

Author: Suey Park

Title: Queerianity: Making sense of Two Conflicting Identities

About the Author: I am a senior studying Psychology at the University of Illinois. I have been both a part of Christian organizations on campus as well as LGBT organizations and have found that depending on which space I am in, there is a lot of misunderstanding and sometimes tension towards the other group. I am curious to know whether or being both queer and Christian is accepted and embraced by students at the University of Illinois.

Keywords: queer, religion, Christian, spirituality, sexuality, orientation

Abstract: My research is on the topic of the intersection of LGBT and Christian identities within individuals. Historically, there has been much tension between the queer and Christian communities and I am interested in understanding how individuals make sense of identifying as both queer and Christian.

Question: Initial Question (Assignment 1): I am wondering how Korean-American culture, which tends to be collectivist/traditionalist/religious, influences the expression of queer culture on the University of Illinois' college campus

Revised Question (Topic Change, Assignment 3): How do students at the University of Illinois make sense of both being Christian and identifying as queer? In what ways do people suppress or feel pressure to suppress their orientation as a result of either identifying as Christian or being raised in a Christian household once they are away at college with more freedom to explore identities? Does one identity trump the other, especially with regards to membership in Christian organizations and queer organizations on campus? How do the Christian religion/Christians view queer individuals/queer culture in the University of Illinois? How does queer individuals/queer culture view the Christian religion/Christians in the University of Illinois?

Current Question: How do students at the University of Illinois negotiate their Christianity and sexual orientation? What kind of spaces are safe for students who identify as both? What has this process looked like while in college?

Plan: Initial Plan:

A. Method

I plan on doing interviews with stakeholders that frequent the two types of spaces and/or hold officer positions in these groups. This way I will be sure to interview folks that may have a well thought out opinion or an opinion that may also be representative of the organization as a whole. I will enter these spaces and ask a specific set of questions to gather perspectives. I will be clear as to what my intent is.

B. Participants

In queer spaces I will interview participants who have been either been raised Christian or identity as Christian and identify as being queer. In Christian spaces, I will interview random folks to get a general opinion, as well as those who identify as queer if I am able to find people willing to speak about it.

C. Schedule

I need to develop this one further, but after receiving permission I will move forward and begin gathering as many interviews as possible here and there. I will be meeting with you during office hours to figure out what my timeline looks like since I am not behind on several of the steps.

1. Ethics

My research will definitely uphold principles of the Belmont Report by intentionally checking to see if all of the ethical guidelines are being followed. I intend to be transparent about my goals and will try not to ask leading questions during the process. I hope that it is not of harm to anyone involved, but due to the nature of the topic possibly bringing up sensitive and negative memories, I will make sure to bring

information on the Counseling Center as well as making it clear that it is not mandatory to finish the interview or to share anything that the participant does not feel comfortable talking about.

Revised Plan: I will be going into spaces on campus that service the particular groups I am hoping to interview. This includes the LGBT Resource Center, Building Bridges meetings, and Christian campus ministry spaces. I will connect with people present and try to find out if someone has experiences that could possibly shed light on my inquiry. I will then ask those individuals to meet with me at a separate time. I will be interviewing and recording the conversations in a private setting.

Final Plan: I will be looking for participants who are actively engaging in conversations around being both a queer identifying individual and a Christian individual. I found that it was too broad of a range to look for anyone who identified as just one of my two identities. I will still seek out individual interviews.

EUI References/Tagging: *[1=Read, but not relevant, i.e., i took a look at this project but my own EUI project does not really have anything to do with it; 2=Somewhat Relevant, i.e., I think my project is related to this EUI project, but I do not really build specifically on any of its arguments or data in my project; 3=Very relevant, i.e., My project builds on this project; namely, my project's arguments confirm/contradict the discussions in this project.]*

Benham, "Minority Times Two": A look at life for an LGBT student of Asian descent on campus, 2008.

Lane, Conflicting Identities: Life of LGBT Students at UIUC, 2009.

Mora, Comparison of LGBT student involvement in identity-based organizations vs. other organizations on campus, 2009.

Kingsbury, Exploring the effects of coping behaviors on adjustment during a semester for lesbian, gay and bisexual college students, 2011.

Leduc, Undergraduate Student Opinions of and University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign's Involvement in Homosexual Rights, 2010.

Reflect: This was a really great learning experience for me. I learned so much about the how to comply with the IRB and produce work that I can be proud of. Presenting at the EUI conference was great because I was lucky to be part of a panel with three of my classmates who did really great work. It was fun to see how are projects are complemented each other. I had a hard time with deadlines and strict rules this semester do to some other circumstances, but I think I could definitely improve and learn how to better organize time and paper. I am looking forward to continuing to think about my research topic and learning more.

Recommendations: My research shows that the University of Illinois does a fine job creating safe spaces for queer students. Many said that although things can be hard or uncomfortable, it is much worse outside of the University of Illinois bubble. The students I interviewed were very content with the work Building Bridges is doing to create a place where students can in fact explore both their sexual orientation and their Christian faith. One student suggested that there be more spaces and events for students with other religious affiliations who are exploring their orientation. It is not just the Christian faith that does not support queer identities. It would be great if the University could offer resources or somehow reach out to students of other religious groups too. I think it is also clear that some students who are Christian or raised more conservatively feel uncomfortable at the LGBT Resource Center because of their lack of religious acceptance and their sometimes exclusive group norms. It might be helpful to make sure LGBT RSO leaders get training of some sort to be more inclusive. On the other hand, it would be great if Christian groups had to go through ally trainings of some sort too in order to become more tolerant.