can be assessed and what domains researchers have used to operationalize religious/spiritual well-being. Also, we present some measures that assess various dimensions of religious/spiritual well-being that clinicians and researchers can utilize to better understand how individuals are doing spiritually.

Search Method and Selection Guidelines

For this column, we focused on measures related to religious or spiritual well-being. We first conducted a broad search in the *PsycTESTS* database, from the year 2000 to 2021, using the search terms [Religio*], [Faith], [Christian*], [Spiritual*], [God*], and [Church] to search by Test Name and Acronym and Construct. To identify the measures that would be most appropriate for the purpose of this column, we followed the criteria below:

1. Only measures that could be faith-based and applicable to Christians, rather than general non-religious spirituality, or scales solely relevant to other non-Christian religious groups.
2. Scales that went beyond the simple assessment of religious practices (e.g., church attendance, prayer, reading the Bible).
3. Scales that addressed some form of religious or spiritual well-being (e.g., personal feelings of peace and contentment, willingness to put faith to work in relation to others, experiencing God).

Two members were involved in the scale search process: a faculty member at a clinical psychology program in the U.S., originally from Taiwan, and a fifth-year Armenian American clinical psychology doctoral student, originally from Iran. The second reviewer first identified 59 possible scales. Then, the two reviewers further used the criteria to narrow the measure pool to the final five scales deemed most appropriate.

Religious Well-Being Measures

Daily Spiritual Experience Scale

The *Daily Spiritual Experience Scale* (DSES; Underwood & Teresi, 2002) is a 16-item measure created to assess perceptions or experiences of connection with the transcendent in daily life. Sample items include "I feel God's presence," "I feel guided by God in the midst of daily activities," and "I am spiritually touched by the beauty of creation." Items are rated on a

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6-point Likert scale (1 = *many times a day* to 6 = *never or almost never*), with lower scores reflecting more frequent daily spiritual experiences. A 6-item version of the scale was also developed. Data from several samples were utilized to attain psychometric analysis results. High internal consistency reliability estimates were achieved, with Cronbach's alpha of .94 and .95 for the 16-item version of the scale and .91 for the 6-item scale (Underwood & Teresi, 2002). In terms of construct validity, individuals who reported "no religion" also reported significantly less daily spiritual experiences than those who identified as Protestant or Catholic. Additionally, the DSES has been compared across sex, ethnic, and religious groups. For example, African American women reported significantly more daily spiritual experiences than White women, and women reported significantly more frequent daily spiritual experiences than men.

Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy—Spiritual Well-Being

The *Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy—Spiritual Well-Being* (FACIT-Sp; Peterman et al., 2002) is a 12-item measure created to assess spiritual well-being in people with cancer or other chronic illnesses. The measure includes two subscales: Meaning/Peace (8 items) and Faith (4 items). Sample items include "I have a reason for living" (Meaning), "I feel peaceful" (Peace), and "I find comfort in my faith or spiritual beliefs" (Faith). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = *not at all* to 4 = *very much*) on the basis of how much each item applies to their experience in the past seven days. The sample of the study consisted of 1,617 participants, with a median length of diagnosis of 29 months (83.1% cancer patients). The Cronbach alpha coefficients for the composite and subscales scores ranged between .81-.88 (Peterman et al., 2002). In terms of validity, moderate to strong correlations were found between the FACIT-Sp scores and quality of life.

Spiritual Assessment Inventory-Revised

The Spiritual Assessment Inventory-Revised (SAI; Hall & Edwards, 2002) is a 54-item (47 questions, with 7 follow up questions) measure, revised from the original SAI (Hall & Edwards, 1996) to improve psychometric properties, as well as to add a subscale. The measure assesses spiritual development and consists of six subscales: Awareness (19 items), Realistic Acceptance (7 items), Disappointment (7 items), Grandiosity (7 items), Instability (9 items), and Impression Management (5 items). Sample items include "I have a sense of how God is working in my life" (Awareness), "When [I feel angry at God], I still have the sense that God will always be with me" (Realistic Acceptance), "There are times when I feel disappointed with God" (Disappointment), "I seem to have a unique ability to influence God through my prayers" (Grandiosity), "I am afraid that God will give up on me" (Instability), and "I am always in a worshipful mood when I go to church" (Impression Management). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all true* to 5 = *very true*). The SAI subscale scores had strong Cronbach's coefficient alphas, ranging from .73 to .95 (Hall & Edwards, 2002). Construct validity of the SAI was supported by correlations of the SAI subscales with various other scales measuring constructs, such as spiritual well-being, intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation, and narcissistic personality. Additionally, the incremental validity of the SAI in predicting alienation above and beyond a spiritual well-being and an intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientation scale was supported through two-step multiple regressions.

Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire

The *Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire* (SWBQ; Gomez & Fisher, 2003) is a 20-item measure assessing well-being based on four domains conceptualized by Fisher (1998): Personal, Transcendental, Environmental, and Communal (5 items each). Sample items include "Developing joy in life" (Personal), "Developing peace with God" (Transcendental), "Developing awe at a breathtaking view" (Environmental), and "Developing forgiveness toward others" (Communal). Participants in the study were asked to report how the statements in the items described their personal experiences in the past 6 months, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very low* to 5 = *very high*). High internal consistency was achieved for the composite scores, as well as each domain, with a .92 Cronbach's alpha value for the composite score and .89, .86, .76, and .79 for domains of Personal, Transcendental, Environmental, and Communal, respectively (Gomez & Fisher, 2003). Convergent and discriminant validity of the SWBQ were supported through its

correlation with scores on the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS; Ellison, 1983), which also included items reflecting Fisher's main domains.

Sky Spirituality Scale

The *Sky Spirituality Scale* (SS-25; Kimura et al., 2016) is a 25-item measure that consists of 3 components: Pious Mind (8 items), Social Connections (8 items), Life Satisfaction (4 items), and 5 other items. Sample items include "I have experienced meaningful coincidence in my life" (Pious Mind), "I would like to do something to make society better" (Social Connections), "I have inner peace" (Life Satisfaction), and "I envy people who seem happy" (other items). Each item is scored using a 5-point Likert response scale (0 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*, except for the 7 reverse items). This scale was developed to examine spirituality with a sample of students at two private Japanese universities, and spirituality was defined based on their cultural context. Cronbach's alpha coefficients of SS-25 exceeded .70, with the exception of the Life Satisfaction domain (Kimura et al., 2016). The SS-25's construct validity for assessing spirituality in university students was supported through factor analysis and the scale's relationship with religiousness.

Conclusion

In this column, we identified five different measures of religious/spiritual well-being. These measures have conceptualized the construct through different domains that involve individual and social aspects, existential and transcendent perspectives, and perceptions and experiences of God. Four of these five measures were developed in the early 2000s. The four measures established around two decades ago all have a decent amount of citations. Based on Google Scholar on May 27th, 2021, the DSES and FACIT-Sp have been cited over 1,000 times and the SAI and SWBQ around 500 times.

Each of the five measures have unique characteristics, which practitioners and researchers can consider when deciding the one to use. For example, the FACIT-Sp is a measure that is designed for people dealing with illness and meaning of life concerns. The SAI includes both positive and negative aspects of spiritual well-being and is a tool that examines spirituality from very different dimensions linked with various psychological constructs. The SWBQ is also multidimensional, covering individual, social, and transcendental aspects of well-being. The DSES is single-dimensional, with a focus

Table 1

Religious/Spirituality Well-Being Measures

Scale name	Authors/year	Subscales	Items
Daily Spiritual Experience Scale	Underwood & Teresi (2002)	N/A	16
Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy—Spiritual Well-Being	Peterman et al. (2002)	Meaning/Peace & Faith	12
Spiritual Assessment Inventory - Revised	Hall & Edwards (2002)	Awareness, Realistic Acceptance, Disappointment, Grandiosity, Instability, & Impression Management	54
Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire	Gomez & Fisher (2003)	Personal, Transcendental, Environmental, & Communal	20
Sky Spirituality Scale	Kimura et al. (2016)	Pious Mind, Social Connections, & Life Satisfaction	25

on one's connection with the transcendent. The DSES has been sampled with various ethnic, gender, and religious groups; it can be used when assessing spiritual well-being across different groups. The SS-25 is the only measure that was not developed in the Western cultural context. Developed within the Japanese context, this measure can broaden the construct of spirituality beyond the Western cultural lens. Although there are likely other religious/spiritual well-being measures beyond the five that we introduced, our hope is that the religious/spiritual aspect of Christians' well-being will receive more attention through better utilization of these assessment tools in psychological research and clinical practice.

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Theology in Research and Practice

Humility and Despair

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Introduction

Ever since the wife-husband team of Anne Case and Angus Deaton (Case & Deaton, 2015) popularized the term *deaths of despair*, psychologists have become more interested in seeing despair as a psychological phenomenon in its own right, apart from its association with clinical depression and anxiety (Pecchenino, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2020). Despair's central marker is the loss of hope. It is characterized by feelings of social and spiritual isolation, meaninglessness, hopelessness, helplessness, demoralization, and shame (Clark & Kissane, 2002; Pecchenino, 2015). Causes of despair are complex, ranging from individual (e.g., grief, bad health, addiction, abuse), to societal (e.g., social and cultural dislocation, unemployment, economic disaster, poverty), to a combination of both (Johnson & Tomren, 1999; Mair et al., 2012; Pecchenino, 2015; Shanahan et al., 2020). As Shanahan et al. (2020) noted, despair affects an individual on multiple levels—from hopeless and helpless thoughts about oneself and the future, to feelings of excessive sadness, irritability, and apathy, to reckless and self-destructive behavior, to a breakdown in the body's functioning (Shanahan et al., 2020).

How can such an individual be helped? Sometimes, acknowledging and/or addressing despair's *material* causes is enough. But the problem with despair is that it tends to generate a vicious cycle of self-defeat. Often, it manifests in self-perpetuating negative cognitive biases, self-defeating emotional reactions, and self-destructive behavior (Shanahan et al., 2020). To break free, the person must address the psychological and *spiritual* roots of her despair. Here, I offer insights from a Christian

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tradition grounded in the monastic spirituality of the Desert Fathers, in the hopes that these might help a therapist seeking to do just that.

Despair in the Deadly Sins Tradition

The Deadly Sins Tradition

The Deadly Sins tradition originated in the desert Christian communities functioning as ancient precursors of monastic communities. These were formed by men and women who fled into Egyptian and Palestinian deserts to pursue salvation through purity of heart and undivided focus on God. They lived either as hermits or in small communities, and their days consisted of prayer, meditation, reading, and simple manual labor, like rope weaving or basket making. Having left behind the many distractions of civilization, they were forced to face their own selves and confront their hidden motivations and desires (Chryssavgis, 2008, pp. 37, 39). Through the relentless practice of individual and communal spiritual discernment, they achieved what Evagrius termed *cardiognosis* (knowledge of the heart)—a deep knowledge of the human psyche.

The desert fathers and mothers detected patterns among the monks' manifold temptations and struggles. They noticed that some of the temptations and sins were rooted in deeper spiritual problems and identified eight "evil thoughts" or "demons" that tended to engender and nourish other sins. By the end of the seventh century, it became customary to talk about deadly vices or sins, instead of evil thoughts or demons, and the number of deadly sins was fixed at the infamous seven.

Why, though, should we pay special attention to these vices? After all, there are many worse things a person can do than, for example, post too many TikTok videos aimed at boosting their vanity. The deadly vices are significant because they constitute the underlying causes of our more "visible" negative traits. The wisdom of the desert fathers and mothers lies in recognizing that, instead of spending our time and energy battling the secondary and tertiary sins, we should address their roots. This insight brings the desert fathers and mothers into such proximity with contemporary therapists' approach

to the human psyche that contemporary therapists might benefit from listening to the accumulated wisdom of the voices from the desert. This is especially true given that the ancient monks' *cardiognosis* covers not only the nature of the deadly vices, but also the tested and proven ways of combating these "evil thoughts."

Despair as Emotion vs. Despair as Sin

How does despair fit into the Deadly Sins tradition? As its Latin name (*desperatio*) suggests, despair as an *emotion* is a loss of hope (*spes*). As a basic human emotion, hope signifies "a reaching out for anything that is perceived as good, and for the anticipated fulfillment that the possession of something good brings" (Pieper, 1986, p. 27). Consequently, the emotion of despair "implies not only privation of hope, but also a recoil from the thing desired, by reason of its being esteemed impossible to get" (Aquinas, 2012a, p. 372).

Not all despair is considered a sin. Aquinas, for example, takes the *sin* of despair to be not an emotion or mood, but, rather, an error in judgment (Aquinas, 2012b, pp. 187–91). In his account, a despairing person believes that God is good and merciful. Yet, they also believe themselves to be such a great sinner that God's mercy does not extend to them. Consequently, they lose hope of salvation and turn away from the goodness that is God.

This deliberate, volitional act of turning away is the mark of the sin of despair. Anyone can experience despair as an emotion—it is a natural reaction to the irreparable loss of something we love and desire. These non-sinful instances of despair follow the right judgments of reason by giving up on those things which are truly unattainable and by not blocking our ability to perceive other significant goods. The vice of despair, on the other hand, consists of a persistent, deliberate turning away from and giving up of the goods that we should not give up. That we do give them up shows that we are affected by the deadly sins and that our judgment is clouded. Here, I address only the sin of despair.

Despair as the Daughter Vice of Acedia and Pride

The Deadly Sins tradition views sinful despair as a potential "daughter" of two vices. The first vice is *acedia*. It is "a specific temptation that diverse psychological states and demonic sug-

gestions may produce in a monk: the temptation to stop his practice of divine contemplation" (Aijian, 2021, p. 7). Acedia is characterized by restlessness and the inability to stick to the tasks of ascetic life. This restlessness can manifest as either apathy or a constant distracting activity and is brought on at least partly by the monk's concern with their lack of spiritual progress. Toiling away every day with seemingly nothing to show for it, the monk comes to see their work as useless and blames this ineffectiveness on their external circumstances (e.g., the people who surround them, a lack of support from their spiritual leaders, etc.). Aijian writes, "The acedious monk has convinced himself that until his circumstances change, none of his work will be effective, and so he stops working, looks for distractions, and imagines a different environment in which he could be effective" (Aijian, 2017, p. 188).

Looking at acedia helps us understand how a person might fall into despair. Acedia makes us feel that the daily grind of our tasks in pursuit of holiness, a good marriage, good parenting, decent living standards, etc., accomplishes nothing. We perceive the goal as being out of reach, so we are tempted to turn away from it in despair. Yet, something else besides acedia is necessary to push the person into *sinful* despair.

The vice that supplies this push is pride. As the first and most fundamental sin, pride is the desire for excellence gone wrong. Generally, it goes wrong in two ways. The first is when we desire to have more excellence than rightly is or ought to be ours. It may manifest as presumption, pretension, arrogance, conceit, excessive competitiveness, or other similar attitudes and dispositions. Think of a person who, while falling apart, nevertheless insists that everything is under control or a person who strives to be the best in their field, not because they care about the subject, but because they want to be better than everyone else. Second, we succumb to pride when we pursue excellence in the wrong way. We want to be independent and self-made, and we do not like acknowledging our dependence on God and others. We grasp for a modicum of control because it helps us maintain the illusion that we are in charge of our lives and destinies. This is the sin of a person who refuses help because they do not want to be in anyone's debt. And it is the sin of one who, despite benefitting from generations of financial and

social wealth-building, maintains that their success is the result solely of their own hard work.

At pride's extreme end lies despair, as, deep down, pride-born despair is twisted self-love. When we become convinced that, for whatever reason, the excellence we crave is unattainable, pride makes us grasp for the next best thing: control. Overwhelming circumstances or acedia can leave a person feeling utterly impotent, which is when pride-born despair might take over. In the face of perceived failure, pride makes us grasp for anything that would allow us to hold onto an illusion of power—like the power to judge oneself. When a person loses hope and feels isolated and helpless, despair allows them to hold onto some vestiges of control: Nobody but the person themselves tells them whether they are worthy. As Thomas Merton (1961) wrote, "Despair is the absolute extreme of self-love. It is reached when a man deliberately turns his back on all help from anyone else in order to taste the rotten luxury of knowing himself to be lost" (Merton, 1961, p. 140). Unsurprisingly, the Deadly Sins tradition has pointed to proper humility as a remedy for pride. If pride lies at the root of a person's despair, then cultivating humility might help the despairing person as well.

Counteracting Despair

Humility

In the West, humility has had a complicated history.[1] Its popularity ebbed and flowed, but humility (at least cultural and intellectual humility) has made a recent comeback. Psychologists have even linked humility with better physical and mental health outcomes, as well as the strengthening of social bonds, the promotion of social cooperation, and better leadership (Worthington et al., 2016). But what is humility? Currently, several rival conceptualizations exist. For this article, I adopt Aquinas's definition and supplement it with Kent Dunnington's take on the Augustinian account.[2]

Aquinas understood humility as the right *valuing* of ourselves before God and others (Aquinas, 2012b, pp. 531-543). It is a developed character disposition that moderates our desire for excellence by bringing it in line with our reason's correct estimation of our abilities. A humble person does not strive for something beyond their capacities, but subjects themselves to God and his ordering of things; they also subject them-

selves to other people for the sake of God (Aquinas, 2012b, pp. 535-536). A humble person can do this because they believe God is worthy of their glad submission and they are willing to rely on God for their being, goodness, and self-identity (Dunnington, 2016).

The four markers of humility thus identified are low concern with one's status, other-orientedness, accurate self-estimation, and owning of one's limitations. A humble person is clear-eyed because a bloated sense of self does not block their view. They see their limitations and failures for what they are. They also see God for what he is: someone greater than their sins, failure, and circumstances. Accordingly, they readily subject themselves to God and others, but not because they consider themselves unworthy. In a very important sense, they do not consider themselves at all. Rather, they subject themselves to God and others because they value *them* and their goodness. Humility functions as an antidote for pride by helping the person "get over themselves."

Humility undercuts acedia as well. Remember, acedia is a temptation to abandon a good but difficult task, stemming from the person's secret anxiety about their efforts' effectiveness. When we indulge this anxiety, our previous desire for the difficult good becomes an aversion. The traditional cure for acedia is *stabilitas loci*, which means remaining in one's place and doing one's work exactly when the temptation to flee into distraction or laziness is strongest. Aijian (2017) compares this cure to behavioral therapy, in which developing a habit to "combat [one's] urge to escape" changes a person's perception of her work and place (Aijian, 2017, p. 194). Cultivating humility can bolster this behavioristic approach. Aijian (2017) points to studies suggesting that maladaptive perfectionism often undergirds avoidance behavior. Our fear of failure can sabotage us, and what we see as a lack of progress can discourage us. By helping us take our eyes off ourselves, humility enables us to stop chasing the phantom of success as we define it and to focus on the task itself.

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[1] For an excellent overview of humility's conceptual history in the West, see Dunnington (2018).
[2] By doing so, I do not wish to negate other compelling, yet competing, accounts of humility. For a good overview of other conceptual accounts, see Worthington et al. (2016) and Dunnington (2018).

We have seen how humility targets both acedia and pride. I now offer two examples showing how humility targets despair as well.

Narrative Illustrations

The first example is from the Gospel of Matthew 26:69–27:10. Matthew tells of two betrayals: one by Peter and one by Judas. Both men betrayed Jesus at the point when he appeared to be the most vulnerable. Both are undone by their betrayals. And yet, while Judas hangs himself, we next see Peter with the rest of the disciples, on his way to meet the resurrected Jesus. Judas gives in to despair, but Peter is saved.

The second example is from the first book of Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene*. Spenser tells the story of St. George and the famous victory of that knight over a fierce dragon. Surprisingly, the dragon did not pose the most danger to St. George. Instead, a weak-looking man named Despaire was the greatest threat. Before St. George was St. George, he was Redcrosse, a knight sworn to protect Lady Una and kill the dragon desolating her land. Redcrosse's pride and lack of care caused his separation from Una, or truth personified, and his entanglement with Duessa, or deception. Redcrosse capped a string of spectacular combat and moral failures by rushing into Despaire's house, thinking he could easily overpower the villain. However, when Despaire spoke, he reminded Redcrosse of all the stupid, shameful acts the latter had committed with Duessa. He showed that even Redcrosse's victories were marred and suggested suicide to break the cycle of ongoing sin. Overcome with guilt and feelings of unworthiness, the knight was about to stab himself when he was saved by Una. She took the knife from his hand, scolded him harshly for his cowardice, and reminded him of God's mercy and his quest to slay the dragon. She ordered Redcrosse to follow her out of "this dreadful place." To everyone's astonishment, he did.

What united Redcrosse and Peter? Why did they live, while Judas died? If my suggestion that despair is rooted in inordinate pride is correct, the answer to both questions is *humility*. It takes true humility to stop looking at oneself and judge oneself by one's own standards. And it takes true humility to respond to a call from someone you have abandoned and betrayed the way Redcross abandoned and betrayed Una.

Could it be that Judas despaired because he could not get over himself? All he saw was his wretchedness and foulness, and he could not imagine how someone like him could be forgiven. Peter, meanwhile, looked at Jesus' goodness, instead of his own smallness and shame.

A therapist, working with a person struggling with despair, might take away three insights from these stories. *First*, a despairing person might benefit from practices aimed at cultivating humility, such as laying one's thoughts bare to God, fasting, acts of service, etc. However, a despairing person should not undertake these practices alone, in isolation from others. This brings us to the *second* insight: a despairing person needs community. When we despair, we cannot rightly see ourselves or our place in the world. We need someone else to remind us that acknowledging our smallness and inadequacy is the first step. We must also relinquish our right to judge ourselves and, instead, submit to God's judgment. In other words, others—be it a therapist or members of a therapy group—must show us that our despair is the ultimate form of self-indulgence and help us get over ourselves.

Third, a despairing person needs to see that they, like every other human being, have a calling, and that this calling is other-oriented. Redcrosse looked up from himself only when Una showed her anger at his readiness to abandon his quest to liberate Una's homeland. She reminded him that he had a task for which the Fairie Queene chose him, and he would be abandoning it by committing suicide. Now, few of us are called to something as obviously heroic as Redcrosse, but we all have a calling to fulfill, and a despairing person might need their therapist's help to remember this. At minimum, everyone is called to the demanding work of being a neighbor and growing closer to God. To do both of these and other worthwhile tasks, we must take eyes off our status or performance and focus on what we are called to do. This allows us to see the hard work of staying in place and showing up, not as pointless and ineffective, but as the very thing that transforms us into who we are called to be.

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Justice in Teaching, Research, and Practice

A Biblical Case for Justice in Professional Practice and Scholarly Engagement

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Welcome to our first column on *Justice in Teaching, Research, and Practice*. This first article is intended to provide a biblical framework from which many of the articles that follow will spring forth. As we set the stage for this column, it is worth noting that our decision to offer a column explicitly focused on the topic of justice is grounded both in observance of the socio-historical realities that are shaping our nation and world and the firm conviction that a life marked by justice is inextricably linked with the life of faith according to the Scriptures for the people of God. As a result of this conviction, we as integrators—integrative scholars, practioners, students, educators and activists—are called to pursue an ever-deepening understanding of justice. This understanding finds its fulfillment in the faithful application of these principles in every sphere of our lives.

In this column, our aim is to devote undivided attention to the ways that justice may be carried out in various aspects of our professional lives. Although the focus of this column will be on various aspects of our *vocational endeavors* as they relate to our formal work, it would behoove us to acknowledge that congruence, or integrity, between our professional pursuits and personal practice is of the utmost importance. As a result, the biblical witness, empirical evidence, and theological and theoretical arguments that are explored in this professional context will necessarily have ramifications for other aspects of our lives as well. I trust that the Holy Spirit will provide ample wisdom for each of us as we discern how to apply these principles to other parts of our lives.

Before taking a step further, it is essential that we begin with a working definition of justice. Any clarity surrounding our engagement with this topic must begin with our awareness about what justice is in the first place. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (n.d.), justice is defined in the following manner: "The quality of being just, impartial, or fair; the principle or ideal of just dealing or right action; conformity to this principle or ideal: righteousness."

There are many things about this definition of justice that are worth observing. First, "justice" is a noun that describes a way of being, or engaging, in the world around us. A person, institution, or larger system that operates in line with justice is marked by the qualities of just, impartial, or fair behavior. Second, as social scientists, the word "impartial" stands out, as it clarifies that a lifestyle of justice is marked by *intentional mitigation, or erasure, of bias*. The person, group, or institution that claims that it is just must not only be mindful of their biases, but actively account for them in order to fully address them. Third, the word justice is associated with the virtue of *righteousness*. As followers of Jesus, everything that we do is meant to be marked by righteousness. Christians are called to not only think righteous thoughts (Philippians 4:8), but the people of God are also called to live entire lifestyles that are marked by righteousness (Proverbs 21:3).

Thus, as followers of Jesus, this dictionary definition of justice finds even greater credence in the fact it is in keeping with a biblical understanding of justice. It is noteworthy to observe that the biblical pairing of "justice" with "righteousness" is a well-known word association among biblical scholars. There are dozens of pairings of these words throughout the Old Testament. In fact, these two words are so closely associated with one another that, while they are distinct terms, it is safe to say that they are inextricably linked: from a biblical perspective, you cannot have one without the other. This link between justice and righteousness matters, in part, because the way of justice is always meant to accompany righteous behavior. While it may be uncommon for someone to think of "justice" being served in an "unrighteous" manner, it is important to remember that *true justice* cannot simply be accomplished by following "the rule of

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law." Rather, justice can only be accomplished (in a judicial system, institutional setting, or interpersonal relationship) when the mediation of justice also accomplishes what is morally right. (This distinction seems worth noting due to the fact that contradictions can and do arise between what is "just" according to national law and what is "right" according to God's law.) Careful attention, then, to the manner in which justice is provided also matters for the people of God.

Continuing our observation of the role of justice in the Scriptures, we find that justice holds a prominent place in the life of faith because it is a "divine attribute"—a characteristic trait of God. As a psychology professor, I spend quite a bit of time thinking about "traits." When I teach my students about personality traits, I remind them that, unlike the more temporal nature of "states," "traits" are consistent characteristics that mark a person, group, or organization. Our traits show the world who we are and demonstrate to those around us what matters to us. These characteristic behaviors reveal our values even more strongly than any words that we might speak.

Likewise, divine attributes are immutable characteristics of God's character and nature. They tell us who God is and what God cares about. Notably, the term "justice" is a characteristic that God uses as a *divine self-description* over and over and over again. God repeatedly uses this term to describe God's self in order to make sure the characteristics of the divine nature may not be mistaken, minimized, or underestimated. "The Lord is a God of justice" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Isaiah 30:18). God's throne and God's kingdom are established through justice (Psalm 89:14). God's interactions with the world are marked by justice—interactions with the people of God and the enemies of God (Psalm 72:2). Moreover, those whose lives are not marked by justice—be it the people of God or the enemies of God—will be brought to justice (Deuteronomy 27:19). This divine commitment to justice is echoed in the New Testament as well (Luke 18:7; Acts 17:31; Revelation 19:11).

So, we see that justice is a divine character trait in the Scriptures. But we also see that the Lord calls the people of God to emulate this divine way of being as well. Repeatedly, we hear some iteration of the following: "Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Isaiah 1:17). We also hear of the sobering outcome for the people of God when they do not bring about justice for the least of those among them: "Cursed is the one who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan or widow" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, Deuteronomy 27:19).

Yet, for all of the hundreds of Scripture passages that speak to the way of justice, for many 21st century Western Christians, discovering that the God of the Bible is a God of justice often seems strange, at best, and off-putting, at worst. More often than anything else, many Western churches (Western, White churches, more specifically) are inclined to highlight "love" and "grace" as the preeminent divine attributes. Often, this emphasis on divine love and grace overshadows other divine characteristics. For many contemporary Christians, this reasoning stems from the New Testament's attestation that "God is love" (*New International Version Bible*, 2011, 1 John 4:8). However, I venture to propose that an *overemphasis* on the love of God may be just as damaging to our theology (knowledge of God) and ecclesiology (understanding of the Church) as an underemphasis of other divine traits.

It may not be much of a stretch to observe that underlying many modern Christians' emphasis on the love of God is a deep fear and growing confusion about how to make sense of God's behavior when demonstrating divine righteousness and justice—particularly in the Old Testament. For many, God's demonstrations of righteousness and justice showcases a God that frightens us so much that we would rather engage in a type of dissociation that classic Kleinian theory would call "splitting": the inability to hold in tension the traits of an individual that seem incompatible to us (Feist et al., 2018). It is easier to simply lay aside the divine characteristics that we do not fully understand and, instead, pay close attention to the ones that we find endearing. Often, this means placing a wedge between our understandings of God's character in the Old Testament and the way of Christ in the New Testament.

To resolve this tension, it seems that many Christians subconsciously subscribe to an early Christian heresy that most have never heard of, but whose roots run deep in Christendom,

even to this day: the heresy of Marcionism. In short, Marcionism was a theological heresy that emerged in the 2nd century AD, based on the teachings of Marcion: a wealthy and influential preacher's kid (his father was a bishop in the early church) who, as an adult, was known for popularizing the following ideas: "'The God of the Old Testament is a tyrant,' 'Jesus came to show compassion, unlike the God of wrath,' and 'Love is the opposite of the law'" (Tilby, 2007, p. 74). These sentiments are not unlike many of the thoughts and feelings expressed by believers today. The "God of the Old Testament" seems so different from the Christ of the New Testament that it is easier to simply think of them as separate beings or to assume that God's personality shifted over time, such that the *justice* heralded in the Old Testament was *replaced* by *love* in the New Testament. Whether or not this exchange takes place intentionally, the character traits that mark many Western Christians today seems to reflect this bifurcation in deep and profound ways.

But what does this brief trip down ecclesial memory lane, traipsing through Church history and theological heresy, have to do with justice for the integrator? I propose that slipping into this theologically binary way of thinking is fatal for the life of faith in general, and detrimental for those of us who teach, practice, or research psychology specifically.

The Scriptures are clear about the unchanging nature of God's character (Hebrews 13:8; James 1:17), and choosing to buy into an oversimplified view of the divine nature is harmful to us and to the work of the gospel that we are called to live out in every sphere of our lives. It is a gift to us, as the people of God, to worship and obey a God who sees the marginalized (Genesis 16:7-13), cares for the oppressed (Psalm 9:9) and champions the way of justice (Zechariah 7:9-10). The reality of the goodness of this truth is plain to us when we are the marginalized, the oppressed, and those in need of justice.

But what do we do when we find ourselves removed from the experiences of the oppressed or, worse yet, in a season of discovery that *we* are connected to—directly or indirectly—the oppression of others? How do we find solace in the truth that justice remains a hallmark of the divine nature and is also the call of the people of God?

These moments of epiphany ought to be approached with gratitude and humility. Though sobering, such moments of clarity allow us to see the world, and ourselves, as we really are. As psychologically oriented professionals, we know that staying grounded in reality is foundational to our psychological well-being. The first step towards cultivating a lifestyle marked by justice begins by acknowledging where we, individually or collectively, have been and are associated with injustice. Thereafter, it becomes our responsibility to find those around us who live lives marked by justice to emulate.

As educators, it is incumbent upon us to know the history of our discipline and ensure that the narratives that we tell about who we are as a discipline and how we came to be adequately recounts our successes, as well as our failures. This means our students are clear about the role of antisemitism, misogyny, and homophobia that are wrapped up within the founding of psychology and psychoanalysis (Moss, 2001). It also means that our choice of textbooks and course assignments require that our students engage with the implications of our past and ethical responsibilities of the present so that they are equipped to enact and promote justice in their own lives as well. Failure to tell the painful truth about who we have been and what we have done is a form of injustice in and of itself.

For those of us who have the privilege of writing for the academy and/or the Church, the aim of our scholarship ought to be marked by justice from beginning to end. For researchers, this means paying attention to the ways that justice and injustice have shaped the populations that we study and the ways that these realities will impact the interpretation of the data that we collect. Additionally, as we put together our literature reviews and engage with the work of colleagues, it is incumbent upon us to attend to the diversity of perspectives and backgrounds of the authors whom we are referencing and with whom we are in theoretical dialogue. Attention to the representative nature of those with whom we engage is a practical way to proactively promote equitable access to the voices of others—particularly those voices that have been historically underrepresented and systematically misrepresented (Fort & Watson, 2021).

As practioners, we also have the unique opportunity to embody and promote justice in the therapy room, at the consulting table, and within our supervisory conversations. Specifically, our commitment to pay attention to the ways that our own subjective experiences and cultural heritage shapes the way that we see our clients and supervisors/supervisees is just as important as the material that we read in our efforts to develop a posture of cultural humility within our cross-cultural interactions (Hook et al., 2017).

Our intentional pursuit of justice is meant to have far reaching effects: ensuring (and not merely intending) that every nook and cranny of our personal and professional lives are marked by just and right appraisals of ourselves, our clients, our research participants, our dialogical partners, our students, our communities, and our institutions and that our just attitudes and actions flow from these accurate appraisals. In doing so, we acknowledge the inherent risk to ourselves and our reputations: we acknowledge the foibles, failures, and—more sobering yet—fatal implications of the injustices that surround us and the injustices to which our own practices make regular contribution.

Even with this sobering reality in view, however, as the people of God, we also take courage in the fact that a lifestyle marked by justice is one that is empowered by the Spirit of God. It is the same God of justice—*The God of the Oppressed* (Cone, 1997)—who enables us to serve as Christ's ambassador in every sphere in which we find ourselves (2 Corinthians 5:20). As a result, we step forward in bold and convicted humility as we actively make space for the virtues of the Kingdom to permeate life here on earth, just as they do in heaven (Matthew 6:10).

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